Remember Not To Forget

Reigniting ubuntu for school change in South Africa

A case study by Morabo Morojele for

INNER WORK *for* SOCIAL CHANGE

Fetzer Institute

SYNERGOS
Building trust works

Contents

The Inner Work for Social Change Project

Synergos and the Fetzer Institute began the project on Inner Work for Social Change in 2018 to demonstrate how Inner Work and Bridging Leadership can make social action towards a better world more effective. Through six commissioned case studies and in dialogue with thought leaders, development practitioners, activists, and others, the project aims to spark a global conversation on how reflective practices can make social action more aware, more ethically attuned, and more sustainable.

Within the project, *inner work* is any form of reflective practice that increases awareness of self, others, and the systems in which complex social problems arise. Inner work is core to *bridging leadership*, which is the capacity and will to build trust and tap the fullest contributions of diverse stakeholders, helping them to come together across divides to work in concert for the common good.

About this case study

This case study portrays the approach that sparked the remarkable achievements of the *Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme* in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District of South Africa's Free State province. A core proposition is that meaningful change cannot be achieved without Bridging Leadership and collaboration among stakeholders who take personal and collective responsibility for organizational performance.

Content for the case study was built through a documentary review, interviews with key individuals and groups, and participatory observation of an Empowerment and Training Workshop. In-depth interviews with selected Kagiso Trust staff and facilitators, school principals, heads of department, and educators, provided rich insights into the history, development, and outcomes of the program. The Free State Member of the Executive Council for Education also kindly agreed to an interview. Focus group sessions with selected education department officials and teachers invited participants to share their perspectives on the processes and activities, successes, and challenges of the program.

Neo's Story

During the week, seventeen-year-old Neo normally wakes up to the crow of the first rooster, though in winter, when there might be snow on the crowns of the high mountains above their house, she is usually awakened by the cold that cuts through her blankets.

She lights the paraffin stove in the kitchen to boil water in a large steel pot, and then rouses her brother, Tumo, who frets before going to the pit latrine in the yard outside. On his return, she gives him a thick slice of bread thinly smeared with a yellow lard, and a cup of tea in an enamel mug. They eat together and normally don't have much to say. Sometimes, he recounts the dream he had, and she only partially listens, because somehow these are always about the same old memories of their father and mother.

Instead, Neo thinks about how much she wants to pass her Grade 11 exams, so that she may proceed to Grade 12 and write her final school exams. If she succeeds, she could go on to university, like the boy from their school who did so last year.

The boy's picture appeared in the newspapers. He held a trophy in one hand and the other in the tight clasp of a smiling government official because he had received a scholarship. He returned sometimes to stand in front of the school at morning assembly, telling them about the university of stone and concrete at the bustling center of Johannesburg, that city of gold.

It takes Neo and Tumo about an hour to walk to school every day. On the way, they meet other children coming out of their houses, all neatly put together in their school uniforms. They clasp another's shoulders or hands, the boys together and the girls separately. They chatter and gossip, even though it's early morning.

Sometimes they recount a horror, how they looked on helplessly as a woman was mugged by the Nyaope boys with their bloodshot eyes, who stole her money and her antiretroviral medications to mix with their marijuana. Or the way the principal hadn't been able to separate the two boys at school, who'd drawn knives and almost stabbed each other. At other times, they bemoan how a classmate,

slumbering and hiding her pregnancy, made them want to fall asleep in class, and that they might not pass come the end of next year. One or two girls who may also be secretly pregnant slink to the back of their group of 10 or 15 now, because they don't know what to say.

But most often, they talk about the subjects they are studying at school. Neo talks about natural sciences. She wants to be doctor, to save people's lives. She used to help the home-based carer who came once a week to bring adult diapers, wash her mother, and put balm on her festering wounds as she wasted away. Her best friend Thelma, who always somehow manages to tweak her uniform and hair to look glamorous, wants to be rich and talks always about how accounting isn't so difficult. "We've been poor for too long," she says, sounding older than her years.

If these students studied hard and kept out of trouble, they would also do well. If their teachers taught as they were supposed to, instead of coming to school drunk on Mondays or never showing up at all, they could do well and would pass their exams. Like the boy from last year, they would also get bursaries and have their pictures in the newspapers. And after that, well, it would be up to them to make what they would of their lives.

Introduction

Neo's story reflects the aspirations and disappointments of the many young South Africans whose education falls far short of the democratic ideal of equal education for all. Set in the mountainous Thabo Mofutsanyane district on the eastern side of the Free State province, Neo's story depicts the typical living conditions and experiences of children growing up in a context of rural poverty. The district is one of the province's poorest, with two-thirds of its households living below the poverty line.

Over the past decade, remarkable changes in Thabo Mofutsanyane district schools have brought hope to children like Neo and her brother. Between 2010 and 2015, 166 government schools in the district participated in the Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme, an initiative of the Kagiso Trust. District results in National Senior Certificate examinations leapt from a pass rate of 65% in 2010 to 87.5% in 2015. Three years after the program ended, the district pass rate in 2018 had risen to 90%. And in 2019, the Free State ranked first among the country's nine provinces, with two of its six districts – Fezile Dabi and Thabo Mofutsanyana – ranking as the top performing districts nationally.

What accounts for these striking achievements? What part did the BNSDP play in their accomplishment?

At the core of the program is a series of Empowerment and Training Workshops (also known as retreats), designed to enable self-reflection, collaboration, and accountability among school teams and district officials. In the view of Kgotso Schoeman (former CEO of the Kagiso Trust):

> *The real change in schools has been because of the retreats. The retreats allow a conversation around values, and what holds organizations together.*

The Case in Context

The persistent failings of South Africa's education system are, in part, a legacy of apartheid, a political system of racial segregation enacted by the white National Party government elected in 1948. From that point on, the government enacted legislation that politically, economically, and spatially disenfranchised "non-whites," categorized as blacks, Indians, and coloreds (people of mixed race), and drove them into subjugation and destitution. In 1973, the United Nations declared apartheid a crime against humanity.

South Africa has struggled to overcome apartheid's legacy. Before the apartheid era, missionary schools provided education for some black children although they were unable to offer universal coverage. A number of elite missionary schools educated a small African middle class and were the main feeder institutions for the University of Fort Hare, the first university for blacks in Southern Africa, whose alumni include such luminaries as Nobel Prize winners Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 took control of African education away from the missionaries and transferred it to a separate racial education authority.[1] This compelled black children to attend government schools, with curricula designed to prepare them for "their station in life", for manual labor and menial jobs, and to inculcate the idea that black South Africans were subservient to whites. During the primary years at school (up to the fifth grade), teaching was to take place in the students' "native tongue"; English or Afrikaans were to be the medium of instruction for post-primary education. Each of the so-called "homelands" and 'independent states' created by the apartheid state also had its own schools.

To illustrate the discriminatory nature of the apartheid education system, in 1975 the government spent R644 (US$64) a year on a white child's education, but only R42 (US$4) on a black child.[2]

In June 1976, primary and high school students in Soweto, Johannesburg's largest black township, revolted when the white government ordered that from then on Afrikaans would be a compulsory medium of instruction, alongside English. Although

the language policy triggered the protests, this was part of a much wider movement against apartheid. Under the motif "freedom before education," protests continued to disrupt schooling throughout the 1980s, until the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the installation of a democratic government in 1994.

South Africa's democratic government moved swiftly to integrate fragmented and racially segregated schooling into a single system with national responsibility for policy and provincial responsibility for schools. Despite extensive educational reform and high public expenditure on education, vestiges of the apartheid education system remain extant. In a perfectly equitable schooling system, a learner would have the same opportunity for success regardless of where they went to school. What we find instead are stark inequalities in educational opportunity, the quality of education offered, and school performance.

Former "Bantu education" and "homeland" schools, and schools in poor neighborhoods and rural areas, have generally poor performance and high drop-out rates compared to former predominantly white schools. Under the new dispensation, schools are assigned a quintile ranking, relative to the poverty level of the surrounding neighborhood. Schools in quintile 1 are located in the poorest neighborhoods; those in quintile 5 in the wealthiest. On almost any measure of educational performance and quality, schools in the lower quintiles fall far behind those in the higher quintiles. For example, in the 2011 national assessments for numeracy in Grade 6, almost half the schools in the two lowest quintiles had more than 90% of learners score below 35%.[3] In the same year, three-quarters (76%) of Grade 9 learners had not yet acquired a basic understanding of whole numbers, or decimals, or the operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

South Africa's worst performing schools are concentrated in the country's poorest and largest rural provinces. The provinces of Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal are home to schools with no water for learners to drink, no textbooks for them to read, not enough desks for them to sit at, and a poorly equipped learning environment. Countrywide, in 2019, 74% of schools had no libraries, 80% had no science laboratories, and 63% had no computer laboratories. Inequalities in the

system were even starker in 2009 when the Kagiso Trust began its work in school development. Teacher-related issues remain the top challenges, with high rates of absenteeism and substandard preparation. Up to 50% of maths teachers fail to pass mathematics tests at their own grade levels.

