SHIFTING PARADIGMS

Changing Practice

Values-based instructional leadership in schools

Dr. Allistair Witten
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by Allistair Witten
## CONTENTS

**Chapter 1 Introduction**  
Where it all started 1  
Leading and managing 2  
Where do we begin the journey of school improvement? 2  
Why develop effective school leaders in South Africa? 3  
The structure of this book 7  
Endnotes 10

**Chapter 2 Values-based instructional leadership in schools**  
What are values? 11  
Linking leadership and values 14  
The instructional core 16  
Clarifying the concept of instructional leadership – some theoretical perspectives 19  
A need to focus on instructional leadership in our public schools 20  
Endnotes 26

**Chapter 3 Developing a framework for understanding instructional leadership in schools**  
Defining learner performance 28  
Identifying a framework for improvement 28  
How does my work as a leader support the instructional core 33  
Endnotes 36

**Chapter 4 Leading change to improve instruction**  
Looking back 37  
Leading in a complex world 37  
Leading for changes 38  
Shifting the paradigm 41  
Influencing rather than controlling the outcomes 43  
The technical and adaptive work of change 44  
Endnotes 49

**Chapter 5 The role of the SMT in instructional improvement**  
The role of instructional leaders in supervising the work of the school 50  
What is supervision 51  
Accountability 54  
The importance of working together as the SMT 63  
Endnotes 64
Chapter 6  Communicating effectively  65
Communication as a tool for effective supervision  65
Active listening  68
Your role as supervisor in giving feedback  69
Difficult conversations  69
Endnotes  71

Chapter 7  Building the team  72
Strong working relationships – the glue that holds the teams together  72
The role of the school leader in building a culture of collaboration  77
Cultures that discourage collaboration in schools  79
Building the team  80
The roles that teachers can play in teams  83
Endnotes  85

Chapter 8  Creating networks of support for learners  86
Are we not all equal?  86
Defining partnerships  90
The knowledge required to build effective school–community partnerships  90
Starting collaborative work  93
Enhancing the repertoire of school leadership skills  94
Establishing effective school–community partnerships: leadership challenges  98
Endnotes  101

Chapter 9  Conclusion  104
Why is change difficult  106
Instructional leadership as a system-wide construct  110
Endnotes  111
Introduction

Where it all started

South Africa’s public schools and their learners need good leaders. In research conducted by the Sasol Inzalo Foundation in over one hundred schools across the country, the research team established that:

- the challenges to school improvement are both internal (school-based) and external (from the broader environment);
- school leaders are not adequately prepared to deal with many of the challenges they are faced with on a daily basis – especially as they seek to improve the functioning of their schools; and
- school leaders are at times almost overwhelmed by many of the challenges they face. A large portion of their time and energy is spent on putting out fires or responding to situations that have not been planned for.

The difficulties in effectively resolving many of these challenges can lead to feelings of despair, frustration and helplessness. Yet, these situations form part of the complexities that arise from a living social system within which schooling occurs. Not only is this a complex system, but it is also a system that is highly unequal. This inequality further exacerbates the challenges that many schools in South Africa’s urban township and rural communities face.

Our schools are complex organisations, thus leading and managing South Africa’s public schools is no easy task. They do not function in a vacuum, insulated from the political, economic, and social influences at play in society. In fact, these influences have a significant effect on the schooling processes.

A good example of this are the challenges related to the historical legacy of unequal education and the current persistent conditions of poverty and social inequality in South Africa. Schools serving urban township and rural communities – which comprise the majority of public schools in the country – have to educate children whose development are, amongst other things, affected by hunger, poverty, ill-health, malnutrition, alcohol and drug addiction, and violence. These contextual realities cannot be ignored in any efforts to support and improve school functionality.
Leading and managing

Our research has found that effective leadership is a critical part of school improvement. Further to this, a number of scholars suggest that good leadership is second only to a good teacher in the classroom in terms of its contribution to improving academic outcomes for learners. This suggests that school leaders play a key role in establishing the organisational structures to support teaching and learning, developing teacher capacity, and building a school culture that is conducive to academic performance. In addition to this (and more relevant to the situation in South Africa), the impact of effective leadership is even greater in schools where the learners are faced with increased social challenges.

Where do we begin the journey of school improvement?

Good schools always have good leaders. Without good leaders, all external efforts and support are less likely to have any long-term benefits for the learners inside the school. Thus, if we accept that schooling is a societal issue, then we can all contribute to improving our schools.

