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# THE BRIDGE STORY

Learning through  
Communities of  
Practice

**BRIDGE**



LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION

**2009-2023**

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# Introduction

*The BRIDGE Story* is a legacy document chronicling 14 years of significant contributions to South Africa's education sector. The setting up of BRIDGE Innovation in Learning in 2009 as an organisation dedicated to the convening and management of communities of practice (CoPs) was a significant innovation at the time. In its life time the reach of BRIDGE's 26 communities of practice covered over 750 organisations, over 3500 individuals, and operations at both national and provincial levels. Through its knowledge management system BRIDGE shared new learning, insights and practices emerging from these multi-stakeholder communities, which worked across a number of educational domains and specialisations. BRIDGE's knowledge management role contributed to systemic thinking in relation to the improvement of education outcomes, and to the scaling up of successful initiatives through duplication and adaptation. In addition, BRIDGE built up new knowledge about the nature of communities of practice themselves. The history of BRIDGE's CoP journeys can contribute a wealth of insight into factors such as the life cycles of CoPs, their impacts and limitations, their features and characteristics, and ways in which ideal CoP outcomes and member profiles need to be adapted for different contexts.

The aim of *The BRIDGE Story* is to share some of the lessons learned through this journey with all those who have worked with BRIDGE over the years, as well as with those who have an interest in how communities of practice effect change. BRIDGE has occupied a unique role in the education ecosystem: its story can serve as a guide to future educational initiatives using communities of practice to harness the power of common interests for collaboration and impact.

With thanks to Epoch and Optima Trust for funding this report, and to the National Association for Social Change Entities in Education (NASCEE) for its support.



# Section 1: Origin Story

## THE BEGINNING

### Walking together in education



Through 2008 and 2009 a series of consultations with education stakeholders was held, culminating in the development of the Education Roadmap for South Africa. During this period the seeds for the creation of BRIDGE were planted, influenced by thought leaders such as Ann Lamont from Convene Venture Philanthropy, John Gilmour and Dr Mamphela Ramphele. Convene as a catalysing agency shaped the concept of an education innovation project that aimed to leverage the power of collective impact. In November 2009 the Dinokeng Scenarios team and Convene's Education Innovation Project together hosted 'Walking together in Education' as a three-day bringing together of 'citizen leaders', supported by the Development Bank of Southern Africa and Spier. One of the outcomes of all these processes was the establishment of BRIDGE Innovation in Learning as a non-profit education organisation. Linking education discourse to political will led to BRIDGE beginning its journey with the full support of all nine provincial education departments.

### Foundational Concepts

A key influence was Convene's approach to driving transformation, drawing on the systems change methodology Theory U. Theory U calls for a future-directed consciousness and a new collective leadership capacity to meet challenges in a more conscious, intentional and strategic way. It recognises the need to move away from a continual problem-centred 'diagnosis' of education towards a more affirming view of potential transformation.

The strategy to harness collective thinking and collaboration was the use of a community of practice approach. Using CoPs to spread successful practice of different and replicable innovations on the ground (horizontal integration) and purposefully linking to state policies and national initiatives (vertical integration) supports broader systems change rather than discrete and small scale education programmes.

Theory U offers a method for rethinking the parts and the whole by making it possible for the system to sense and see itself. When that happens, the collective consciousness begins to shift from ego-system awareness to eco-system awareness: from a silo view, to a systems view.

Otto Scharmer, <https://www.u-school.org/theory-u>

On the basis of these foundational concepts, BRIDGE identified critical issues as follows:

- Stakeholders work independently from each other and do not sufficiently share, adopt and implement what works in order to scale and replicate good models and solutions.
- Pockets of successful practice, operating in silos, have consequently failed to improve the education system in an impactful, lasting and sustained manner.
- Solving complex problems requires diverse stakeholder views.

## THEREFORE

We need to:

- Invest in continuous processes linked to outcomes.
- Build shared understandings of different elements of a problem.
- Mobilise resources to address these.
- Share collective learning (what works and what doesn't work) which can lead to the spread of good practices.
- Collaborate for impact at scale.
- Take a systems view, understanding systemic blockages and challenges and identifying and using systemic levers for impact and scale.
- Keep both horizontal and vertical integration in mind when planning and implementing education interventions.

BRIDGE's mission is to connect people, foster collaboration and spread successful practice in order to promote systemic improvements in education to address these issues and goals. The convening of communities of practice supports these aims, enabled by a strong knowledge management strategy and system.

The original thinking around BRIDGE brought in a liberating methodology, moving from intuitive sharing to more structured ways of embracing the interconnectedness of human beings in the workspace in order to reimagine education in South Africa.

[John Gilmour, BRIDGE CEO reflecting in November 2023 on BRIDGE's origins.]



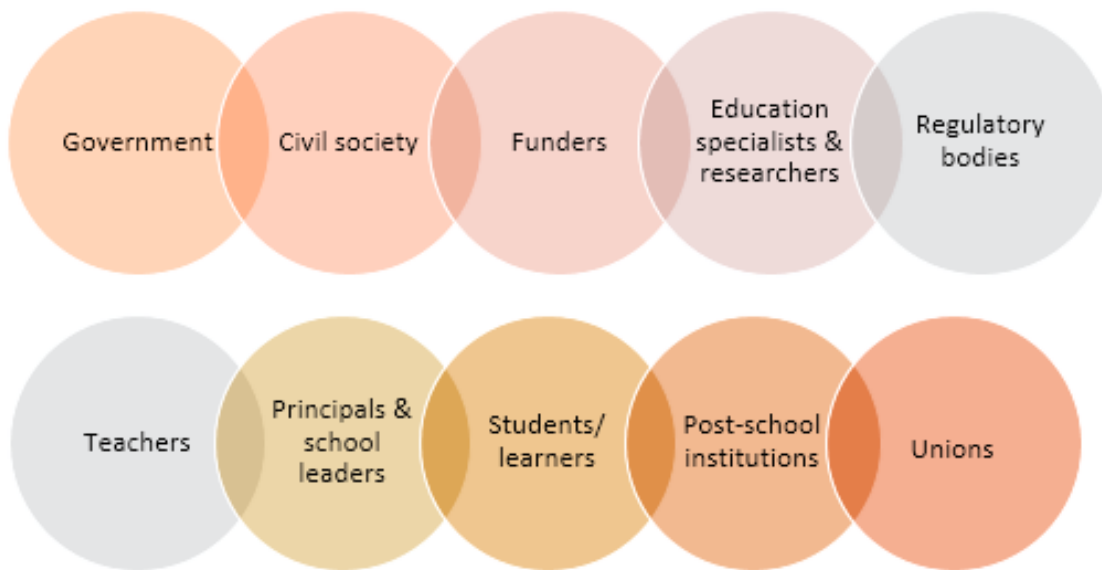
We need to change *how* we work, and *how we work together*, if we are to make a difference. We need to conceive of the entire system as a whole entity into which each contribution is simply one part.