The education system exists in a context of poverty, with 55.5% of the population living in poverty in 2017, or on less than US$75 per person per month. In addition, 43.5% of young people under the age of 17 live in households earning below the median income of US$60 per month. Youth unemployment is also extremely high (52.2% in 2011) and increasing (up to 38.2% in the first quarter of 2018).[4] There is also a high incidence of teenage pregnancy in South Africa; in 2017, about 16% of women aged 15 to 19 years had begun childbearing, and 12% had given birth. Schools, which should be a safe haven where young people can learn, are instead places where they are at risk of violence, either within the school grounds or on the way to school. A 2012 national study conducted over a period of one year, found that 22% of learners (22.2%) had been victim to some form of violence while at school.[5]

Even in such dire circumstances, and perhaps especially then, Nelson Mandela's words are an inspiration:

> *Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*

The power of education rests, in part, on schools committed to and capable of providing an education that honors the hopes and aspirations of young people. Under the auspices of the Kagiso Trust, the Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme played a vital role in developing such commitment and capability in rural school districts.

Working towards a more equitable and just society

If an organization does not have values that propagate the worth of the people in it, that does not value their work, and that does not encourage people to know that they are working to building a just society, then it will not work.

Kgotso Schoeman, former chief executive officer of Kagiso Trust

In its founding and history, the Kagiso Trust and its leaders exemplify many of the characteristics of Bridging Leadership – a deep sense of purpose, the capacity to build trust and collaboration, and the courage to act in concert with others towards bringing about a more just society.

In 1985, during a period of intense political struggle against apartheid, a group of prominent clerics, secular leaders, and businesspeople founded the Kagiso Trust to initiate development programs and channel donor funds to worthy causes in South Africa. Collaborating with the South African Council of Churches and others, the Trust worked to oppose apartheid by providing financial and leadership support to institutions and initiatives across a range of sectors.

With political normalization from 1993, most of the Trust's external funding ceased. The Trust then established Kagiso Trust Investments (KTI) to acquire and benefit from its equity acquisitions in large business corporations. KTI ploughs back all revenue accruing from these equity holdings into the Trust's development initiatives.

Since the founding of South Africa's constitutional democracy in 1994, the Trust has worked towards a prosperous, peaceful, equitable and just society. Education development is one of its focal areas.

The Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme (BNSDP) was an educational initiative named in honor of Beyers Naudé who was a leading Afrikaner theologian of the whites-only Dutch Reformed Church. In 1963, Beyers Naudé gave his last sermon; placing "the authority of God over the authority of man", he removed his robes and left the church to become active in the Christian Institute, the South African Council of Churches, and other structures opposing apartheid. Along with Desmond Tutu, he later became a patron of the Kagiso Trust, until his passing in 2004.

In the words of Beyers Naudé:

Education is a responsibility for all within society and the burden to empower the next generation through education must be borne by all.

Prominently displayed on the Trust's webpage on Educational Development,[6] these words point to the spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility that infuse the Trust's education initiatives.

The objective of the BNSDP, and its successor the District Whole Schools Development Programme, is to deliver a comprehensive and tailored program to address the challenges facing rural schools in South Africa. It builds instructional leadership and the capacity of teachers to teach in schools, along with the functionality of the educational system, in order to improve learner outcomes.

Photo: Ziphozonke Lushaba for Kagiso Trust

Makofane Kagiso drinks water during the BNSDP launch at Sehlaku Secondary School in Limpopo.

The Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme

In 2004, the Kagiso Trust implemented a pilot school development program in the Vhembe district of Limpopo province. Three years later, in 2007, the program was extended to 10 schools in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district of the Free State, in partnership with the Free State Department of Education. From 2011, this grew to encompass 166 schools in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district and another 247 schools in the Fezile Dabi and Motheo districts of the Free State.[7]

Beginnings, eureka moments, and lessons for a new design

Between 2005 and 2007, as part of the pilot program, the Trust funded and contracted school development service providers to improve teaching and learning outcomes in 10 schools in rural Limpopo. After two years, there was no marked improvement in performance, particularly regarding discipline among both learners and teachers in the schools.

Kgotso Schoeman, CEO of the Kagiso Trust at the time, was struck by contrasting incidents at two of the participating schools. At the first school, when the headmaster forgot to lock the school gates, some community members stood guard while others went to find him. At the second school, negligence had enabled the theft of computers and other equipment. Kgotso assembled the school staff and school governing body (SGB) of this school and called a press conference to expose their culpability, by omission, in the loss of the equipment. The SGB subsequently raised funds from the broader community to safeguard the school.

These two incidents became eureka moments for Kgotso. He came to understand that where school stakeholders did not abide by the values of ownership, responsibility and accountability, little progress could be achieved. He also came to believe that if provincial departments of education were not committed to the processes of change, they too would continue to fail accountability tests.

Following these insights, Kgotso prepared a presentation on the importance of accountability and integrity, and of working in teams, and presented it to the SGBs and principals of the 10 participating schools in Limpopo. He accepted a suggestion from a principal that the same presentation should be offered to schools on an individual basis. This would give schools a concentrated space for conversations around their own performance, and to respond to the difficult question, "Do we bring our complete selves when we come to school?"

Photo: Kagiso Trust

A rare opportunity for self-reflection deepened Kgotso's insights. As a Synergos Senior Fellow, he was invited to the United States in 2007 to engage with members of the Synergos team and go on a personal retreat. It was here that Kgotso encountered Bridging Leadership and formed an appreciation of Inner Work. Three days entirely alone in a tent in the Montana desert gave him time do his own Inner Work, as he puts it, "to re-energize, to reflect and to recommit myself to my personal goals and my goals for the Kagiso Trust."

Although much of his thinking about the importance of personal values of integrity and accountability had already occurred, the time away and the interaction with Synergos inspired Kgotso to think about securing a place of isolation to serve as a safe space for similar retreats for others. He was particularly keen to make such a space available for senior government and other officials in South Africa, who, in his

Synergos photo

view, require serious self-reflection to take accountability where they are culpable for the country's poor course over the past few years.

Laying the foundations for a trusting, trustworthy, and accountable system

Together with colleagues Themba Mola and Yoyo Sibisi, and others, Kgotso convened school-specific workshops for participating schools in Limpopo province to reflect on and account for their poor performance. These reflective workshops were the start of the retreats that became a central feature of the school development program. They played a crucial role in building a shared sense of responsibility across a school's ecosystem.

Following these school-specific workshops, schools that had been performing at average pass rates of 50% increased their pass rates to between 60 and 70% within a year. At award ceremonies to celebrate these achievements, Kgotso admonished government officials who had not fulfilled some of their basic obligations to schools, for example the timely provision of school furniture, despite the availability of funds. He was making officials account for their responsibilities, recognizing that good school performance also required the buy-in of government and its officials.

Based on these experiences and lessons, Kgotso and his colleagues began to shape and reshape retreat processes, and through learning by doing, to iterate their form and content.

With insights from the Limpopo pilot project experience, the Kagiso Trust team designed the Beyers Naudé School Development Programme around five propositions:

1. Provincial education departments would have to provide matching funds for school improvement programs funded by the Kagiso Trust.
2. All school stakeholders in participating schools would participate in retreats for individual and group reflection, to account for their own and their school's performance, and to chart ways forward.

3. Specialized service providers would assist with capacity development in management, curriculum, or pedagogy, tailored to meet the specific needs of each participating school.
4. Parents and the community at large would need to engage in school-related activities.
5. Schools that achieved their agreed performance targets would receive incentive rewards.

The Trust proposed the program to education departments in seven of South Africa's nine provinces. Few were willing to provide matching funds; in others there was limited commitment to the program.

The Free State province was enthusiastic, however. Michael Phutsisi, manager of Partnerships in Education in the Free State Department of Education, understood the potential of partnerships to advance change in a system with weak internal capacity and severe resource constraints. Strong support came, too, from Pule Makgoe (affectionately known as "Tate"), Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in the Free State.