Further to this, increased support from government at the national, provincial, and district levels; parents and community members; education-based organisations; universities; business partners; and a host of other non-governmental organisations is also needed. In instances where these partnerships are being developed – in purposeful and coordinated ways – our research is starting to see the benefits for all learners in our schools.

Our school principals and School Management Team (SMT) members are important leaders in schools. They hold formal positions of authority and have designated roles and responsibilities. However, as our research in schools has shown, we cannot expect principals to solve all the challenges faced by their schools on their own. The school principal has a key role to play in this regard and does so by working collaboratively, tapping into the collective knowledge, skills and expertise of others to address the issues at hand. As one scholar points out, “You don’t have to be in a leadership position to be in a position to provide leadership”. Through these different types of interactions that the stakeholders are engaged in, leadership is not only distributed, it also multiplies. In other words, leadership influence and effectiveness expand significantly when it is part of a collective leadership effort.

For this to occur, we require an understanding of leadership practice that is distributed – or shared out across the broader context of the school and community.
Why develop effective school leaders in South Africa?

Education has always been regarded as a powerful driver of development in any country. In South Africa, it is seen as the key means to overcome the many socio-economic challenges we face, and transform our society. This is one of the reasons why education is such a popular topic in the public discourse, with many people emphasising its importance in building a strong economy and lifting families out of poverty.

While this is very important and is urgently required in our current context, the primary role of education should be seen as much broader than this. Through education, we want to develop the human potential of all our young people so that they can actively participate as citizens in the social, political, cultural, and economic spheres of the country. Education should also enable the youth to live meaningful lives. In so doing, they can contribute to building a collective humanity that seeks to address the challenges that impede the development of all human beings.

Schools are key (though not the only) sites in preparing our children for life. They not only develop academic knowledge, skills, and competencies, but also nurture the behaviours, values and attitudes that will enable young people to interact in, and with the world.

In poor communities, where the kinds of support required for the social well-being and cognitive development of children are often missing, the role of the school becomes even more important. In many cases, the school may serve as the last safety net for children. When a child comes to school hungry or sick; is weighed down by fear or sadness related to death and loss; or is the victim of abuse; it means that s/he has slipped through the support networks of the family, community, and that of the broader society.

These vulnerable children may not get another chance if the school fails to respond to both their educational and social needs. One scholar refers to this as the moral purpose of schooling, where “… schools make a difference in the lives of all students (learners), and help produce citizenry who are committed to the common good.” Thus, if schools in South Africa serve a moral purpose, then improving the quality of education should be a moral imperative for all role-players in education.

While addressing some of the challenges to effective schooling can indeed seem like a daunting task, we do have examples of schools that succeed against the odds, whose leaders accept that demography is not destiny – in other words where you come from should not determine what you will become. Despite the challenges, there are schools that work effectively to unlock and develop the potential of the learners.

The following vignette is about a group of schools that have come together to address some of the social and educational challenges they are encountering. They did not wait for help to come from the outside – they started on their own. This is what we call agency – which we refer to as the ability to act on a situation and change it. Agency resides at the level of the school and community, and start with the school leader.
THE MANYANO NETWORK OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

One group of school leaders in the Eastern Cape called their schools Active Schools because they wanted to address some of the educational challenges they were facing.

These schools began to work more closely together and later formed the Manyano Network of Community Schools, which adopted the following slogan:

“Change…starts here… with us…with what we have… and then with others…”

Schools in the Manyano Network subscribe to the notion that teaching and learning remain the core processes that define the work of the school. As such, it centralises the focus on instruction and builds the other aspects of school improvement around this. These aspects, which are both directly and indirectly related to the instructional core (more about this in Chapter 2), are aligned in a coherent system of activities that are aimed at supporting and strengthening the teaching and learning processes. This school-based program of action adopts a multi-pronged strategic approach to school improvement that focuses on the holistic development of the learner.

The following activities were developed by the teachers, principals, parents, learners and community members of the schools in the network:

1. **Curriculum development**
   - The key focus of the network’s activities is on strengthening literacy and numeracy in the schools. Teacher training initiatives to strengthen reading and Maths in schools are run and have been expanded in the schools by offering short learning programmes in the two subject areas.

   Another initiative focuses on the building of school- and community-based literacy coaching teams in schools. These teams work in classrooms and focus on engaging families to support the work being done in the schools.

2. **Capacity-building**
   2.1 **Early childhood development:** A teacher training program that is designed specifically for current or prospective practitioners working in the pre-school organisations that feed the Manyano primary schools in the Uitenhage area and who deal directly with children from birth to six years is run over eight months and provide practitioners with an understanding of child development processes, while also enhancing their competencies and skills to support the development of young children.

