

data
driven
districts



DDD PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDY

BRIDGE and the DDD Dashboard

BRIDGE and the DDD Dashboard: A Case Study

Introduction

Over the past two years the DDD team from New Leaders Foundation (NLF) has increasingly interacted and worked with education NGOs across South Africa. This has primarily been to explore the potential benefits that can be derived by integrating the Dashboard into these NGO's programmes. The team has found that the DDD Dashboard and its data usage methodologies can unlock significant gains for various types of education NGO programmes.

One such NGO that NLF has worked with is BRIDGE. This document details how BRIDGE successfully integrated the Dashboard into its communities of practice (CoPs) with school principals.



BRIDGE Background

BRIDGE was started in 2009 and is a registered non-profit organisation. The organisation came about because of the realisation that a critical part of the problem in education in South Africa is that stakeholders do not sufficiently share, adopt and implement what works. Pockets of successful practice, operating in silos, have consequently failed to improve the education system in an impactful, lasting and sustained manner.

BRIDGE drives collaboration and co-operation among stakeholders in education to increase their collective impact on the system. It does this through convening communities of practice and sharing knowledge, working practices and resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the country.

The mission of BRIDGE has always been to connect people; to foster collaboration so that collective effort and the sharing of ideas helps spread successful practice. This in turn promotes systemic improvements in education. In support of this mission, convening communities of practice was a natural development as the work of BRIDGE evolved with a wide range of stakeholders and in the context of collaborative projects.

BRIDGE believes that effective leadership is the foundation for successful learning in schools and that the principal plays a central role as an agent of change. BRIDGE aims to support and capacitate school principals in their roles as instructional leaders with the aim of improving school functionality and enabling productive teaching and learning. Underpinning this, the CoP programme has at its core the DBE's nine key areas of whole school improvement which includes among other things: leadership and governance; the quality of teaching and learning; learner achievement and curriculum provision. The principals in the CoPs are encouraged to share good practices, resources and solutions to problems in relation to the nine focus areas.

DDD introduced to BRIDGE

Conversations between BRIDGE and NLF regarding a potential partnership began in late 2016 where opportunities for collaboration within the DDD programme were explored. The Dashboard presented a natural fit for BRIDGE's programme as it covers several areas of whole school improvement. Plans were therefore made to enable the integration of the Dashboard into the BRIDGE principal CoPs.

In early 2017, DDD team members from NLF conducted a two-day Dashboard Train-the-Trainer (TTT) programme with the project coordinators and CoP facilitators from BRIDGE. The intention of the TTT programme was to familiarise the BRIDGE team with the Dashboard and equip them to train their principals and schools to use the tool independently as well as in their CoPs.

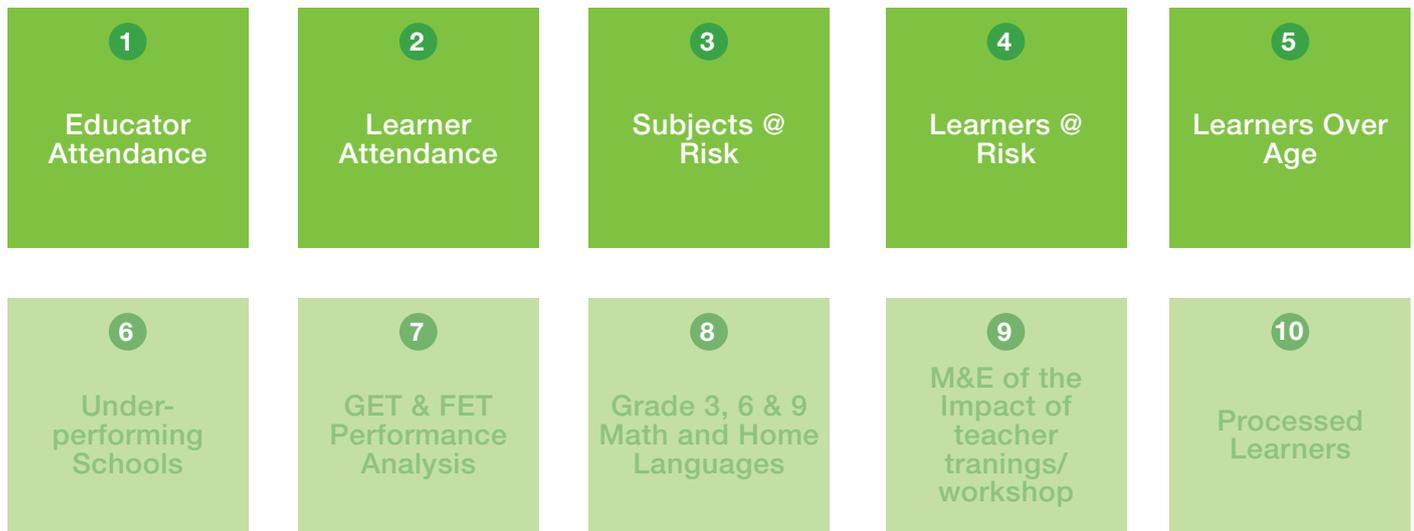
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DDD Master Trainer (Zola Gule) leading a discussion during the TTT with the BRIDGE team