Developing schools in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district

The Kagiso Trust's education initiative in the Free State began in 2007 with 10 pilot schools in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district, the setting for Neo's story and one of the poorest of the province's four municipal districts. It has a population of approximately 750,000 people, the majority of whom are Sesotho by ethnic origin.[8]

At the outset of the Trust's intervention in the district, there were a number of challenges common to the schools targeted through the Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme.[9] Challenges included high failure rates in mathematics, science, and accounting, and an undersupply of teachers qualified to teach these subjects. Schools, especially in rural areas, had a dearth of teaching and learning resources, and teachers had not been properly trained to implement the changing national school curriculum. There were weaknesses, too, in the systems for school management and governance: the Department of Basic Education was providing

little support for school management teams (SMTs), and the roles of school principals and SGBs were not clearly distinguished. Teacher morale was low; relationships were broken; teachers, leaders and learners alike acted in undisciplined ways that compromised a culture of learning.

Figure 1: The Thabo Mofutsanyana district (in red) in the Republic of South Africa

In view of these challenges, Kgotso engaged with MEC Makgoe to consider providing support for educational development in the district. The Trust predicated its entry into the province on the establishment of a formal partnership with the provincial education department. It had learned from its earlier engagement in school development in Limpopo province that without formal arrangements for collaboration, government commitment would not always be forthcoming. On the basis of this learning, the Trust agreed to work in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district only on condition that the Free State Department of Education co-matched its funding commitment.

When the early successes of the program became evident in a pilot in 10 schools in the Thabo Mofutsanyane district, the MEC agreed to match the Trust's funding offers:

> *If Kagiso Trust was prepared to risk its own money, then I had to do the same.*

In November 2010, the MEC and the Kagiso Trust CEO signed a memorandum of agreement. Targeting 166 schools, the total expenditure up to 2015 amounted to R187,966,444,12 with an original budget of R174.2 million, with the Trust absorbing the resulting cost overruns of R13,755,801 (8%).[13]

Building on a vision: Portrait of a leader

When the MEC of Education in the Free State province, Dr Tate Makgoe, took up his position in 2009, he had an ambitious vision for education. Having been active in the struggle against apartheid, for the MEC, improving education in the province was a profoundly political aspiration. During an in-depth interview,[10] he reflected:

I never believed that white people have an innate advantage over black children. I asked myself, is there something inherently wrong with the black child? What would happen if we gave a black child the same advantages as a white child?

White kids grew up appreciating the value of education. Their fathers were engineers and their mothers, doctors, or accountants. Black children on the other hand had been raised by parents with limited education and did not appreciate how education could change their lives.

I wanted to raise the bar. I wanted to close the gap between previously white and well-resourced public schools, and black underprivileged schools. The disadvantages could be eliminated. The other night, I was listening to a radio program about an innovative medical procedure. When I looked up the race profile of the surgeons involved, they were all black. I was fascinated by the way that when opportunities are made available, black children can excel. This is what counts.

When he agreed to match Kagiso Trust's funding offer and committed to an expanded schools development program, Dr Makgoe had to find ways around the public finance regulations that placed restrictions on how he could spend public funds, but he found ways around them. "If the private sector and NGOs were willing to incentivize schools by offering money for schools infrastructure, provided I matched their funds, I had to work around the system in order to do so." In this way, the MEC had used his vision for change and his leadership to leverage a highly effective "systems change," which, though still unchanged in law, offers a case for new ways of collaboration between state, NGOs, and the private sector.

Dr Makgoe's vision for education infuses his leadership, in word and action. In the words of a senior official[11] in the department, "Dr Makgoe is on the ground. Where there are challenges, he ensures that action is taken to rectify them. When he visits schools, he does so to motivate SGBs, principals, teachers, and learners. He is at ease with all types of people. He is an engaged leader. He tells the learners that they are the future and that they should return as engineers and with other skills to change the places they come from. This excites and motivates them."

As MEC, Dr Makgoe has visited many of the several hundred schools in the province and knows most of their problems. "We need to support schools, by being involved, and through strategies that talk to targets if we want to have more African kids studying maths, physical science, and accounting."

Asked whether leadership is learned or innate, he responded:

In my view, leadership is taking responsibility. Once you take your responsibilities seriously, you become a leader. If principals take their jobs seriously, then they become leaders. Once you recognize your core business, and focus on it, then other people will support you. Leadership is about outcomes.

When we go to communities, the old people still talk about Nelson Mandela, as if no leaders that have come after him have done anything. They remember him because he fundamentally changed their lives. Mandela was a great leader. He goes to prison for 27 years, comes out and is not bitter, because he knew that his responsibility was to pacify the many armies in a country at war with itself. Since then, the country has not fought with itself.

In Dr Makgoe's view, Kagiso Trust has had inspired leaders at all levels. He mentions Kgotso's courage and purpose-driven action:

He makes things happen. He is a hard worker and doesn't settle for mediocrity. He is also a brave individual who is not afraid of challenging others. I recommended him to the Senate of the University of the Free State. Within a few meetings, everyone looked up to him, because he was always challenging them. Themba, the Kagiso Trust program manager is also an implementer and has been the engine behind the success of the program.

In collaboration with the Department of Basic Education, under the leadership of the MEC, the Kagiso Trust negotiated and agreed on targets and developed a program of implementation. Table 1 outlines the main elements and engagement processes for which funding was provided. Building trust, a shared sense of purpose, and accountability were crucial for successful collaboration among the Kagiso Trust, the provincial education department and district department,[14] selected schools, and contracted service providers.

This was an important motivation for the steps shown in Table 1. During reflective retreats for each participating school (step 3), schools identify school-specific projects, which approved service providers then implement. The service providers have to account for funds allocated to them and for the successes of their interventions.

Kagiso Trust then funds school infrastructure (such as laboratories, libraries, multipurpose halls) once school performance targets have been met. Through its Monitoring and

Evaluation Units, the Trust also monitors program implementation. Participating schools are accountable to the Trust and to the district and education departments for achieving commonly agreed performance targets. The formal framework for collaboration helps establish conditions for trustworthy practice (Figure 2).

After extensive engagement among themselves, Kagiso Trust program staff, the provincial education department and district officials in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district agreed to the program outcomes and success measures presented in Table 2.

The Trust then commenced its engagement with school stakeholders, namely, departmental officials, principals, educators, and learners, and their Learner Representative Councils (LRCs) which comprise elected learner representatives in Grade 8 and above. In some instances, stakeholders might also include social workers to support special needs learners and the police services in places where crime is endemic.

Table 1: Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme Engagement Processes

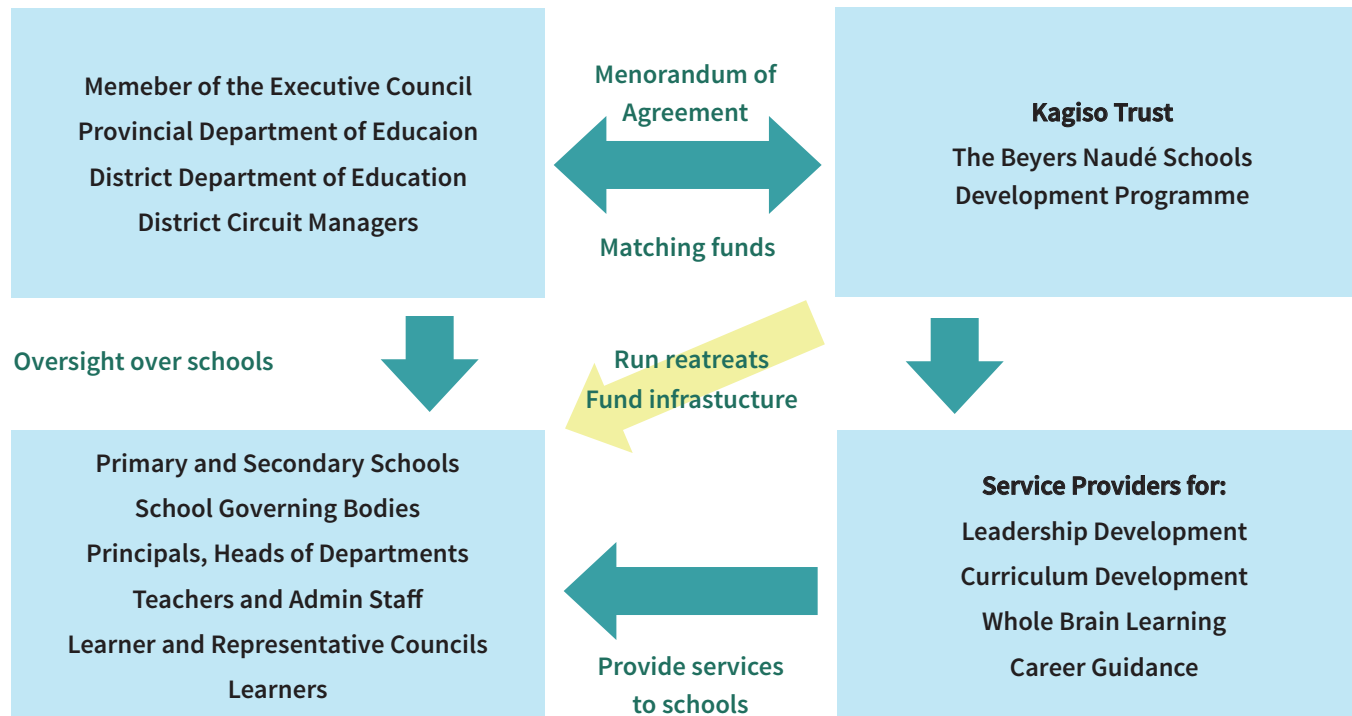| Step 1: Formalization	Step 2: District selection	Step 3: Intake of schools	Step 4: Team building	Step 5: Capacity development	Step 6: Incentive infrastructure	Step 7: Sustainability
Political and administrative support for the program	Identification and selection of district(s), with the provincial education department	Needs assessment to determine district and individual school status, district functionality and degree of customization of interventions	School retreat workshops with district, school, SGB, learners and leadership	Curriculum and social development	Incentive infrastructure based on school achievements that exceed performance benchmarks	Program evaluation
Match funding with provincial department of education		School selection according to feeder, phased in over first two years with varying support	Introduced in year school was selected to participate in the program	Socioeconomic support	Schools awarded infrastructure that does not already exist	Project closure and report development incorporating lessons learnt and impact assessment
Alignment with the education department's strategy to improve schooling				Leadership and governance development	Additional incentive infrastructure based on school performance and ability to sustain performance	Sustainability planning processes
						Lead teacher capacitation for communities of practice
						School leadership learning circles