   In addition, an accompanying mentoring program that focuses on assessing children’s abilities, especially in writing, reading and understanding texts is provided to practitioners. The mentoring program is conducted in the
mother tongue of practitioners and includes ways in which they enhance parental and community involvement in the lives of children. During the course of the training intervention, a number of on-site observations take place where staff provides support and guidance for practitioners in their early childhood centres.

2.2 **Foundation phase intervention:** This is connected to the early childhood intervention with the objective to support and enhance the work of Gr. R teachers and practitioners in the Manyano Schools Network. Workshops, which focused on identifying the needs of Gr. R teachers and practitioners; making educational materials from recycled goods; and classroom management, have been held.

2.3 **Workshops for SGBs of Manyano Schools Network:** A short learning program (SLP) for School Governing Body (SGB) members titled: Stronger School Governance for Quality Public Schooling, has been implemented through a series of workshops that focuses on building the SGB voice on governance issues; capacitating and empowering SGBs to take action in support of school improvement; managing the finances of the community school; and strengthening the role of parents and community members in the development of their communities.

2.4 **Workshops for the Manyano management teams:** Effective school and community leadership is crucial to driving the improvement programs. An SLP for School Governing Body members titled: Building the Community School– An asset based approach to school improvement and community development, has been developed for the management structures of the Manyano Schools Network (principal, SGB chairperson; teacher; and learner representatives in high schools). Included in these sessions is training for parents in establishing community-led initiatives to support literacy and numeracy in schools.

2.5 **Professional development for School Management Teams (SMTs):** An SLP on school leadership and management that focuses on the aspects of instructional leadership; organisational development; distributed leadership; effective teamwork; and communication titled: Leading and Managing the Community School, has been developed for teams that comprise the school principal, deputy principal, heads of departments, and teacher leaders.

2.6 **Entrepreneurship and leadership development program,** which consists of a series of workshops are run for Grade 11 learners at high schools.

3. **Psychosocial support for learners**
As leaders of community schools, the principals recognise the need to address some of the social challenges that often affect learner performance in the school and classroom. They identified the importance of building a
network of support around learners, especially those more vulnerable to the effects of poverty and inequality. Some essential elements in establishing a learner support system include:

- Helping teachers to identify some of the learning needs and developing their capacity to address these needs.
- Assistance in testing learners with special needs.
- Establishing multi-disciplinary student intern teams from NMMU who will work with learners around issues relating to physical and mental well-being, social services, the arts, sports, and career counselling, etc. These teams will comprise students from the faculties and departments of Education, Health, Psychology, Social Work, and the Community Development unit. They will work closely with teachers in identifying the learners. They will also work with their faculty advisors in designing appropriate interventions and supervised internship projects that are carefully coordinated and bring benefits to the NMMU student, the learner, and the school.
- Assistance to teachers in dealing with learner discipline at school.

4. **School Infrastructure**

The Manyano Network identified school infrastructure and facilities as a major challenge to creating an enabling environment in which effective teaching and learning can occur. The principals suggested an "Infrastructure audit" of the buildings of all the Manyano schools. This audit can be part of a project undertaken by students from the schools of Architecture, Engineering, and the Built Environment. The audit will have the following key components:

- An assessment and analytical report of the physical condition of the current buildings.
- Interviews with all the relevant stakeholders (principals, teachers, learners, parents, community members) to identify the common elements of what they desire to see in their school as a community school.
- Redesigning a school building (around the current one) that best captures the hopes and aspirations of the school and serves as a community asset.

The Manyano school principals will use this final report and building design to lobby for funding from the Department of Education and elsewhere to upgrade the infrastructure of their schools.

5. **Community-focused projects**

Besides efforts to involve parents and community members in some of the above activities, schools in the Manyano Network will also identify a project that benefits members of the community. This can be in the areas of skills-training, job-creation, and other community-building or entrepreneurial activities. The projects will be identified and implemented by the schools.
6. Guiding principles in the design and implementation of the Manyano Programme of Action for School Improvement

This collaborative approach to improving educational outcomes for learners, schools and communities involves cooperation and coordination that leverages knowledge and expertise within NMMU, the Manyano Network of Community Schools, and other education stakeholders to address complex problems and develop creative solutions. In order to realize the above goal, the following guiding principles are recommended:

- Build collaborative capacity by developing common purpose and acknowledging multiple stakeholders and diverse perspectives.
- Ground the work in contextual relevance by conducting baseline studies/needs assessments before the design and implementation of projects.
- Create benchmarks that measure progress towards the goals of the initiative.
- Develop a research agenda and undertake research around the projects that deepens and expands the knowledge of the community school.
- Create joint opportunities for learning by consulting with principals, parents, and other school and community leaders in terms of the design and implementation of projects.