[BRIDGE November 2009. Walking together in Education: Outcomes and Reflections]

# Section 2: The Facts

## BRIDGE STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder relationships were managed through a database of a total of **3 843** individuals as at November 2023, segmented according to stakeholder profiles, organisational type and focus area interests. Communities of practice have included the following:



*A CoP Meeting Reflection Circle*

# THE BRIDGE OUTCOMES

The BRIDGE outcomes emerged from BRIDGE's mission to help those working in education to connect and to collaborate for impact and change.

## To foster collaboration

Collaboration can range from informal connecting and networking, to shared cooperation and coordination in specific activities, to formalised, contractual partnerships. By enabling people to connect and share practice and information, BRIDGE prompts various forms of collaboration between different organisations and stakeholders.

## To create common purpose, peer support and trust among stakeholders

Attitude shifts can be seen in CoPs in a reduction in competition, an increased willingness to share intellectual capital and resources, and a greater appreciation of the perspectives of different stakeholder groups. Trust and understanding of common purpose becomes the basis for further collaboration. CoP members in various focus areas have reported feeling less alone and more supported through their participation.

## To maximize resources and reduce duplication

This involves not only the sharing of concrete tools and resources to help members avoid 'reinventing the wheel', but also the sharing of data which might help in avoiding duplication (such as mapping certain kinds of interventions in different geographical areas or specific schools). Any information presented at CoPs is documented and shared for use by others.

## To share working practice

'Working practice' can include pedagogical strategies shared at CoPs, implementation frameworks, and practical ways of solving problems.

## To link policy and practice

This systemic outcome plays out in CoPs through the critical function of information sharing and updates on national policies, and the equally critical interrogation and critique of policy by those working on the ground and delivering the educational services shaped by those policies: both these elements support vertical integration and alignment of education work with national priorities. BRIDGE performs a vital function in providing a platform for policies in different focus areas to be presented, explained, debated and challenged.



# THE BRIDGE FOCUS AREAS

BRIDGE established communities of practice in five 'focus areas', which were home to a number of different CoPs.

## SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Effective leadership is the foundation for successful learning in schools. BRIDGE works with principals and other school leaders through CoPs and in the context of specific projects, helping to capacitate school leaders in their instructional design roles and other competencies.

## TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Competent and motivated teachers are critical to improving learner performance. Understanding the challenges teachers face is vital to developing an effective teaching force. BRIDGE works with organisations in CoPs such as the Maths & Science CoP and the Teacher Development CoPs to share strategies and useful resources for better practice.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The early years are crucial for children's development, not only for health and physical growth but also for cognitive and emotional development. BRIDGE CoPs at national and provincial levels work to understand provision and increase quality in the sector. BRIDGE also collaborates with a number of other organisations in policy and advocacy work.

## LEARNER SUPPORT

South African learners face numerous challenges which require diverse interventions. BRIDGE facilitates learner support by, for example, mapping information on forms of provision and making this accessible, and by sharing programmatic methodologies and topic-focused resources.

## CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

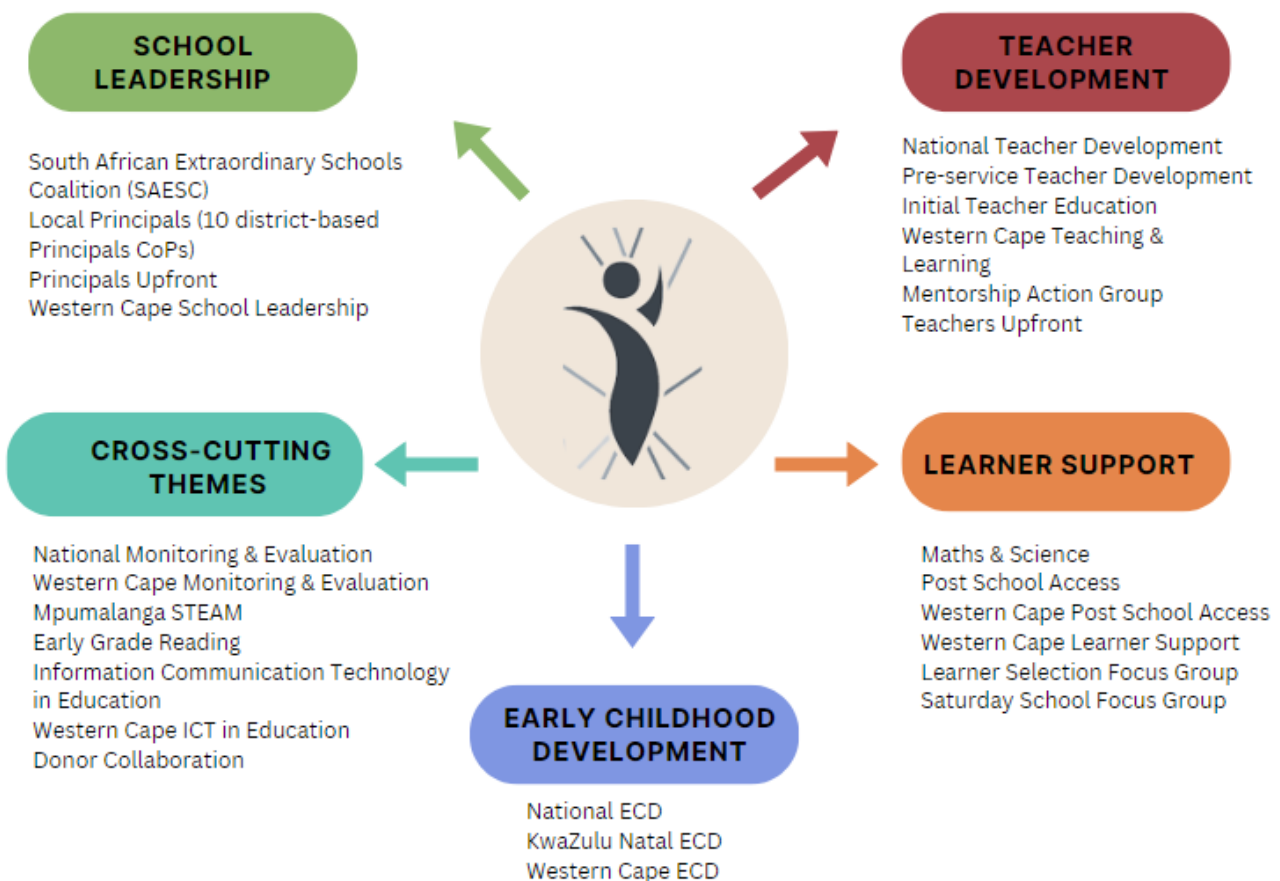
Cross cutting themes refer to disciplines or topics which apply across a number of education sectors. Examples are BRIDGE's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) CoP, Early Grade Reading CoP and Information & Communication Technology CoP, all of which relate to any of the other four focus areas.