Building trust, a shared sense of purpose, and accountability were crucial for successful collaboration among the Kagiso Trust, the provincial education department and district department, selected schools, and contracted service providers. This was an important motivation for the steps shown in Table 1. During reflective retreats for each participating school (step 3), schools identify school-specific projects, which approved service providers then implement.

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Figure 2: Formal collaboration in the Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme

Memeber of the Executive Council
Provincial Department of Educaion
District Department of Education
District Circuit Managers

Menorandum of Agreement

Matching funds

Kagiso Trust
The Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme

Oversight over schools

Run reatreats
Fund infrastucture

Primary and Secondary Schools
School Governing Bodies
Principals, Heads of Departments
Teachers and Admin Staff
Learner and Representative Councils
Learners

Provide services to schools

Service Providers for:
Leadership Development
Curriculum Development
Whole Brain Learning
Career Guidance

Empowering school teams

Table 2: Intended Programme Outcomes and Success Measures for the Thabo Mofutsanyana School District

Program outcomes	Success measures
Improved performance	• Program schools to perform above the national and provincial average: • 95% of the Further Education and Training (FET) band schools will perform at 75% and above (matric) • 80% of the General Education and Training (GET) band schools will perform at 75% and above in the Annual National Assessment (ANA) • Measure progression of learners during program implementation • Enable learners in participating schools to reach their full potential • Capacitate teachers in each phase to manage the rotation as well as identify the lead teachers • Address socioeconomic issues affecting the schools • Ensure continuity and sustainability within the schools upon Kagiso Trust's exit from the district as far as is possible
Incentive-based infrastructure	• Incentive-based infrastructure granted to all high performing schools (as per agreed targets)
Effective leadership	• Influence the province and district in how resources are deployed • Develop committed and accountable leadership within the schools • Ensure that SGB members actively participate in enhancing the schools' performance
Involvement of government, parents, and community members	• Parent involvement and participation • Temporary jobs created for the community during the provision of infrastructure to schools • Enhance the involvement in and ownership by communities of schools • From the outset, ensure the involvement of key government stakeholders

The initial and catalytic processes of engagement with schools were the "retreats" (later known as Empowerment and Training Workshops), typically convened at local lodges or hotels for two days over weekends so as to minimize workplace dynamics and enable school teams to participate with undivided attention. Over time, the Trust has formalized the workshop process with detailed facilitation manuals.
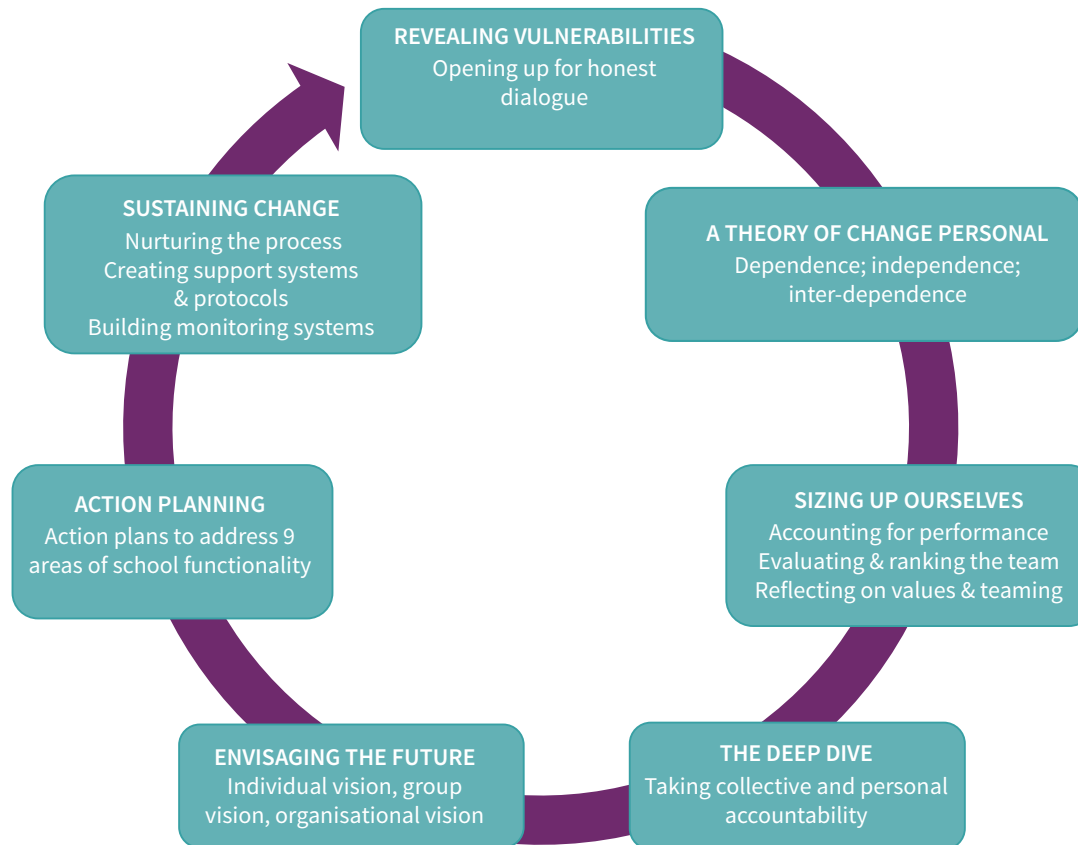
A central purpose is to mend the human relationships that have broken down in many schools, and build "positive, humane and accountable relationships" for a healthy teaching and learning environment. The current program participants' manual states:

> *This workshop approach is … anchored on mending and building positive, humane and accountable relationships in schools. Experience has shown that unless relationships between the different stakeholders are improved, whatever intervention is implemented, will not be fruitful. The reality is that human relations in many schools have broken down, and the level of conflict in some of the schools completely undermines the management of the school and the teaching and learning environment.*

To build relationships and a shared sense of responsibility across a school's ecosystem, workshops typically include principals, teachers and members of SMTs, school support staff, SGB members, and circuit managers (education department officials responsible for monitoring and supporting schools).

The retreats now follow almost ritualized processes (see Figure 3). In the opening session, "Revealing vulnerabilities," the facilitator prompts the participants: "Tell us one thing that most people do not know about you, what you are grateful for, and what is your most unfulfilled wish." As innocuous as this exercise seemingly is, it generally results in people revealing things about themselves that their colleagues were not aware of, despite having worked together for many years. For the Kagiso Trust team, deep interaction around self-revelation is a powerful activity to open space for deep reflection.

Figure 3: The Empowerment and Training Process

REVEALING VULNERABILITIES
Opening up for honest dialogue

A THEORY OF CHANGE PERSONAL
Dependence; independence; inter-dependence

SIZING UP OURSELVES
Accounting for performance
Evaluating & ranking the team
Reflecting on values & teaming

THE DEEP DIVE
Taking collective and personal accountability

ENVISAGING THE FUTURE
Individual vision, group vision, organisational vision

ACTION PLANNING
Action plans to address 9 areas of school functionality

SUSTAINING CHANGE
Nurturing the process
Creating support systems & protocols
Building monitoring systems

The following narrative portrays the transformative workshop sessions ("Revealing vulnerabilities," "A theory of personal change," "Sizing up ourselves," "The deep dive," and "Envisaging the future"). It illustrates the approach in action and offers a glimpse of how the retreats create a safe yet brave space for reflection, trust-building, and a shared sense of purpose. The narrative builds on the case writer's participatory observation of retreats held early in 2019.