The above case study reveals that the Manyano schools have adapted a pro-active approach to addressing some of these challenges. They display resilience and agency as they work together to identify the challenges and develop their activities to address it. What these schools will need is help from outside partners to implement the activities.

The structure of this book

In this book, we aim to enhance the knowledge and practice of school leaders. This book is not a substitute for what school leaders should know and do – the management and leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies required by the National Department of Education, especially with regard to the recent policy on the National Standards for Principals. Instead it aims to support and enhance this policy, and complement all the professional development initiatives related to it. Parts of the book will also engage school leaders around how to translate the national standards into practice.

This book further seeks to cultivate effective schools and transformative leaders. It identifies key areas of leadership practice that will enable leaders to realise their goals for school improvement, and attempts to help school leaders think differently about the important roles they play by encouraging them to act in response to a new understanding of their work in schools. School leaders can and do make a difference in the lives of children. The journey of improvement should therefore start with them.
Readers may notice that the word school leaders is used throughout this book. There are two reasons for doing so: firstly, whilst acknowledging the important distinctions between leading and managing, the term leader/s is used in its broadest sense – to include both aspects of leadership and management in schools. The current contexts of schooling require not only good managers to ensure that efficient systems are in place for school functionality, but also leaders who are visionary, inspirational, influential, and who can lead others to address some of the challenges they face in order to improve teaching and learning in our schools. The second reason the term leaders is used, is in reference to a wide range of people who can, at certain times and for certain situations, take leadership in a school.

This book:
- draws on research about school leadership, experiences and insights that spans over a number of years of working in schools in communities located in provinces across South Africa;
- draws on the work of current school improvement initiatives in the country, especially that of the Programme to Improve Learning Outcome (PILO) currently being implemented in two districts in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.
- draws on research conducted internationally; and
- contains a number of exercises that will assist school leaders in taking practical steps to improve school functionality and effectiveness.

**Brain @ work**

*As you read through this chapter, what stands out for you? Do you understand the difference between leading and managing in your school?*
MANAGING AND LEADING –
The work of the same person

1. Leadership practice involves balancing the daily activities of managing and leading.
   a) Think about a typical week at your school.
   b) Tick off the activities that apply to you in the right hand column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing</th>
<th>Leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Plan, organise, coordinate</td>
<td>Inspire, influence and motivate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administration</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Maintains/complies</td>
<td>Challenges/develops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Relies on control (positional authority)</td>
<td>Inspires trust (an authority, is competent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A short range view</td>
<td>A long term perspective (visionary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Asks how and when?</td>
<td>Asks what and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Focuses on the present (what we want to achieve now)</td>
<td>Focuses on the future (what is the bigger purpose of what we are trying to achieve?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Focuses on systems and structure</td>
<td>Focuses on people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Asks “how” and “when?”</td>
<td>Asks “why?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do things “right”</td>
<td>Do the “right” things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Reflect on the activities you have identified.
   a) Are there any activities that you may not have ticked off, but believe are important in the work you do?
   b) Use the space below, and describe what these are and how you may want to introduce it into your leadership practice.

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
Endnotes

1 The Sasol Inzalo School Leadership Project research team comprised: Dr Marietjie Vosloo, Dr Allistair Witten, Dr Cynthia Xoli Malinga, Dr James Stiles, Mr Aiden Choles and Ms Natasha Govender.


3 Ibid


9 Prof. Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

10 isiXhosa word meaning “to pull together” or “unity”

11 Theme from the Manyano Network of Community Schools. http://manyanonet.org.za

Values-based instructional leadership in schools

In this chapter, we seek to clarify important terms by considering what they mean in the current context of schooling. We start off by exploring the concept of values. This is then linked to what we perceive values-based instructional leadership in our schools to be.

What are values?

A value is…. a principle or standard that one believes is very important and that guides one’s words and actions.

Values are … those elements of your life, which you find personally important.

Values are… those things that guide you on how to conduct your life in a way that is meaningful and satisfying for you

Values are … the things against which you measure your choices, whether consciously or not. You use them to rationalise your behavior to yourself and others.

Where do our values come from?

Our decisions, behaviours, and interactions are underpinned by a set of values we hold within ourselves. These values are amongst the essential elements that make up our identities and define who we are.
Figure 2.2 shows a picture of an iceberg, which is often used in management training to explain human behaviour.