# THE BRIDGE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

BRIDGE CoPs operated nationally, provincially and at district level in the case of CoPs for principals. Linking different levels of the system created connections between policy and practice, with the work of CoPs intentionally contextualised within policy frameworks. National CoPs were based in Gauteng, but were frequently attended by participants from other provinces, at both in-person and online CoPs during and post-Covid. Provincial CoPs were informed by the topics discussed at national level, while at the same time they focused on province-specific issues; conversely, provincial CoP discussions brought in different insights and experiences from the provinces to national level.

From its operational implementation in 2009 to its closure at the end of 2023, BRIDGE convened a total of **26 focus area driven communities of practice**, most of which met at least four times a year during their life cycles; many of these also operated at provincial as well as national levels. Some CoPs generated additional working groups, such as the ECD Quality working group, the Parental Support working group and the Post School Access Map working group. The longest running CoPs (such as the South African Coalition of Extraordinary Schools and the Early Childhood Development CoPs) began early in BRIDGE’s lifetime and continued to engage as BRIDGE CoPs until the organisation closed, while others existed for a year or more in response to need and/or funding requirements.



BRIDGE also ran communities of practice in the context of other funded partnership projects or interventions. These were mainly focused on school leadership and teacher development, with notable examples including CoPs in the Teacher Internship Collaboration of South Africa (TICZA) project, the Telkom Foundation High School Support Programme (HSSP), the Standard Bank Tutuwa Foundation School Leadership Programme, and the Get It Done Foundation BPG Mindspark Primary Maths Programme.



*Role Plays with Molteno at the Early Grade Reading Cop*



*Principals Upfront at Sasol*



*Group work at the M&E CoP at Tshikululu*

# BRIDGE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

A knowledge management (KM) strategy is a plan that describes how an organisation will manage knowledge related to its key purpose and core business, for the benefit of its own organisational goals and for the benefit of its stakeholders. For BRIDGE, the value proposition question was: 'What are the knowledge needs of BRIDGE CoP members and other partners – what types of knowledge assets and knowledge activities would be useful to BRIDGE stakeholders?' BRIDGE's knowledge management system evolved to consider questions such as what constitutes knowledge, who are the holders of this knowledge, and what processes are required to make this knowledge accessible to those working in the field.

In its 14 years of operation, BRIDGE produced thousands of pieces hosted on its website. A few illustrative examples are provided.

## STANDARD KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

These are mainly the Community of Practice Meeting Highlights which hold the institutional memory of BRIDGE CoPs, and record discussion of the main themes and trends in different interest areas over time.

## NON- STANDARD KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

These are frequently the results of collaborative inputs, either CoP or project-based, informed by further desktop or field research. Examples are:

- **Tools and Resources** such as the *ECD Practitioner Quality Reflection Tool* and the *Mentorship Resource*.
- **Information Mapping** such as the *ECD Resource & Training Organisations Map* and the *Post-School Access Map*.
- **Research pieces** such as those drawn from GEDT or NECT projects and meta-evaluations.
- **Case studies** and **Lessons Learned**, specifically those documenting lessons from different types of collaborative programmes such as the Telkom High School Support Programme or the Standard Bank Tutuwa Foundation School Leadership Programme.
- **Impact Stories** and **Working Practice Profiles**, real stories of change and work gathered from CoP members and constituents.
- **Reflective pieces**, specifically in relation to BRIDGE's experiences on the nature of collaboration such as *Learning and Working Together: A Framework for Donor Collaboration*, and the evolution and changing nature of communities of practice.
- **Podcasts** and **Key Point Summaries** were generated from BRIDGE's partnership with Cliff Central Radio in a range of debates on school leadership topics in 2014 and 2015.

# Section 3: Methodology and Concepts

BRIDGE drew on Wenger and Trayner's pioneer work on communities of practice in developing its approach. In general, BRIDGE CoPs were established on the basis of a common interest and shared learning goals in relation to that interest; the aim was to connect people in the spirit of learning, knowledge sharing, cross-pollination of ideas and collaboration, retaining a systems lens in relation to the impact of education work. This principle remained in place throughout the organisation's existence. CoPs also came into existence in response to funder strategies and programme partnerships. In addition, from the start BRIDGE saw itself as a learning organisation which needed to self-reflect on its own notions of communities of practice and knowledge management.