Scenes are rendered faithfully, but all names are fictional. The processes portrayed here have been a common feature of the retreats since the commencement of the BNSDP in the Free State province in 2010.

Portrayal of a retreat in action

The room is comfortable, air-conditioned, and full of light. The principal, heads of department, teachers, four members of the SGB, and two LRC members are all sitting around tables. They will be in this venue for two days, from Friday lunchtime until Sunday lunch time. Grace, who teaches accounting sits next to her best friend from the school, Ms Mokae, a mathematics teacher.

Revealing vulnerabilities

The facilitator introduces herself, "My name is Minkie."

She describes the Kagiso Trust, its history, and its values of honesty and integrity, in order to reassure participants that however difficult the workshop process might become, trust and integrity would be foundational to it. "I would like you all to tell us one thing that most people do not know about you, what you are grateful for, and what is your most unfulfilled wish," Minkie says. She extends the portable microphone to Ms Mokae, "You first, please." Ms Mokae wriggles in her chair and says, "You all know that I have three children, right?" People murmur assent. "I actually have four and have never told you about my first born. He has a serious mental handicap and has been in a home since he was born, before I started teaching here."

"What is it that I am grateful for? I am grateful for my health and for my family, especially my eldest too, and for the fact that I have a job and a salary." Ms Mokae hesitates before continuing, "I have always regretted that I never furthered my studies. Perhaps it was because I was depressed after the birth of my first child." At the other end of the room, the deputy-principal Mr. Oliphant says, "You know all there is to know about me." "That can't be true," Minkie replies. Mr. Oliphant hesitates and then blurts out, "Do you remember the time I fell into a coma and had to be taken to hospital? I have type one diabetes."

He reaches under the table, undoes his belt, and puts two small pouches on the table. "These are not for my cellphones," he says. He shows them around the room. "One has my tester, which I use to check my blood sugar levels, and the other has

'Kagiso Trust photo

my medicines and injection. I inject myself in my office when no one is around. I am grateful that the diabetes is under control and that my eyesight is still ok. I do regret that I didn't look after my health when I was younger."

The janitor, Mr. Phiri, tells them that he is originally from Malawi and hadn't wanted anyone to know. The head of the science department regrets that she never married. An SGB member says he wishes he hadn't dropped out of school when he was young. Unhappy stories most of them, from these staff members, salaried well enough, but living on the poor and underdeveloped edge of a rural town, where lives often barely matter.

"You see," Minkie says. "You've been working together for years and don't fully know each other." There is a silence in the room as they look at each other as if meeting for the first time.

A theory of personal change

"Now that we know a little more about each other, we can move on," says Minkie. "Organizations are only as good as the people in them, and not the other way around."

She leads the group through something called a personal framework for growth:

Individuals on a dependent growth path exacerbate the weakness of others, in order to control them. They always agree with others even if they disagree with them. They are affected by others, by physical conditions and the environment, and always think that the problem is out there, and thus absolves them.

Individuals on an independent growth path act rather than be acted on. They speak out against what they think is wrong, and do so with a huge sense of self- respect and respect for others. They are creative and analytical, are inner directed and can take care of themselves, have a strong sense of self-confidence, but they can be destructively arrogant.

Individuals on an interdependent growth path understand that their being has to do with relationships with others and that they are only as good as their team members. They understand that cooperation and combining talents result in the creation of something bigger and better, and realize they have opportunities to share themselves deeply and meaningfully with others, and to access the vast potential of others.

Participants ask a few questions about the theory but say very little. They are preoccupied with the revelations in the session before.

Sizing up ourselves

To break the silence, Minkie says, "I can see that you are all a little bored. That's alright. I want us to rate our performance as a team and rate ourselves with a 1 for poor; 2 for average; and 3 for good."

She divides the participants into smaller groups and instructs them to discuss and agree on the factors that contribute to the performance of the school and to write them up on a flip chart. There is disagreement about the final ranking among some groups, but the majority rank the school's performance as average, while a few rank it as poor.

Participants then reflect on best performing teams, including their characteristics, visions and purposes, ownership, management, systems, leadership, and, very importantly, their culture and values. Reluctantly, they acknowledge that their school has few of these attributes.

The deep dive

The group is still looking at their performance scores when Minkie says, "Now when you look at your school's ranking and the reasons for its performance, and compare them to the characteristics of teams that work well, you begin to see what is wrong, isn't it?" The participants agree.

"I want us to all now take a deep dive. I want you to please tell us all: What are two things that you personally do that hamper the performance of your team?" Minkie walks silently around the room and then points to the librarian.

The librarian says, "I sometimes don't file the books in the correct order. Then even I can't find them afterwards."

"Great. And what else?"

"I'm sometimes too harsh when the children make noise in the library."

"And you, Grace?" Minkie says, handing her the microphone.

"I don't always hand in test results on time".

Kagiso Trust photo

"And what is the effect of that?" Minkie asks.

"Well, it means that the head of department can't compile the results in time and his work is delayed."

"And what else?"

"I don't offer extra classes for the Grade 12s when they need them before their final exams."

And so participants unburden themselves and confess: to hitting an unruly learner; to failing to attend departmental meetings; to being insufficiently communicative; to not sharing instructions from the district office with the school; to coming late to school on Monday morning, or not at all on some Fridays.

"Alright. We are deep diving now," says Minkie. "I now want you to tell us two things that any of your colleagues do that hamper the performance of the school." She paces around the room.

Grace raises her hand. She is brave. She points at a bleary-eyed teacher across the room. "Mr. Monday. You are always late on Monday mornings when we are supposed to have our departmental meetings."

The man mutters to his neighbor and then shouts at Grace, "Yes, and you and your perfumes, all over the corridors. We can't breathe!"

Minkie runs over to him. "No, no, no. This is not a slanging match. We are not here to insult one another. We are here to tell each other difficult things, but with honesty and respect. Please rather say that Grace uses too much perfume. And that goes for everyone else too."

A mature teacher raises her hand. Things are moving quickly now. She points at the principal. "I am a married woman and yet you speak to me as if I am a child. I don't know what to do. One day, driving home, I was so unhappy, I just stopped the car in the middle of the road. A truck almost crashed into me. I could have died." She's distressed and pulls out a handkerchief and wipes her eyes.

And so the finger-pointing continues. They are all blameworthy in some way or another, and cannot deny their culpability. In this they are all equal – as one facilitator put it – "in the eyes of the lord."

*****

A break is necessary, to allow people to be alone, to find hidden spaces to break down if they need to, or just to get tea, coffee, or water. Fifteen minutes later, the workshop resumes.

*****

"How deep did we dive?" Minkie asks.

"Very," someone responds with a nervous laugh.

"Good. What is it that we have done?"

"We have taken responsibility for our own shortcomings and have told each other about the things we do that hurt and frustrate each other, and that get in the way of our work."

"Exactly. And how does it feel?"

"I was very upset at first," says the principal, "but then because everyone was being honest, and because no one was trying to hurt anyone on purpose, it was the right thing to do. I did not know these things about myself and I would like to thank you all for telling me. I now know what it is I have to change."

"That is exactly the point of this exercise," Minkie says. "Our school will never work if we don't take responsibility for our own actions as individuals and as a collective, and if we do not communicate with each other in honest and respectful ways. I have called it taking a deep dive. Would any of you have any other words to describe what we have just done?"

"It's talking from the heart," someone says.

"For me it was liberating and empowering."

"Hallelujah!" calls out someone else.

"Anyway," Minkie says, "as hard as it was, I would like to thank you all for being honest and respectful towards each other. So, let's move on." She pauses to give them time to recover.

Envisaging the future

The time has come for looking to the future and making personal commitments.

"Tell us two things that you are personally going to do from now on to enhance the performance of the team. Think about it and then write them down. You'll read them out afterwards," says Minkie.

She gives them a few minutes to consider their responses and then points to the man with the bleary eyes. "What are yours, please?"

"I will make sure that I never come late again on Mondays," he replies, "and I will also spend less time joking with the children in my classroom." Turning negatives into positives can be affirming, and perhaps comforting.

"These are your individual commitment statements," Minkie says. "Please make sure you have put your names on them and let me have them. I will get them printed and laminated for you and let you have them back for you to display."