![Image of an iceberg showing observable and invisible components](image)

**Figure 2.2**

- The top of the iceberg represents our behaviours and actions – this is what is observable or visible in individuals to the outside world. As with the iceberg, what we observe about people through their words, actions, and behaviours represent only a small part of the whole person.
- The invisible part of the iceberg (the biggest part), is submerged below the waterline, and represents our thoughts and emotions. Our actions and behaviours (which can be seen) are influenced by our thoughts and emotions (invisible).
- What and how we do things are often driven by our emotions (how we feel). These feelings are influenced by what we are thinking, which in turn is influenced by our values and beliefs – all of which are shaped by our historical, cultural, and social contexts.

Our actions and behaviors are therefore an outcome of a number of processes that are in a constant state of interaction.

Conflict often arises when our actions do not reflect our values. Argyris and Schön, two organisational theorists, explains why this is so. They note that each person has espoused theories (what we publicly say our values and beliefs are) and theories-in-use (what we actually do).

They further note that in organisations there is often a disconnect between these two theories. In other words, what we say (our espoused theory) is not seen in our actions (our theory-in-use). Colleagues are quick to pick up on this discrepancy between words and actions, hence we often hear the words, “Practice what you preach”.
Argyris and Schön note that becoming aware of this disconnect (between our values and behaviours) is an important transformational moment, as it provides the motivation for change and for increasing our effectiveness as leaders.

The work of leadership development at a personal level thus involves closing the gap between what we say we believe and value, and what we do. This is hard work, because becoming aware of the inconsistencies between words and behaviour often causes discomfort, anxiety, and even fear, as we may have become so comfortable in the old way of doing things. Yet, working to close the gap and changing our behaviours is likely to build authentic leadership, which enhances leadership influence and effectiveness in the organisation.

School leaders should be mindful of just how much of an individual’s identity lies below the water line. Each person has his/her own feelings, thoughts, values and beliefs. When dealing with uncooperative or negative behaviour, leaders must try to understand the root of this behaviour and should not be too quick to judge and react. This may exacerbate the problem and increase the levels of tension and conflict in the school.

What are values in education?

The leadership we exercise is not values-free – it is values-driven.

Whilst we may not be aware of it, our values and beliefs are core to our identities. It defines who we are, what we think, and how we behave or act.

The values we hold are implicit, and we are often not aware of how they influence our actions. But these values are there, and they guide us around how to conduct our lives in a way that is meaningful and satisfying for us.

In organisations like schools, values often form the glue that holds the school together and allows it to function effectively. It forms part of the general school culture or climate, and often underpins the behaviours and attitudes that permeate throughout the institution.

People in organisations work together more effectively when the values of the organisation are made explicit, when people are given a chance to discuss it, and are then allowed to share it with others; while making values explicit in an organisation gives potentially new members an opportunity to decide whether they would like to join the organisation.

Trust – an essential value in a school

While there are many values we hold as individuals and within organisations, one of the most important values required for school improvement is trust.

Research\(^2\) has shown that trust is a significant resource for improving learner achievement and can be used to strengthen collaborative social relations within the school, build bridges between the school and the home, and foster greater school–community commitment to the development of learners.
Schools with high trust cultures have leaders who are non-judgmental and create a safe space for their members to disagree and share their views in an authentic manner.

Bryk & Schneider, two researchers who focus on school improvement, identify four key elements that build trust in schools. These are:

1. **RESPECT** – This involves the recognition of the important role that different individuals play in the development and education of the learner and the interdependencies that exist among the role-players in this endeavour. It comes about through genuine listening and conversation that acknowledges and values different ideas and perspectives.

2. **COMPETENCE** – School leaders have to show competence in their formal roles. This includes establishing effective operational structures; and policies and procedures that create conditions conducive to effective teaching and learning. Gross or ongoing incompetence by leaders undermines the levels of trust inside and outside of the school building, which demotivates teachers and can have a negative effect on their performance.

3. **PERSONAL REGARD FOR OTHERS** – Trust is enhanced in an organisation when individual members believe that others care for them beyond their formal roles and responsibilities. School leaders show personal regard for teachers by not only creating professional development opportunities for them, but also by showing concern for personal issues that may be affecting them.

4. **INTEGRITY** – Teachers often evaluate whether there is consistency between what leaders say and what they do, and whether they can be trusted to keep their word. At a deeper level, it can also be seen in the moral and ethical considerations that guide the work and actions of school leaders. The integrity of the leader is enhanced when she/he stands up for the best interests of learners or takes actions that put the learner’s interests ahead of his/her own personal and political interests.