As the scope of BRIDGE's work grew, BRIDGE learned that every Community of Practice has its unique character, driven by factors such as the context in which the CoP was established; consensus (or lack thereof) on purpose, desired outcomes and processes; member profiles; size; and delivery methods. Various adaptations evolved for different focus areas and circumstances (such as the transition from in-person CoPs to online CoPs in 2020 due to Covid-19).

This section sets out a selection of features and learnings drawn from BRIDGE's varied CoP journeys. These observations are shared in the interests of adding to the field of knowledge about communities of practice, and to offer insights to others interested in working through and with communities of practice.

## 1 MEMBERSHIP

BRIDGE was intentional in including the perspectives of a range of stakeholders in its CoPs, with the aim of enhancing mutual understanding (for example, between government and practitioners, or between funders and implementers).

### **Multi-stakeholder participation and inclusivity**

With some exceptions, BRIDGE had a policy of 'open membership' to CoPs, meaning that anyone could attend. In-person CoPs generally had a fairly stable attendance of about 20 participants, most of whom were regular members. With Covid-19 and the move to online CoPs, numbers increased radically (often reaching over 80 attendees at any one meeting) due to easier access and the general thirst for information to help with addressing the impacts of the pandemic. While this benefitted the principle of inclusivity and the spread of information, it



led to large participant numbers and irregular attendance, to the detriment of deep and continuous learning and networking in spite of BRIDGE's attempts to retain its core CoP principles.

In-person or limited online CoPs with targeted invitations are preferred for continuity of purpose and the building of relationships which promote collaboration.

**Single stakeholder and 'closed' CoPs**

Single-stakeholder CoPs were run in specific contexts as 'closed' CoPs by invitation only. These were generally made up of a homogenous group rather than a multi-stakeholder group. For example, BRIDGE's original Principals CoPs had defined membership, with the benefit of being a safe space in which trust could be built up between those working in similar positions and confronted with similar challenges. The small size of these groups allowed for all voices to be heard, and the regularity of attendance meant that participants knew each other and could drill down deeply into issues of concern. Some closed CoPs were project-specific, linked to programmatic outcomes.

**The issue of continuity**

CoPs were not once-off events, but consecutive engagements building on themes. CoPs met quarterly every year. The aim was to encourage core and consistent membership in order to achieve CoP outcomes, which assumed regular attendance by the same individuals in order to build relationships and trust. While this worked well pre-Covid when CoP membership and attendance was stable and consistent, online CoPs where greater numbers attended 'open' CoPs changed this dynamic.

## 2 CoP OUTCOMES

**Agreed-upon outcomes**

The BRIDGE outcomes were shared with CoP members for buy-in. Many CoPs also developed their own additional specific outcomes for a CoP in a focus area.

**Collaboration and networking**

As this was one of BRIDGE's own critical outcomes, CoPs were structured to encourage participants to network during engagements, and to identify potential opportunities for collaborative activities. These engagements were more easily facilitated in face-to-face CoPs rather than in online engagements.

**Intentionality**

Where CoP outcomes focus specifically on setting up collaborations, there needs to be intentional planning to this end. Collaborative ventures or co-created products do not emerge from one CoP meeting, but are the result of iterative processes to a defined end.

## Neutrality

BRIDGE was often seen as a neutral platform that could facilitate advocacy in certain areas. However, this was not always a straightforward matter; in the ECD CoP, for example, not all CoP members were in agreement on certain policy positions. When this happened BRIDGE could not play an advocacy role for a position which might have been at odds with the views of other CoP members. In addition, BRIDGE saw itself as a partner to government, not as oppositional. It therefore limited its advocacy role to information sharing, and to assisting CoP members and their organisations in joining other advocacy structures.

### 3 CoP METHODOLOGY

## Interactive and participatory methodology

The principle was to give all voices an opportunity to speak, and develop a sense of agency amongst participants. To this end, structured group work according to a prepared activity brief was the norm for both in-person and online CoP events. Most BRIDGE CoPs followed a specific format of routines, rhythms and rituals, with a facilitated Check-in and Check-out process bookending standard activities such as reflective practice.

## Reflective Practice

A key element was to provide opportunities for participants to reflect on how topics and debates related to their own practice, how they would take back CoP learnings to their own organisations and colleagues, and how they would apply these in their field. CoP members were sometimes asked to share these impacts at subsequent CoPs – for example, this was a specific aim for the National M&E Community of Practice.

## Facilitation

Expert facilitation was needed in order to support the participatory methodology, and to manage group explorations and dynamics. CoP facilitators were part of the planning team.

- Facilitators need to be on board with CoP principles, know how to build trust and encourage reflection, understand group dynamics, and facilitate activity or task focused meetings.
- Core skills needed are those of facilitation rather than subject matter or sector-specific expertise, especially as facilitators need to remain neutral when there are divergent opinions. However, it has been our experience that those who combine facilitation skills with deep understanding of the CoP focus area run the most successful CoPs.
- Group work also requires some facilitation or management from core team members. While CoP participants can be allocated roles, group activities need to be planned and managed.

## Delivery

- In-person events at accessible venues, set up for group work and networking, are the ideal.
- After Covid-19, online meetings were an option preferred by many, due to savings on time and travel. However, these need to be carefully structured using available technologies such as breakaway rooms and interactive whiteboards so that everyone can participate. CoP events are not webinars.
- While hybrid meetings allow for functional inclusivity, they are sometimes the least successful option, even when well-managed, as the dynamic of the two different groups tends to be divided.

## 4 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge production and knowledge management are critical elements of CoPs if the learnings generated are to be sustained and replicated. CoPs need to be documented for knowledge preservation and dissemination.

## Principles

A critical element in BRIDGE's approach was to move away from a hierarchical and expert-driven view of knowledge. Communities of practice are spaces where all participants' experiences and insights are valued as 'knowledge' to be shared, distilled and learned from. Revisiting notions of what constitutes valuable and practical knowledge also supported professional development amongst participants. In the early years CoPs focused on facilitated reflection and did not feature presentations and inputs; this later changed in the interests of information sharing, with inputs intended to serve as a spur to discussion and reflection. To this end, knowledge capture and distillation emphasized participant inputs and debates as well as useful inputs.