The retreat is coming to an end. Participants begin thinking about priority projects for their school.

Action planning comes next in the empowerment process (see Figure 3). Using their insights from the retreat and simple project matrixes, participants then identify school-specific projects and start developing priority plans for their schools around the Nine Areas of School Functionality, to augment mandatory school improvement plans (SIPS), which are:

- Basic Functionality
- Leadership, Management and Communication
- Governance and Relationships
- Quality of Teaching and Learning and Educator Development
- Curriculum Provision and Resources
- Learner Achievement
- School Safety, Security and Discipline
- School Infrastructure
- Parents and the Community.

Once these plans have been further developed, the Trust funds service providers with good records in facilitating content-specific activities to manage these change management activities. It also monitors the implementation of agreed activities and evaluates their outcomes, and also commissions periodic external evaluations of implementation.

Reflection on the retreats

For the Kagiso Trust team, self-revelation is a powerful opening activity to create space for deep reflection in the retreats, and helps to pave the way for trust-building and more humane relationships among participants. The next session, on a theory of personal change, offers a framework to guide and inspire personal and organizational change. It suggests an ideal type – individuals who understand that their being and actions are shaped in relationship with others.

In "Sizing up ourselves", participants rate their school's performance and begin to identify reasons for poor performance; they also begin to recognize their collective culpability. Together, they then describe and reflect on the characteristics of best performing teams, including visions and purposes, ownership, management and systems, leadership, and very importantly, their culture and their values, described as "behaviors in action." Typically, participants concede that their schools do not have the attributes common to high performing organizations.

Becoming more intrusive, the "deep dive" – the mea culpa session – is difficult and uncomfortable, although some participants do come to unburden themselves. For most, the session prompts them, possibly for the first time, to "own up" to their actions, their mistakes and shortcomings, and to shift from exteriorizing the causes of problems.

In an even deeper dive, participants are prompted to "finger point" at each other, saying what any of their colleagues do (or neglect to do) that negatively affects others or the school as a whole. This calls on participants to be both honest and brave. However distressing or hurtful some of the accusations might be, in the end, they appear to have almost always been liberating. In many cases, they have resulted in new, almost sacred covenants among members of school teams. In some instances, however, individuals refuse to acknowledge failings on their part and to be accountable for their actions. In one case, a participant took legal action against a colleague for defamation of character. This proves the volatility of some of these workshops, which call for skilled facilitation.

The Kagiso Trust team came to understand that the retreats would not be successful if they were not forward looking. After the deep dive, the forward-looking workshop sessions take participants through a process of personal commitment to change, as a foundation for school change. "The commitment statements are at a high level but can't be more than that," says Kgotso. "Whatever the statements, they are theirs. The retreat is not about strategic planning, but about personal empowerment… You can set audacious goals and achieve them."

The Trust has developed a manual for facilitating the retreats (or, as they are called in the manual, Empowerment and Training Workshops). The common view is that the manual is not sufficiently unique or rigorous to be patentable, yet it can be used in contexts beyond the education sector. It is a tool that can bring value to any organization where good and accountable relationships are crucial for performance. But, as Kgotso observes:

> *There is the danger that in using a manual and working hard to meet targets set by the Trust, the process might become mechanical and insufficiently responsive to the different dynamics across schools.*

Are the retreats a space for Inner Work? "There is no language for the retreat process," says Kgotso, one of the originators of the process. "It is about creating safe spaces for individuals to reconnect to themselves. It may be Inner Work, although we do not use that term, because language can be a barrier."

Although MEC Tate Makgoe never participated in school retreats, he said:

> *I could see their power by the results. They forced schools to ask themselves, where are we dropping the ball? There was a lot of soul searching. Schools then developed individual and collective targets, and would then ask themselves, how are we going to achieve our targets? This was a very scientific approach. And the facilitators were key.*

> *People became very emotional, but took ownership of their schools and became proud of their achievements. Many of the schools are still the top in the country, four years after the end of the program.*

> *The retreats also changed the educational landscape of the province. They built teachers' confidence and helped to show them that they are important and to rediscover their passion for education.*

What it takes to be a facilitator

Workshop facilitators have always been recruited by word of mouth. Most were previously involved in education, as principals and educators, or as government or non-governmental organization officials involved in education. Their knowledge of the realities of schools has been an important attribute they have brought to change management processes. Additionally, a few have come from industrial psychology in the private sector.

None of them have qualifications in facilitation, and none has received any upfront training to become facilitators. They share a passion for social change whatever its impulse; whether political and ideological due to Kagiso Trust's past involvement in the struggle against apartheid, or spiritual or religious due to the organization's historical links to the churches. "I am just a lay priest; I have not been ordained," said one facilitator.

> *I do this for the love of God. I also have my own business, so though I am paid for facilitating retreats, I don't do it for the money.*

For their induction, new facilitators pair up with experienced ones for continuous observation, monitoring, and mentoring. "We start the new ones by inviting them to observe how we manage the retreats. We then allow them to manage the easier parts of the retreats, and then gradually allow them to manage the deep dives, although we watch and guide them, and take over if necessary," said facilitator Yoyo Msibi.

The more experienced facilitators are usually assigned to facilitate retreats for large schools, or for schools considered highly problematic and conflict-ridden.

"We do not have a formal or even an informal organization of facilitators. Perhaps we do need something like that, so that we can continue to bond, to debrief after hard sessions, and perhaps to do our own deep diving," Yoyo reflects.

Facilitation is a personalized skill, and there will always be different approaches to managing processes that can be emotionally charged. Facilitators must enable participants to dive fully and deeply, and guide them to reach intended personal and

collective points of redemption. Even though facilitators may themselves be affected by the emotional outcomes of deep diving, they must nevertheless remain neutral sounding boards, and must also have the sensitivity to counsel emotionally affected individuals.

One facilitator described her way of handling the emotional burden of facilitating the deep dive:

> *During tea or lunch breaks, I sometimes cry privately to myself, in the toilets or in my rooms. I know when I have to talk to someone who has obviously been deeply affected, in private, away from the group, to counsel him or her.*

Kgotso believes that "facilitators are not special people but are people who do not thrive on the weakness of others, but rather thrive on seeing others blossom. There is no way that they cannot be emotionally engaged." Debriefing is important to enable them to heal. "They need space to share their experiences and to tell their stories." says Kgotso.

Incentives

To maintain the enthusiasm generated through the retreats, to effect behavior change, and motivate stakeholders to achieve desired targets, the program has an incentive structure, based on school achievements that exceed performance benchmarks. Initially, rewards were relatively inexpensive items such as laptops, fax machines, and other office tools. Other incentives were holiday trips for school teams and their partners to the port cities of Durban and Cape Town, to which very few had ever been. The program came to offer more expensive and tangible rewards to benefit whole schools, including toilets and water supply systems, where these did not exist or were in poor repair, and laboratories, libraries, multipurpose halls, and other facilities when schools achieved agreed targets.

By all accounts, these incentives motivated school teams considerably. "My husband used to insist that I teach extra classes on Saturday, so that like our neighboring school, we too would go on holiday to the sea," said one teacher.

Beyond the personal, the incentives around improved school infrastructure kindled community commitment and a shared sense of ownership. "The infrastructure mobilized community involvement as it rallied behind schools to work hard for results," a teacher commented. "Community mobilization also helped with security at schools because the communities took ownership of them. Computer centers are open to the community members."

Events convened by MEC Tate Makgoe and the department to celebrate good school performance offer a different kind of incentive to learners and their parents. Whilst a hundred or so people attended prize-giving events in the early years of the BNSDP, from 2010 on, up to 3,000 people now attend them.

"The events are now fashionable. Black and white kids and their parents attend them together. It has become prestigious for schools and their best performers to be invited. Extensive media coverage is important too, because it spreads the importance of education to the lives of our people. Now, people in the province talk about education," says MEC Makgoe.

In his view, in addition to affecting the education system in the province, the BNSDP has had a catalytic effect on the local economy in and around the Thabo Mofutsanyana district. Well-paid, highly qualified teachers and administrators and aspirant learners are increasingly relocating to the district, which has resulted in growing investment in public infrastructure, commercial and residential facilities, and a mini economic boom. The MEC considers the retreat and incentive processes so powerful that he is lobbying government colleagues to utilize them in other sites of poor service delivery.

Remember not to forget: One school's story of change

Rantsane High School is a Quintile 1 school,[15] serving one of the poorest communities in a rural part of the Thabo Mofutsanyana district. For many of its learners, the school-feeding scheme provides their first meal of the day, and a second at the end of the school day for the most underprivileged. During the school holidays, as Grade 12 students prepare for their final school-leaving exam, some stay at the school overnight, sleeping on mattresses on the floor. Funds raised by the school and its SGB help to feed these dedicated students.