With the BRIDGE facilitators introducing the Dashboard to their CoP principals at a basic level in 2017 and early 2018, a decision was made to run a refreshed and more role-based Dashboard training for the BRIDGE facilitators in mid-2018. This saw the NLF team deliver a more bespoke programme that incorporated school data analysis topics that had been proved to drive DDD uptake in SMTs. Illustrated in the figure below, five of the ten data analysis topics were selected, and BRIDGE facilitators were trained on how these could be used to further data-driven conversations in the CoPs.

Data-Driven Interventions



Principals' data analysis topics covered with the BRIDGE facilitators

The subsequent roll out of the school data analysis topics proved to be the hook that led to increased adoption of DDD amongst the principals. In several cases, principals requested that Dashboard training be run with their full school management teams (SMTs) so that deputies and heads of department (HODs) could also benefit from the use of the data. The sections that follow discuss the impact that the Dashboard's integration has had on the BRIDGE CoPs and within the schools themselves.

Impact of the Dashboard in BRIDGE CoPs

With principals electing the Dashboard to be a regular feature on CoP agendas, it has delivered several key benefits to BRIDGE and the CoPs.

Increased and more consistent CoP attendance

According to Patience Voller, Senior Project Manager and CoP facilitator at BRIDGE, principals became more eager to engage in their CoPs as a result of the inclusion of the Dashboard. Principals have been "reluctant to stay away from the CoP for fear of missing out so working on the DDD has assisted with increased and consistent attendance." With the vast array of competing demands placed on principals, this has been of notable importance to furthering the impacts of many of the BRIDGE CoPs.

Deeper conversations and more active participation in CoPs

The integration of the Dashboard into the CoPs has helped drive more active participation by principals in the sessions. As argued by Ms Voller, "It [the Dashboard] became a beneficial addition to the school leadership programme as it helped us to move away from what, to some principals, appeared to be mere theorising about leadership and allowed us to link the theory to more practical and implementable solutions provided by the DDD." From the initial interest on analysing and discussing educator and learner attendance issues, principals in the CoPs are increasingly reflecting on learners' performance and evaluating their schools' functionality against that of the group.

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*Ms Patience Voller, Senior Project Manager
and CoP facilitator*

Increased sharing between principals and schools

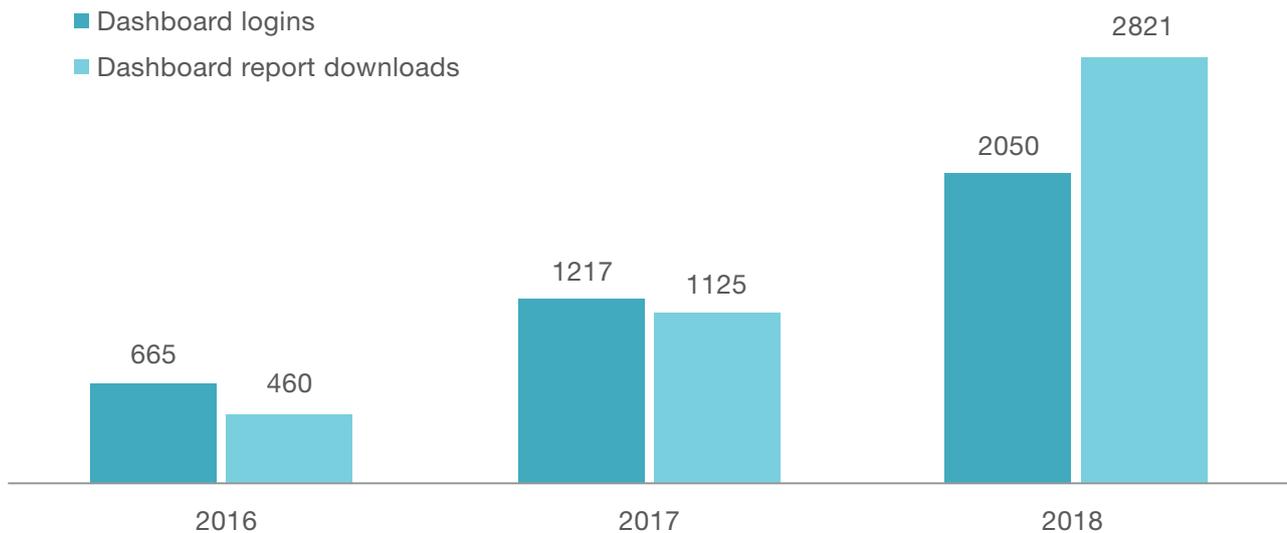
Discussed above, one of the key objectives of CoPs is increased sharing between the participants. Under the guidance of the BRIDGE facilitators, many principals have increased their support to one another especially on the use of data in running their schools. The Dashboard has a wide variety of downloadable reports that can benefit school leaders. The principals have been able to share information about reports they have used for specific purposes. They have also used the platform to troubleshoot and to share solutions with each other.