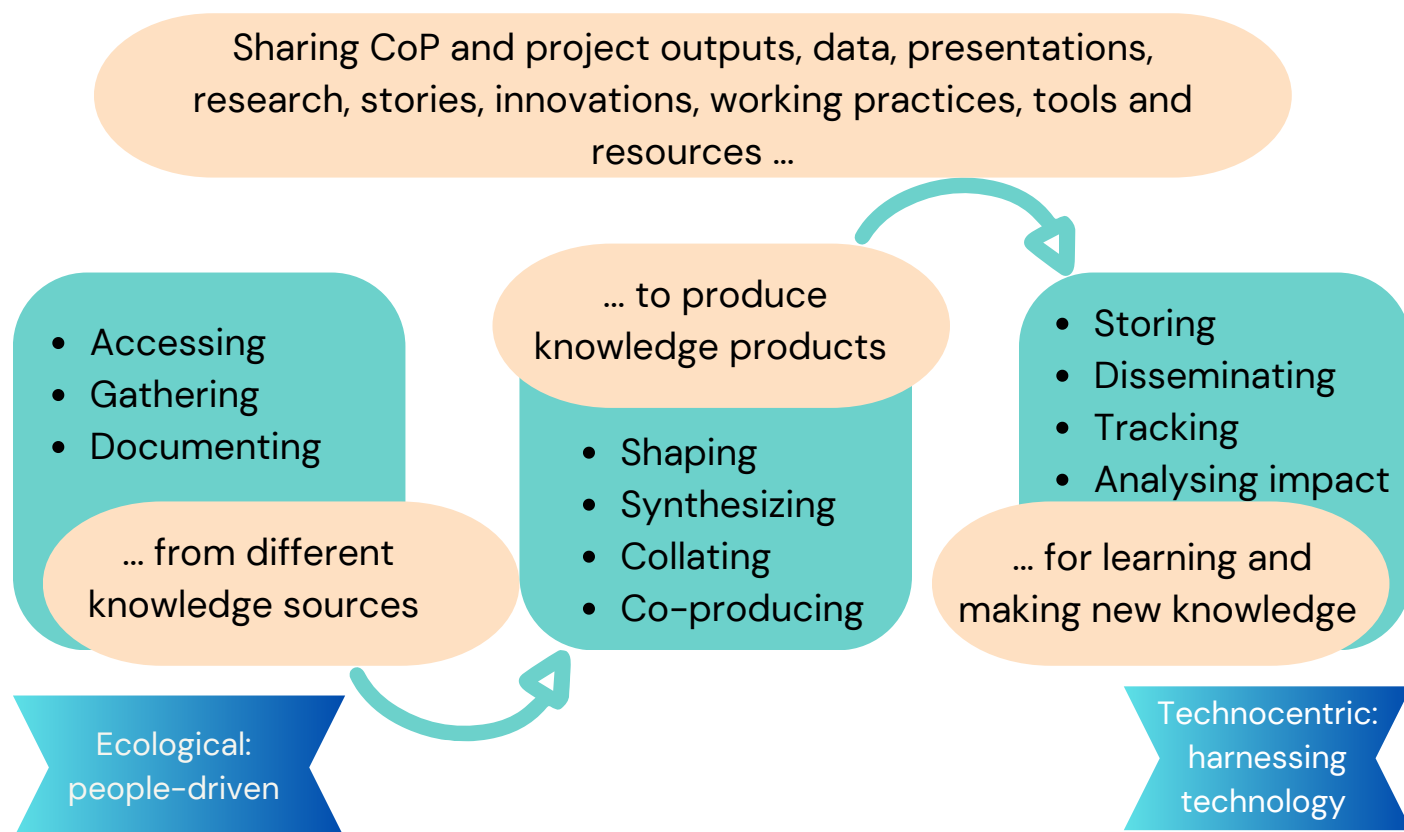
Finally, BRIDGE recognised that so much of the pioneering work done in education by non-profits working on the ground simply gets lost if these organisations cease to exist. Through CoPs and through an enhanced view of knowledge management, BRIDGE aimed to ensure that education innovations can be retained and duplicated.

## Systems

BRIDGE had a highly evolved documenting and reporting system, capturing and sharing discussions, presentations and resources through a range of media. Documentary outputs were open education resources disseminated to CoP members through the individual CoP databases, and freely available on the BRIDGE website. BRIDGE also drew on a range of inputs to collate and create new knowledge products and tools useful to the sector. As illustrated below, processes focused on crystallising knowledge and resources shared at CoPs for access and repurposing.



## BRIDGE Knowledge Management involves:



The standard CoP outputs were the Meeting Highlights, capturing the essence of inputs and presentations given and, critically, the views and responses of CoP members to issues raised. BRIDGE took the (sometimes disputed) view that Meeting Highlights should be detailed, so that debates and contestations were documented. Meeting Highlights were seen not only as a record for those who were there, but also a resource for those who could not attend. In addition, they frequently served as source documents for the creation of other collated resources of use to the field. BRIDGE later introduced a one slide overview with links to presentations given for those who wanted a summary only, but continued to share the more detailed Meeting Highlights.

## 5 CONVENING PROCESSES

### The planning and convening skills set

BRIDGE had well-developed processes for the establishment and ongoing management of a CoP, from communication logistics to online technicalities and the use of interactive tools. BRIDGE CoPs were convened and managed by a team which included a project manager, knowledge manager, facilitator and Reference Group.

For CoPs to be genuinely action-oriented, learning-focused and collaborative, various processes need to be intentionally promoted. These include:

- Planning a programme in relation to outcomes.
- Making sure that regular and efficient communication happens. Pre-event and post-event communications support buy-in to the CoP.
- Facilitating for engagement and reflection.
- Providing technical support for smooth running, especially in relation to online CoPs.
- Managing and disseminating CoP knowledge, learnings and outputs.