In its curricular offering, the school has a strong focus on maths and the physical sciences. Between 2007 and 2011, the school's pass rate in the national senior certificate ("matric") fell from 59% to 37%. Since 2013, the pass rate has been 100%.

School principal Mr. Segogo Molete attributes this remarkable turnaround to the Kagiso Trust "and the retreat they convened, where teachers spoke their hearts out about the school and about each other. And members of SGBs also. As the principal, I learnt what people thought about me. The good, the bad, and the ugly." He reflects:

The retreat was a difficult process, but people needed to be mature; let me look at myself in the mirror, and to respond. People came out wounded, but in order to grow, they needed to be uncomfortable. And relationships changed so much to the extent that school stakeholders now go to their colleague's relative's funerals, something that does not happen in other schools.

The retreat changed Mr. Molete's behavior beyond the school. He says,

I am respectful of everyone and try and care for everyone I can. People now confide in me and see me as a father figure, because of my leadership position. I walk with pride in the community.

The change engendered through the retreat process has been sustained because, Mr. Molete says,

We remember not to forget. We agreed amongst ourselves that when people regressed, we would meet and remind ourselves of new commitments to continue building a family called Rantsane. The Kagiso Trust intervention was very profound because it did not end with the retreat.

Mentoring and incentives complemented the retreat process in enabling and motivating school improvement. Mentors went to the school to assist with leadership

Photo: Kagiso Trust

"Now let us go for this very high note!"

issues and personnel management. Mr. Molete so valued his monthly mentoring that he has now taken on the role of mentor himself. Within the school, he mentors the deputy principal, heads of department, and teachers. Beyond the school, the province and the district departments use him to mentor other principals and maths and science teachers. His reward is personal satisfaction in serving the school and the country.

You forget about yourself. There is no monetary reward. It's about ploughing back.

The Trust offered the school a compelling incentive: If it achieved a 100% matric pass rate, all staff and SGB members, and their spouses, would be sent on an all-expenses paid holiday to the sea. The school went there on two occasions and, in 2017, after achieving a 100% pass rate over three consecutive years and a record-breaking

Synergos photo

Engineer in training!

bachelor pass rate[16] of 91%, school members went on holiday to the glamorous city of Cape Town.

In 2018, in recognition of the school's achievements, MEC Tate Makgoe arranged for an exchange visit to Rwanda for a group of Rantsane High School stakeholders. This was a learning journey where they could observe how schools in a country with very limited resources, and still recovering from the trauma of the 1994 genocide, were able to achieve good educational outcomes. Rantsane High was the second Free State School to embark on such a journey. This benchmarking program started with Mohaladitwe Secondary School visiting Kenya in 2017.

Rantsane High has now developed its own system of incentives. Using their own funds, staff and SGB members go on quarterly "re-retreats" to the picturesque town of Clarens.

Most Rantsane graduates proceed to prestigious South African tertiary education institutions such as the Universities of the Witwatersrand and of Cape Town, while some have gone abroad to countries such as Turkey, China, Cuba, Bulgaria, amongst others, to study subjects including engineering, accounting, and medicine. A number have been beneficiaries of the Eric Molobi Scholarship Programme, established in 2007 in memory of one of the founders of KTI and late head of the Kagiso Trust. Up to 2017, the program had dispensed R16.3 million to fund 140 students.

Many of the students return during university holidays to share their experiences and to assist with teaching and other school activities. They also serve as role models, and help new graduates chart their way when they arrive in such daunting cities as Johannesburg. The school is currently building an alumni platform to further enable students to support each other and the school in the future.

Rantsane High School's goal is to become the country's best public school for math, science, and commerce. In 2023, it intends to celebrate a decade of achieving a 100% matric pass rate. The school's motto is: Through hard work and struggle over adversity, we will reach the stars.

In Mr. Molete's words, "The Kagiso Trust planted a seed. It has left a legacy."

Reigniting ubuntu

The BNSDP retreats (and the Empowerment and Training Workshops in the succeeding Whole School Development Programme) are the main drivers of individual and collective behavior change among school team members. Following the retreats, members became more respectful towards one another, more considerate of each other, more responsive and accountable to themselves and to others, more cooperative, and more willing to give up their free time (and sometimes money) in the interests of the school. The main effect of the retreats, it appears, has been to positively change relationships between school team members. This may account for better school performance.

A principal who had participated in a retreat and in subsequent school development activities said, "Learners and teachers are now willing to work extra hours. Teamwork among teachers is now commonplace. Teacher discipline is 100%. There are no more instances of 'Mr. Monday' or 'Mr. Friday.'"

One primary school had a number of special needs learners with mental disabilities including Down Syndrome and fetal alcohol syndrome. At the same school, two Rastafarian brothers who had smoked marijuana from their early years and who were now in their early teens could not read or write. A teacher said,

Before the retreat, I wasn't helping these children with special needs. But since then, even though it is difficult, I help, and their performance has improved.

At another school, six teachers sat in the lobby of a principal's office, pens and writing pads in hand. "We are waiting for a departmental meeting with the principal," one of them said. "Yes, we participated in a Kagiso Trust retreat. Now commitment is high. Everything he is doing is transparent. We work as a team."

The workshops were never shaped, either by design or by default, to achieve spiritual or religious purposes. Prayers might be offered at the beginning and end of the

workshops, but where these do occur, it is as part of normal practices among like-minded groups of people convened in workshop-like settings.

Perhaps what the Empowerment and Transformation Workshops achieved was to "remind them not to forget," or to reconnect participants to the basic tenet of the African value system of ubuntu, which means that, "You are a person through other people," or, "I am, because we are."

Ubuntu is not taught at school or through any institution of western construct. Elements of it are contained in instruction in now-decreasing numbers of traditional

Photo: Kagiso Trust

Simunye - we are one!

initiation schools for males and females. More pertinently, much of African indigenous knowledge remains tacit, embedded in practices, relationships, and rituals, transferred orally from one generation to the next.[17]

Whilst most black South Africans are Christians, ubuntu remains foundational to the way they immerse themselves in life, even if high levels of crime, gender-based violence, and crimes against children attest to much non-adherence to its basic injunctions. Ubuntu is the ontological basis of life for most black South Africans and frames their relationships with their god(s), with their communities, and with themselves. It foregrounds reciprocity, respect, and the manner in which people relate to each other. It is assumed as a common and shared value system, more often observed in its breach, than in its practice. For example, a young man did not reduce

Photo: Kagiso Trust

We have reason to smile - our future is bright!

the volume of the loud music he was playing as he passed a Saturday morning funeral cortege. He had forgotten his ubuntu and should have been called to order.

"Morena ke lekhoba la sechaba."[18] This means, "A leader (a chief) is the peoples' slave." Ubuntu frames a leader as someone whose purpose is to serve the common will of the people, someone with the capacity to maintain community cohesion, to resolve conflict, to protect the most vulnerable, and to build and direct teams for tasks for the common good.

Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu might well have been describing most teachers and SGB members of the BNSDP schools when he wrote:

> *A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.*[19]

The retreats may have simply done nothing more than to reconnect participants to their own personal ubuntu.

Are the retreats about reigniting ubuntu?

MEC Dr Tate Makgoe reflects:

> *They are something like that, but it is even more. The retreats force people to ask themselves, what value am I as an individual, and others, adding or not adding to this organization. It is a community kind of thing. It is not about just you chasing your own goals. To be successful, others must feel that your success impacts on their goals, and vice versa.*

Recent achievements and the way forward

For many students, the annual announcement of the national matric results brings with it a blend of gratification and sheer relief – for it is, ultimately, the culmination of an exacting 12-year journey. Free State province's class of 2019 realized outstanding achievements, which saw the province attaining the best pass rate in the 2019 National Senior Certificate academic year, with a pass rate of 88.4%.

As a result of Kagiso Trust's intervention through the BNSDP, the following are current achievements:

- The Minister of Education gave special recognition to the Fezile Dabi District Municipality for retaining the top position in districts across the country, at 92.3%. The district also achieved the provincial 90/40 target of a 90% pass rate with a 40% bachelors pass rate.

- The Thabo Mofutsanyana district was one of the top 10 performing districts out of the 52 districts in South Africa.

- Twenty-four BNSDP schools have continued to perform consistently at between 80 and 100% since 2012.

- Two of the three BNSDP beneficiary districts performed above 90% and one performed above 80%.

- A learner from Tsebo Secondary School (one of the first 10 schools to participate in the BNSDP) was among the top 10 national performers.

- Fifty-six schools in the province performed at 100%, of which 25 were from the Thabo Mofutsanyana district. Of the 25, 17 are BNSDP schools.