In addition to this, school leaders are more likely to enhance the levels of trust in the school building when they communicate a strong vision for the school, clearly define expectations, assign resources in fair and consistent ways, and encourage teachers to speak out without fear of retribution. While the school leader invites participation and input from colleagues, the decisions taken by her or him may not satisfy everyone. Instructional leaders are called upon to make decisions based on teaching and learning in the school and the best interests of the learner, even though these may not make them popular. Leaders who try to placate everyone often lose the trust people have in them.

While trust alone won’t solve instructional or structural problems related to school improvement, it is one of the necessary requirements for success. Schools with little or no relational trust have very little chance of improving.

**Linking leadership and values**

Leadership has an important moral dimension to it. The ethical nature of leadership is even more important in the public sector, where all our leaders are called upon to serve and contribute to the public good.
A good question to ask is: “For what purpose do we lead?” The actions that we undertake to fulfill this purpose are always underpinned by a set of values. These values must be identified by the those involved in doing the work; they should be agreed upon and made explicit in the organisation.

The leader has a key role to play here, regularly reminding the team members not only of the vision and mission of the organisation, but also of the values that should guide the actions to achieve the goals.

In education, as in all other sectors of society, we lead for a purpose much higher, bigger and bolder than ourselves as individuals. Our leadership work has aspirational value – it is about:

- advancing the interests of society;
- contributing to the common good; and
- building our collective humanity.

We believe that by leading effectively in our schools, we are nurturing young people who will have the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions to actively participate in society and contribute to building a sustainable and socially just world.

**Brain @ work**

A good starting point for working as part of a school team is to clarify the values that will underpin the work you are going to do. A starting question could be: “Before we start with the actual work, can we identify and agree on the values that will underpin it?” Remember, a value is only agreed to when it is voluntarily chosen.

**ACTIVITY**

1. Think about the levels of trust at your school or in your team.
   By considering the four elements (respect, competence, personal regard and integrity) that build trust above, what do you think you should be working on to increase the levels of trust in your school or your team?

2. Revisit the Code of Conduct of your school.
   Can you identify the values that inform the Code of Conduct?

3. Assess the values at your school by indicating whether the actions that reflect school values are present in your school or not.
### The instructional core

The word *instruction* is sometimes understood as a top-down, one way process of directing or providing information. Our definition of the word *instruction* differs from the above description. *Instruction*, as we define it in this book, relates to the *processes* or *actions* involved in generating or imparting knowledge. In a school, these processes are defined as *teaching*, which constitutes the most essential activity of the institution.

In teaching, the only outcome that matters is learning. In far too many of our schools, teaching has become a stand-alone exercise. We are satisfied to say, “I have taught it” – but very seldom ask, “Have the students learned it?”

In many instances we still have rote learning in our classrooms -- where the information flows in one direction, from the teacher to the learner. Learning is not only about the memorisation of facts, it is also about the understanding of concepts, creative thinking, abstract reasoning, critical analysis, and problem solving.

Teaching not only involves thinking and speaking, it is also about listening and understanding. In this sense, the teacher not only teaches, but is also taught… the student not only learns, but also teaches.

The instructional core is in essence about the processes of teaching and learning. This is the main purpose of schooling. It is the primary reason why schools exist.
The instructional core is located in the classroom. It is made up of three components: the learner, the teacher and the curriculum (as depicted by the blue circle in Figure 2.3).

![Figure 2.3 The education system](image)

In a typical classroom, these three components are in a dynamic relationship – the teacher interacts with the learner around the curriculum and the outcomes of these interactions result in learning. The parent/guardian plays a very important role in the children’s educational development, where the home forms an important learning environment that serves to support and complement the learning that takes place in the school.

The classroom (where teaching and learning occurs) is the most important micro unit of the education system – in fact, the entire education system should be designed around how best to support and improve teaching and learning.

Richard Elmore (2000)³, has written extensively about the work that should take place in the instructional core. He identifies three ways in which learner performance can improve:

1. Raise the coverage and level of the content that is being taught to the learner.
2. Increase the knowledge and skill of the teacher in the subject.
3. Increase the learner’s level of engagement and active learning in class.