**Examples of CoP inputs**

- Presentations, panel discussions, master classes and organisational showcases
- Case Studies: successes, failures, lessons
- Activity Briefs and materials
- Sharing of tools and resources

**CoP Partnerships: Reference Groups and Champions**

Planning for CoPs in terms of themes, speakers and scope was guided by reference groups or planning teams with subject matter or sector expertise in that focus area, with the aim of ensuring that CoPs were kept relevant in relation to major policy shifts and other current debates.

BRIDGE had a number of ‘champions’, in particular for provincial CoPs, in the form of volunteer stakeholders who had a key interest in the focus area. While champions sometimes served as facilitators, their main purpose was to help guide CoPs in relation to provincial interests.

## 6 MONITORING, EVALUATION AND IMPACT

**Measuring impact**

While BRIDGE’s Theory of Change underwent some adaptations in the organisation’s lifetime (informed in part through a number of external evaluations conducted with BRIDGE staff), it was consistently linked to key principles such as trust, engagement and collaboration and a systems view of impact, culminating in the BRIDGE outcomes as described in this document. One example of exponential impact is the work of the SAESC CoP. Small innovations such as ‘education hubs’ grew as CoP members became outward-looking and promoted the growth of other innovation hubs and social networks.

External evaluations have been extremely useful in helping BRIDGE identify its areas of weakness, and adapt and evolve its CoP practices. In general, the anecdotal evidence gathered through these on the value of CoPs and the usefulness of BRIDGE resources has been both positive and widespread.

However, quantifying the role of a catalytic agent such as BRIDGE and developing hard and measurable indicators for complex objectives linked to systemic change is a difficult task. While collaborative working groups, issue-driven partnerships and ongoing working relationships might be sparked by a CoP, these often grew and took shape outside of the CoP context and there was seldom a direct line of attribution. BRIDGE therefore struggled with providing its stakeholders and funders with hard data and quantitative evidence relating to the impact of its CoPs; as a small NPO reliant on donor funding, its digital tracking dashboards remained under-developed and there was no dedicated internal M&E specialist.

Quantitative data included the following:

#### Data

- Website analytics for numbers of downloads of BRIDGE resources. As all BRIDGE outputs were Open Education Resources freely available for use and adaptation, however, there was no easy way to measure actual usage.
- Tracking of attendance and growth of membership for different CoPs. As noted, however, online CoPs led to increased numbers but irregular attendance, with many individuals attending only once to a specific topic of interest.
- The number of resources produced or co-created by BRIDGE.

Qualitative data was gathered in various ways such as the following:

- Key informant interviews conducted by external evaluators.
- Anecdotal evidence gathered through various funded external evaluations of specific CoPs, and of BRIDGE as a whole.
- Impact or Change Stories gathered from stakeholders through templates.
- Feedback from CoP members gathered during CoP convenings.
- BRIDGE-initiated surveys.

## 7 SUSTAINABILITY AND LIFE CYCLES

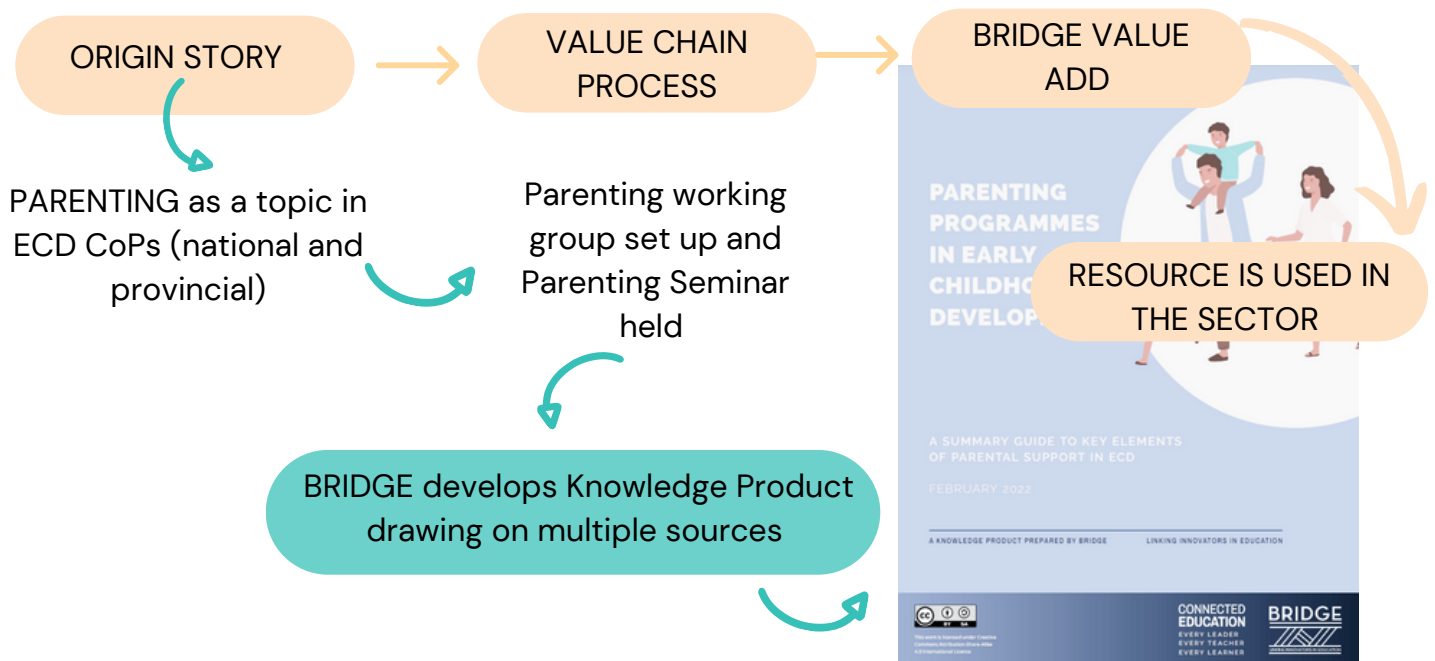
Most CoP specialists acknowledge that a community of practice will evolve through different stages (e.g. from awareness or discovery, through to maturity and sustainability) within a life cycle. A range of different models and terminology for these life cycles exists.