According to Ms Voller, the "principals are able to share real, practical learnings, and for a couple, even show off their expertise at Excel as they assist their peers. An awareness of their Excel ability or lack of it has become a by-product of the DDD as several principals have embarked on a conscious learning programme. I've seen principals planning intra and inter-school excel training sessions after the CoP sessions. This is an excellent example of knowledge sharing and collaboration which are core elements of a functional CoP."

BRIDGE has also cleverly incorporated an element of positive competition amongst the principals. To do this, they present the Dashboard usage statistics of the individual schools in each CoP. Seeing peers taking to the tool and benefiting has further increased the usage of the Dashboard among the principals.

Impact of the Dashboard in BRIDGE schools

Since BRIDGE started integrating the Dashboard into its programme, many of the 120 schools participating in BRIDGE CoPs have become data-driven. Seen in the figure below, DDD support provided by BRIDGE in 2017 and 2018 resulted in significant increases in the number of logins to the Dashboard as well as in the number of reports downloaded by the schools. However, it should be noted that the adoption of the Dashboard by the schools was not achieved immediately. Many principals were very reticent at first and this was driven mostly by their fear of and inability with technology. With the reinforcement and support provided by BRIDGE, many of these principals have been encouraged to see it as a tool to assist them in intervening where problems are identified.



Logins and report downloads for the DDD Dashboard amongst BRIDGE schools (2016-2018)

These usage statistics, while encouraging in their own right, do not tell the story of how many of the schools have been making use of the tool to derive benefits. In many cases, schools are making use of the Dashboard to improve management processes, drive accountability and put in place interventions to improve results.

Subject performance discussions

The Dashboard has driven behaviour changes in some of the schools where SMTs are now meeting more frequently to discuss curriculum issues and learner performance. At schools where BRIDGE ran DDD training with the entire SMT, the HODs are feeling more empowered and are having critical conversations with their subject teams. Some have commented that they now have the evidence to hold their teachers accountable, especially with the knowledge that their subject and curriculum advisors have sight of the same data set. The Dashboard is also being used to track learners' progress and identify weak performance. Learners who need additional assistance are easily identified and put into assistance programmes.

Attendance monitoring and accountability conversations

Principals and SMTs are using the Dashboard to monitor the attendance of both learners and educators. Educators being presented with the hard evidence of their attendance on a platform that is visible to district and provincial officials has driven accountability and led to more self-reflection from transgressing individuals.

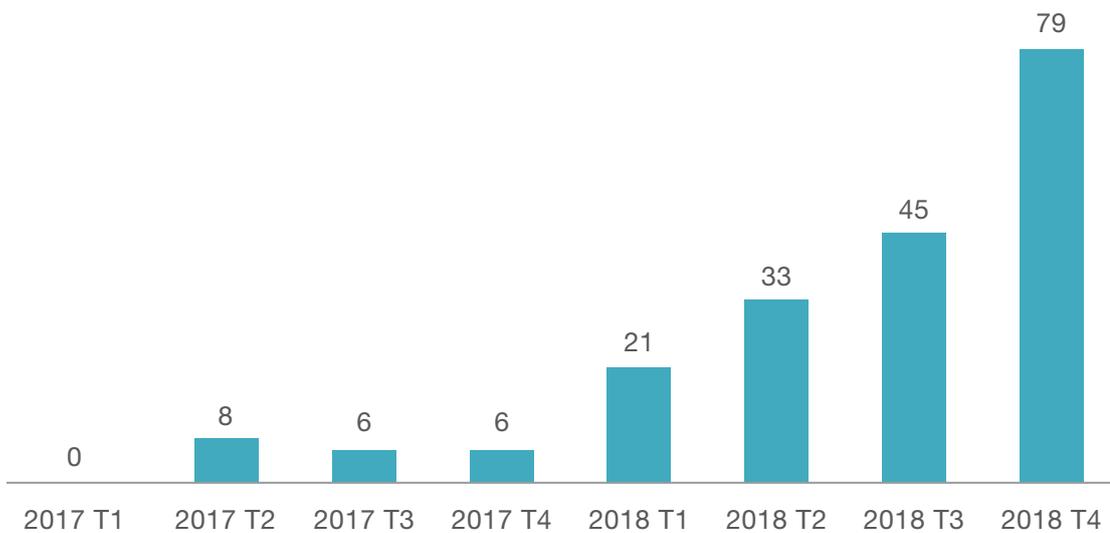
Saving time on reporting requirements and other data analysis