Elmore notes that making a change in one of the three components above requires a change in the other two. In other words, raising the level of the content requires a change in the knowledge and skill of teachers as well as increasing the engagement of the learners in the classroom. So, for example, having a professional development workshop for teachers that focuses on content in the sciences will have limited effect in the classroom if the teachers are not also taught how to teach the new content; and if the learners continue to sit passively, listening to the teacher.
This is not easy work. It implies changing teaching practice in our schools, as well as how supervision is carried out. In many schools where we work, the dominant focus of supervision is on making sure that books are monitored, schedules are followed, and scripts are moderated, with very little attention being paid to what is being taught, how it is being taught, and how the learners are interacting with the teacher in the classroom.

Instructional leaders, however, play a key role in supporting the work in the instructional core. They do this by not only displaying good general leadership skills, but also by using these skills to support and influence the knowledge and skills of teachers; their work in the classroom; and the levels of learner engagement. In other words, instructional leaders have to build a system or an enabling environment that supports and enhances the core work of teaching in the school, which we will focus more on this in the next section. Before doing so, we share a newspaper article that raises questions about instructional leadership in our schools.

**PRINCIPALS ‘GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS’**

‘Lack of leadership, quality at schools’

Leanne Jansen 19 January 2016

Poor school leadership is failing South African pupils. While most teachers and principals are doing their best, some school leaders are merely “going through the motions”, with little impact, says a highly regarded education researcher.

“Many school leaders and teachers are failing our pupils, but in the majority of cases this is not their fault. The problem is that they themselves are poorly educated,” explained Nick Taylor.

While some teachers and principals were lazy and corrupt, “the majority are doing the best they can”, he said.

“But (their best) is not good enough because they don’t understand the curriculum themselves.”

Taylor is a former head of the National Education Evaluation Development Unit (NEEDU) and is now with research organisation Jet Education Services.

The quantity and quality of pupils’ writing was one example: schools reported that this crucial learning activity was satisfactorily monitored, but pupils’ writing books revealed that the work done deviated significantly from what the curriculum prescribed.

The implication, explained Taylor, was those responsible for monitoring pupils’ writing work either did not understand the curriculum or in some cases were simply not paying attention.

“In-service training can’t bridge the gap between where teachers and principals are and where they should be.”

It was not true that the majority of teachers did not care and neglected their work.

“My research tells me that this perception, widely held around the country, is wrong.”

Speaking on the quality of high school education in South Africa, Taylor said because so much in-service training was failing to bridge that capacity gap, the monitoring of teaching and learning was weak or non-existent at many schools.

“There is a great deal of instructional leadership activity throughout the system, but most of it is undertaken at too superficial a level to make an impact on teaching and learning.” Taylor said.

Instructional leaders managed time and resources, identified areas of weakness for teachers and pupils, and devised interventions to address these.
They monitored the pace and progress of learning and ensured that learning activities were set at the right level of complexity for each grade, and that pupils were stimulated to achieve their potential.

Time management at schools was one of the most important indicators of good leadership.

Many schools were not allocating even the minimum time for the teaching of maths and English. This meant that schools were not complying with the CAPS curriculum.

Another key aspect of time management was absenteeism. Taylor said that for a significant number of schools, teacher absenteeism was often, or always, a problem.

A Human Sciences Research Council study that Cape Times sister paper, The Mercury, previously reported on, found that many maths teacher were bunking class because they were unsure how to teach the subject.

The quality and quantity of pupils’ written work was an important factor in academic attainment.

As a norm, pupils should be producing written work on at least four days out of the five. Yet, a minority of schools were meeting this benchmark, particularly in Grade 10 English classrooms.

“The schooling system is beset with many problems, including poor management and leadership, and the inefficient distribution of resources.

But even where schools are well managed and teachers have access to sufficient resources, the quality of teaching and learning cannot rise above the ceiling imposed by teachers’ capacity to teach and leaders’ capacity to provide instructional leadership.”

Brain @ work

School leaders spend their time doing lots of things in the school. Think about the time you spend at your school. How much time do you spend on activities related to teaching and learning?

Clarifying the concept of instructional leadership – some theoretical perspectives

What do we mean when we talk about values-based instructional leadership in schools?

A significant body of international literature focuses on the changing role of the principal from school manager to an instructional leader. Instructional leadership has a strong focus on teaching and learning, with a view to improving these interrelated processes.

Earlier scholarship focused on the role of instructional leadership as one of the key elements to improving student outcomes. Some researchers suggest that instructional leadership is one critical aspect of a broader leadership approach, but agree that it focuses on the quality of teaching, modeling effective teaching practice, supervising the curriculum, and making available quality teaching resources.

Other scholars show that instructional leadership revolves around the following key roles and responsibilities:
Developing and promoting an instructional vision (revolving around teaching and learning) in the school

Building and managing a collaborative school culture that is conducive to having conversations about teaching and learning

Allocating resources to support and enable instructional practice

Supporting teacher growth and development

Focusing on the monitoring and assessing of instruction

Establishing a school climate in which discipline is connected to instructional issues.