As a convening organisation, BRIDGE has found that in most instances once BRIDGE's process support (project management and knowledge management) ended, so did that particular community of practice. Exceptions have included: (i) Provincial CoPs, where there have been committed champions and a core group of voluntary conveners who have continued the work; and (ii) CoPs that have morphed into a

different kind of collaborative or networked entity. The most notable example is the continuation of the SAESC, which has expanded its range as a coalition but continues to work within the original CoP methodology.

While a BRIDGE-convened CoP may no longer exist, however, some of the ideas seeded in CoPs continue through being integrated into the work of an organisation or programme.

### Example of a CoP Value Chain process for co-created resources



### Examples of CoP Activities

- Discussing & documenting ideas
- Networking
- Identifying & solving problems
- Providing learning opportunities
- Mapping knowledge & identifying gaps
- Growing confidence & competence
- Reflecting on own practice
- Requesting & sharing information
- Developing trust
- Explaining & sharing tools, methodologies & practices
- Responding to policy & other conceptual developments
- Identifying duplication of effort
- Setting up working groups to take forward specific issues
- Co-creating products & resources
- Forming partnerships

# Section 4: Actioning the Outcomes

BRIDGE has documented the successes and change stories emanating from different CoPs and programmes in various ways. Outcomes played out in a number of collaborative projects. Outputs included co-created substantial tools and resources which have then been used in the sector. Synthesized ‘lessons learned’ briefs from specific programmes, and documentation of collaborative activities, helped improve practice in sectors such as school leadership and ECD. BRIDGE has also played specific roles in terms of facilitating collaboration and knowledge management in formal, contracted consortium-based programmes.

ACTIONING THE BRIDGE OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
<p><b>To foster collaboration</b></p>	<p>Organic collaboration: the <i>ECD Practitioner Quality Reflection Tool</i> evolved from discussions in the ECD CoPs on the concept of quality in ECD, and was piloted collaboratively with nine organisations from the CoP. It was then finalised and disseminated as an open education resource, and is currently used by a number of ECD organisations.</p> <p>Formal collaboration in a consortium: On the basis of its experience in CoP facilitation and work on collaboration and knowledge management, BRIDGE participated in the Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE), a three-year collaboration between universities and NGOs. One of BRIDGE’s outputs was the development of <i>Collaboration Process Model for Programme Development</i>.</p>
<p><b>To create common purpose, peer support and trust among stakeholders</b></p>	<p>The <b>South African Extraordinary Schools Coalition (SAESC)</b> was one of the longest-running CoPs, and members shared innovations and strategies for the improvement of teaching practice and for addressing the many challenges faced by teachers and learners. This CoP developed the <i>Peer Review Process</i>, which involved members visiting each others’ schools, learning from different</p>

ACTIONING THE BRIDGE OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
	<p>approaches and giving feedback through a structured process. Materials development and implementation processes for the Peer Review were supported by BRIDGE. BRIDGE has used the different elements of this tool in other funded projects.</p> <p><b>Principals CoPs</b> provided much-needed support and joint problem-solving for their members, many of whom faced difficult challenges in under-resourced schools. Practical tips (such as procurement of school items and discounts, or the logistics of joining up for bulk buying) were also shared.</p>
<p><b>To maximise resources and reduce duplication</b></p>	<p>The <b>Principals CoPs</b> and <b>Teacher Development CoPs</b> have a history of sharing tools, resources and guidelines to support educators in both school management and curriculum management. The <i>Principals Planning Tool</i> developed by BRIDGE is one example.</p> <p>During Covid-19 the <b>national and provincial ECD CoP</b> participants shared information on any number of support services and packages (PPE, nutrition, learning materials etc.) offered to the sector, and assisted funders in knowing where to direct financial aid. BRIDGE hosted a dedicated repository of Covid-19 related ECD resources for those working in the sector during this time.</p>
<p><b>To share working practice</b></p>	<p>The <b>Pre-service Teacher Education CoP</b> brought together a number of organisations running school-based internships for distance education students; the sharing of different models and the willingness to openly discuss challenges and barriers was extremely helpful in the development of participant models and programmes, as well as providing shared content for BRIDGE’s <i>Mentorship Resource</i>. The work of this CoP was also instrumental in giving rise to the TICZA programme, a collective impact initiative aiming to scale up the extended internship model for initial teacher education. From the BRIDGE CoP membership which represented less than 100 school-based interns, the internship model is becoming institutionalised through these implementers and TICZA, with currently over 1500 interns on this pathway.</p>



ACTIONING THE BRIDGE OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
	<p>The <b>Monitoring and Evaluation CoP</b> transitioned into a ‘learning space’ for both programme implementers and professional evaluators, helping both groups to broaden their perspectives on the processes and challenges faced in M&amp;E of education interventions.</p>
<p><b>To link policy and practice</b></p>	<p>The <b>National and provincial ECD CoPs</b> were the most active in this area, facilitating stakeholder input into policy and advocacy for ECD with various government departments and forums, and working with key bodies such as the Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN), the National ECD Alliance (NECDA) and the South African Congress for ECD (SACECD). The BRIDGE ECD CoP was represented on the Inter Sectoral Forum (ISF) Steering Committee, which is a National Integrated ECD Policy (NIECDP) mandated body made up of government officials and civil society. BRIDGE staff and its CoP members sat on various technical teams to give input on legislation and to report back to the CoP on developments in the sector, as well as to take back the views of implementers into policy debates.</p>



*Participants modelling play activities at an ECD CoP*



## Two BRIDGE Impact Stories

### The Story of the Principals CoP Maths Test: Rolling out into the District

Principals in one of the BRIDGE Principals CoPs shared their concerns about the uneven levels of mathematics abilities in learners coming from primary schools into Grade 8. With the support of BRIDGE and the district, the principals co-developed and administered a common Maths test for the former grade 7s now in their high schools. In order to identify major problem areas, BRIDGE then facilitated an item analysis on the tests to identify the gaps in Maths understanding, and describe the trends within each of the primary schools in the community of practice. These were then reported back to the secondary schools and the district. The principals, in collaboration with their teachers, designed an intervention thereafter to remediate the gaps in Maths, running revision workshops for Grade 8 teachers to improve their methodology in these problem areas.