Data gathering for official reporting has been simplified as the information is available in different downloadable reports on the Dashboard. One example was in the use of the DDD Learner Intervention Planning Report. This proved to be a significant time saver in that the promotion statuses of learners from the previous years are plotted against current academic performance. This allowed the schools to easily compile their learner retentions lists

which were required by the DBE in Term 3. HODs have also been contacting BRIDGE to assist them by showing which Dashboard reports can help them complete internal subject reports as well as reports to subject advisors. Other time saving has come about through the use of the DDD Learner Chart Report. This has allowed for quick identification of the top achieving learners for end of year awards across subjects and grades.

Principal Testimony: Mr Kevin Fourie – Meyerton Primary School

One school that has quickly taken to using the tool is Meyerton Primary School. Since being introduced to the Dashboard in a CoP in 2018, the principal, Mr Kevin Fourie, has championed the use of the Dashboard with his SMT. With him showing the merits of the data to the team, the school has become increasingly data-driven in its management practices. This is illustrated in the number of Dashboard reports downloaded in recent terms.



Report downloads from the Dashboard by Meyerton Primary School (2017-2018)

The most prominent use of the Dashboard in Meyerton Primary has been in subject performance conversations between the principal, SMT and educators. It is in SMT meetings where the performance of the individual subjects is analysed. According to Mr Fourie, “on the Learner Chart Report, we can pick up if we have a teacher problem or if we have a learner problem. We go look at the class averages and then also go see how individual learners have performed.” If they find there is relatively poor performance in a subject, the SMT consults the teacher by asking them to join the meeting. “We don’t jump on them, we don’t say they’re wrong. We ask them to analyse the reports we have from the Dashboard and tell us what they think.” From that point, they are able to identify if the teacher needs support and agree on the way the performance of the subject can be improved. What has been empowering for Mr Fourie and his team in the conversations is that “the Dashboard and its reports have taken the personalities out of it.” Evidence-based, objective conversations about how performance can be improved have been enabled by the tool.

Other uses of the Dashboard in the school have been in parent-teacher conversations on learner performance, conducting analysis for intervention planning, reporting to the district and identifying top performing learners. While originally seeing the Dashboard as yet another responsibility for schools and a potential distraction from teaching, Mr Fourie has become a strong advocate for the tool. He correctly holds that “teachers in this country are overburdened. We need things to make our lives easier.” The Dashboard is one of those things that is “at your fingertips” and “makes your life easier.”

“The Dashboard and its reports have taken the personalities out of it [the performance conversations].”

Mr Kevin Fourie, Principal of Meyerton Primary School

Future use of DDD by BRIDGE schools

An encouraging data use culture has been established amongst many of the BRIDGE principals and schools. With BRIDGE's support, the Dashboard is increasingly moving from being viewed as merely an administrative tool to one that empowers school leaders to drive improvement. The BRIDGE team sees the coming years bringing deeper, more meaningful curriculum conversations between school management teams. Stemming from this, it is anticipated that subject teams will increasingly use the data to make changes and to support decisions with regard to instructional practices, assessment design and remediation strategies. In terms of monitoring the remediation strategies, further opportunities exist for data to be aggregated from both formal and informal sources to identify patterns in performance and for the appropriate adjustments to be made.

Conclusions

The collaboration between BRIDGE and NLF has shown that mutually-beneficial outcomes can be achieved when education NGOs incorporate elements of the DDD programme and toolset into their programmes. In the case of BRIDGE, integrating the Dashboard resulted in increased attendance at CoPs, encouraged more active participation and helped increase practice sharing between principals. Within the schools, further benefits were achieved when the tool was shared with the full SMT. The DDD programme has also benefitted significantly from BRIDGE taking the Dashboard to their schools. Meaningful data use has been unlocked by the BRIDGE team and this has the potential to drive operational efficiencies in schools and improve learner outcomes. With the NLF team now running DDD across eight provinces, NLF resources would not have been able to provide the required level of support to the principals and schools to enable this. NLF is looking forward to building on the already effective collaboration for the improvement of leadership and management practices in the BRIDGE schools.