Other provinces and national government have also noted the impact made by the BNSDP, and Limpopo province has now partnered with Kagiso Trust to launch the program in the Sekhukhune district, one of the poorest and most underserved in the country.

Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga has also paid credit to the program, saying,

> *Kagiso Trust has developed an exciting and certainly innovative schools improvement program that supports and helps schools in addressing obstacles to increased performance. Government alone cannot address the legacy and infrastructure backlogs we've inherited. It is against this backdrop that we seek collaborations and partnerships … We say 'Thank you' to Kagiso Trust for the splendid job they've done for school children, especially in rural communities.*

Current Kagiso Trust CEO Mankodi Moitse said the Trust wants to spread the program to other areas, "beyond the areas where we started, so that this can become a model that can be replicated, tailored, and implemented across multiple districts in the country. Partnering and collaborating with the Department of Basic Education, as well as the MEC in Limpopo, will be pivotal to the success of this program."

Synergos photo

Scientifically, this is exactly one metre!

Conclusions

This case study has illustrated how collaboration, Bridging Leadership, and intentional practices of reflection, accountability and incentive combined to bring about the remarkable achievements of school districts in the Free State, in particular the Thabo Mofutsanyana district where Neo's story was set.

At the heart of the BNSDP's success in the Free State are the reflective, decisive, and effective Bridging Leadership roles of a number of individuals, which enabled a high degree of formal and informal collaboration among key stakeholders both inside and outside the boundaries of the participating schools. This leadership was visionary, buttressed by uncompromising and unambiguous value systems, and able to navigate normally rigid systems, through risk taking and innovation, to achieve its vision.

The BNSDP's retreat processes were catalytic in bringing about personal transformation and behavior change and, by all accounts, were responsible for changes in school performance that have been sustained, along with the incentives and school support interventions. What is truly remarkable is the way in which the process of self and group reflection of very short duration had such profound effects, particularly when they did not offer the opportunity for the isolation and stillness associated with Inner Work retreats. The inner results of the processes were not Damascene moments, and yet the outer results have been profound. What the process of self-reflection did was to remind fractured individuals working through dysfunctional relationships of the values and ways of living embedded in ubuntu.

This case study would not be complete if it were not forward looking and did not make the following propositions. First, consideration should be given by Kagiso Trust, Synergos and other partners to creating capacity for identifying, and building and nurturing, visionary and value-driven Bridging Leadership. Second, the retreat process should be tested in other non-school locations and, on the basis of lessons learnt, should be institutionalized for wider application.

Finally, whilst a case study such as this should limit the remit of its prescriptions, more collective work should perhaps be directed to address the current global crisis, which is having profound effects on human welfare and wellbeing, through Bridging Leadership and Inner Work embedded in organizations.

Annexures

Annex 1: Documents consulted

- Evaluation of the Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme – Centre for Education Policy Development, 2014

- The Kagiso Trust Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme – A Case Study – Thabo Mofutsanyana district, 2007–2015

- The Kagiso Trust 30-Year Strategic Plan – The Kagiso Trust, June 2016

- 2018 Matric Results Analysis Report, The Kagiso Trust, 2019

- BNSDP Booklet, The Kagiso Trust, 2014

- BNSDP Facilitators' Guide, The Kagiso Trust

- BNSDP Participants' Manual, The Kagiso Trust.

Annex 2: Free State Province, District School Performance 2012 to 2018

District Performance in Percentages, 2012–2018							
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Fezile Dabi	80.5	86.0	83.7	86.2	91.8	90.2	92.3
Thabo Mofutsanyana	81.3	88.4	87.6	87.5	90.0	90.1	90.0
Lejweleputswa	82.6	86.6	80.8	82.6	86.2	84.6	85.2
Xhariep	81.8	86.9	78.2	78.4	92.0	82.9	83.5
Motheo	80.2	87.9	80.7	74.8	85.5	82.5	85.1

In Free State province, Thabo Mofutsanyana achieved the second position with a 90% pass. Both the Fezile Dabi and Thabo Mofutsanyana districts are beneficiaries of the Kagiso Trust's BNSDP. The results demonstrate sustained good performance after Kagiso Trust's exit from the province.

Annex 3: Summary of BNSDP activities and achievements in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district

With an approved partnership budget of R174,210,643 but an actual total program budget of R204,531,965, the BNSDP

- supported 166 schools, of which 120 were primary and 46 were secondary schools. It convened individual "retreats" for all of the schools, with the participation of more than 12,000 school stakeholders including principals, members of the SGBs, members of school management teams (SMTs), teachers, administrative staff and members of LRCs

- had an impact on 455,000 learners, of which 336,000 were at the GET level – Grades 1–9, and 118,000 were at the FET level, – Grades 10–12, including through school camps, learner motivation sessions for FET schools, career guidance for all Grade 9 learners and teachers, the BNSDP Sports Tournament, and storytelling and reading competitions

- enabled 80 Grade 10 learners to attend a three-year leadership program to build resilience and confidence and enhance their public-speaking and leadership skills

- implemented leadership development programs in 40 BNSDP schools for 250 SMT members in the district with leadership and management development and support to

- improve teacher content knowledge in literacy and numeracy, and maths, science and accounting

- improve teacher e-learning skills in computer literacy, and

- provide incentives – vouchers were awarded to the best performing teachers in gateway subjects like maths, accounting and science, as well as trips to Durban for schools obtaining 100% performance in Grade 12 results

- provided infrastructure and equipment to schools that performed exceptionally and achieved set performance targets, including

    - 53 libraries

    - 63 science laboratories

    - 54 computer centers with 2,320 computers

    - 13 school halls for 100% schools including six hostel renovations and kitchens

    - 51 contractors were appointed, and

    - 2,459 temporary jobs created

- awarded 121 learners from the participating schools with full bursaries under the Eric Molobi Scholarship Programme (EMSP) to study at any South African university of their choice.

Notes

[1] For a brief account of Bantu Education and the 1976 uprising against it, see for example, Bekisizwe S. Ndimande, "From Bantu Education to the Fight for Socially Just Education," Equity and Excellence in Education 46 no. 1 (2013): 20–35.

[2] http://africanhistory.about.com/od/apartheid/a/Soweto-Uprising-Pt1.htm.

[3] Department of Basic Education, Report on the Annual National Assessments of 2011 (Pretoria: DBE, 2011).

[4] Source: Statistics South Africa.

[5] Patrick Burton and Lezanne Leoshut, School Violence in South Africa: Results of the 2012 National School Violence Study (Monograph Series no 12, Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, March 2013).

[6] https://www.kagiso.co.za/education-development-2/.

[7] In 2013, a partnership between Kagiso Trust, the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation (CRF) and others formed the Kagiso Shanduka Trust (KST). In partnership with the Free State Education Department, KST up-scaled what became known as the District Whole School Development Model to schools in the Motheo and Fezile Dabi districts.

[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thabo_Mofutsanyana_District_Municipality.

[9] See Evaluation of the BNSDP Report, November 2014, Centre for Education Policy Development.

[10] Interview, Monday August 5, 2019.

[11] Michael Phutsisi, Manager, Partnerships in Education, Free State Department of Education.

[12] At an approximate exchange rate of US$1 to ZAR13.

[13] Source: Kagiso Trust BNSDP Case Study, 2007–2015. The Kagiso Trust and the Free State Department of Education.

[14] The provincial education department, and underneath it the district departments, have oversight roles over schools, and are responsible for ensuring that government funds are available for teachers' salaries, school infrastructure, books, and other teaching and learning resources.

[15] All ordinary public schools are categorized into five quintiles for the purposes of allocating financial resources. Quintile 1 represents schools with the "poorest" learners while quintile 5 represents learners who are "least poor". Schools in quintiles 1, 2 and 3 are classified as no-fee schools and receive a larger allocation from the state than schools in quintiles 4 and 5, which are classified as fee-paying schools.

[16] The pass rate required for students to enter university.

[17] See, for example, M. Munyaka and M. Mothlabi, M. "Ubuntu and its Socio-moral Significance," In African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics, ed. M. F. Murove (Scotsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 63–84.

[18] In the Sesotho language of Southern Africa.

[19] Desmond Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness (New York: Random House, 2012), 35.

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Acknowledgments

About the author

Morabo Morojele was born in Lesotho and grew up in several countries in Africa and Europe. He has degrees from the London School of Economics and the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague. Morabo has spent most of his life working for international organisations and not-for profit organisation in the development sector. Morabo is a published author who is currently working on a second novel, tentatively entitled "Three Egg Dilemma." He is also a musician who has performed and recorded with many of Southern Africa's leading jazz musicians.

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