Subsequently these workshops were run for Grade 7 teachers in primary schools connected to the CoP, and then taken up by district officials for further cascading in more primary schools in the district.

### The Story of the Tertiary Access Group: How a Chain became a Map

The Tertiary Access Group was initially a sub-group of the Maths and Science CoP. Early members were those with an interest in bursary programmes for transitioning between school and higher education, or school and the workplace. Members shared networking information (who does what where), and gradually began mapping the chain of different post-school options (higher education, vocational training, work experience, skills development) and the support services needed to make these work. Their shared goals were to (i) support government in increasing post-school options leading to employment; and (ii) make information on post-school options more accessible to school leavers.

As the Access Chain evolved, BRIDGE secured funding from the Zenex Foundation to develop a descriptive Post School Access Map as an open educational resource hosted on the BRIDGE website.

This focus group later evolved into a full CoP, the Post School Access Community of Practice.

**BRIDGE**  
STORIES

# Section 5: BRIDGE Leadership

Many high profile thought leaders contributed to the shaping of BRIDGE as an organisation, and to its conceptual paradigms around communities of practice. Key thought leaders included John Gilmour (subsequently BRIDGE Board Chair), Ann Lamont (innovation initiator with Convene Philanthropies), Barbara Dale-Jones (subsequently BRIDGE CEO), Gail Campbell (ongoing BRIDGE funder through Zenex Foundation), Teboho Mahuma (subsequently BRIDGE Board member) and Dr Mamphela Ramphele. Other individuals played critical roles in focus areas such as ECD and Monitoring and Evaluation through the relevant CoP Reference Groups; in addition, CoP facilitators actively shaped the nature and life cycles of different CoPs. Finally, BRIDGE was itself a learning organisation in that many staff members grew into leadership roles both within BRIDGE and in their subsequent positions.

## Founding member and BRIDGE Board Chairperson



John Gilmour  
Board Chair 2009 – 2023

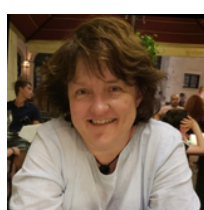
## Chief Executive Officers



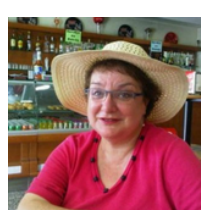
Linda Vilakazi-  
Tselane  
2009-2011



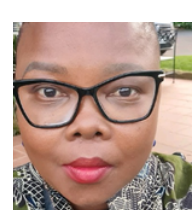
Zanele Twala  
2011-2012



Barbara Dale-  
Jones  
2012-2016



Pat Sullivan  
(Interim CEO)  
2016



Vuyiswa Ncontsa  
2016-2022

In its final 18 months of operation without a CEO, the **BRIDGE Management Team** comprised Patience Voller, Melissa King, Thandeka Rantsi and Taryn Casey.

Guidance in the phase out period was provided by the **BRIDGE Board**, consisting of the following members:

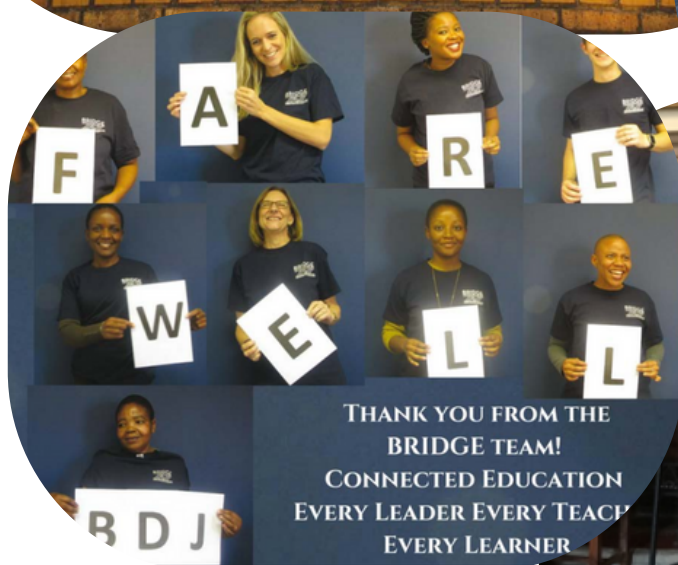
John Gilmour (Chair), Alastair Campbell, Shafika Isaacs, Teboho Mahuma, Nonhlanhla Masina, Godwin Perils and John Volmink. Barbara Dale-Jones and Vuyiswa Ncontsa also served in an advisory capacity.

## BRIDGE CORE FUNDERS

During its existence BRIDGE had a number of seed funders, core funders, and CoP-specific or project-specific funders. There were also a number of entities which supported BRIDGE through provision of venues and catering for in-person events. Key funders are listed below.

Anglo American Chairman's Fund	First Rand Empowerment	RMB First Rand Bank Ltd
Apex Hi Trust	Gauteng Education Development Trust	Sasol Inzalo Foundation
Barloworld	Get It Done Foundation	Save the Children SA
Convener Venture Philanthropy	Grindrod Family Centenary Trust	Standard Bank Tutuwa Foundation
CoZa Cares Foundation	JET Education Services	Telkom Foundation
D G Murray Trust	Michael and Susan Dell Foundation	The Bertha Institute
Deutsche Bank	National Education Collaboration Trust	The LEGO Foundation
Dorper Wind Farms	Old Mutual Foundation	The Oppenheimer Memorial Trust
Epoch and Optima Trust	Penreach	Yellowwoods Social Investment
European Union	Porticus	Zenex Foundation

# BRIDGE Staff and farewells over the years



With thanks to all those who have have been part of the BRIDGE story over the years.

*This report was compiled by Melissa King, BRIDGE Knowledge Manager, with input from John Gilmour and Barbara Dale-Jones. With thanks to Epoch and Optima Trust for providing funding for the report.*