Elmore (2000) regards the principal as the key actor in leading instructional improvement in schools. He asserts that “leadership is the guidance and direction of instructional improvement” (p13) and argues that this definition gives focus to the role of the principal in the school. Rather than seeing instruction as one of the many (and often disconnected) activities that the principal has to do in a school, the focus on instruction locates teaching and learning as central to the work of the school principal. Elmore points out that once the focus is on leading instructional improvement, everything else that the leader does should be instrumental to it – in other words, all the other leadership activities in the school should be connected to and supportive of the teaching and learning processes. All school improvement processes should therefore be directly and deliberately linked to the classroom processes of teaching and learning. However, these processes cannot be adequately managed by principals as individuals, and require distributed leadership where expertise, knowledge, and guidance are shared across a broader group of people at the school. This underscores the importance of the School Management Team (SMT) members as instructional leaders in the school who have an important role to play in managing, supporting, and strengthening teaching and learning.

A need to focus on instructional leadership in our public schools

In South Africa, traditional conceptualisations of school leadership are rooted in the public management approach. Prior to the democratic dispensation, management and leadership in education was characterised by bureaucratic control – where schools, especially the ones serving urban township and rural communities, formed part of a broader network of state-controlled agencies that were carefully monitored for undue political influence and where relationships with community groups and non-governmental organisations were restricted. In essence, the management of these schools was characterised by rigid hierarchical structures, highly centralised control, and authoritarian practices, many of which were not conducive to supporting and improving teaching and learning in the school.

Very little attention was given to the changing roles of school principals during the period following the country’s transition to democracy. This period was characterised by the dramatic transformation of all sectors of the state, and led to a wave of policy enactments (in education, health, social services, etc.) that caused a tremendous amount of confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety for the leaders and members of the institutions who had to implement them. This was particularly true for school leaders.
Research in the United States show that school principals, when faced with large amounts of uncertainty and anxiety from the external environment, tend to focus on the school’s bureaucratic functions in efforts to buffer teachers and schools from these outside influences. They do so by establishing hierarchical and rigid administrative structures, which are often not conducive to collaborative work.

Research in South Africa supports this finding – school principals responded to the uncertainties of decentralisation and the expanded range of responsibilities that have been placed on them by developing management styles in which power becomes more centralised around them. In situations like these, broader participation in school-level decision making takes on symbolic rather than authentic forms, which affects the collaborative efforts required for the school to achieve its goals.

**Bureaucratic control vs managing to support teaching and learning**

The tradition of bureaucratic control in education has deep historical roots, and remains embedded in the practice of school leadership in South Africa today. In this bureaucratic paradigm of leadership, there is an almost exclusive focus on the managerial aspects of schooling without making strong connections to teaching and learning. This, in turn, brings with it the danger that school functionality and effectiveness becomes defined as mere compliance with policy, rather than as substantive engagement with the teaching processes and learning outcomes in the school; and the development of strategies for how these can be improved.

Bush et al. (2006, p11) notes the limitations of bureaucratic control with regard to how teaching and learning is supported and managed in schools, and states that “there are no accounts of how school principals, and other school managers, exercise ‘instructional leadership’ in their schools and seek to develop an effective culture of teaching and learning.”

While government has recognised the need to improve learning outcomes, studies show that inadequate training and professional development opportunities for school leaders remain a challenge. In cases where these opportunities do exist, there is a strong focus on teaching about policy rather than on instructional leadership.

We do have instances where schools have ticked off all the boxes for functionality as required by the department – yet do not perform well in terms of learning outcomes. While there may be external factors that contribute to this, like lack of resources and support for teachers, or social challenges that affect teaching and learning, this focus on compliance without looking at improving learning outcomes, is detrimental to our learners.

Therefore, what is required is a shift in paradigm or ways of thinking about school leadership in South Africa. Our education system needs leaders:

- who can create management structures and explicitly connect these to the practice of teaching;
- who are visionary and can inspire people to work together to achieve the school’s goals;
who think systemically and can influence and work with others to address some of the challenges faced by the school; and
who place the best interests of learners, and of teaching and learning, at the centre of the organisation’s work.

These are the essential elements of instructional leadership.

The findings of a study by Hoadley, Christie, and Ward (2009) provide some important insights into instructional leadership in the South African context. Their study shows that:
- the instructional focus in terms of managing the curriculum and engaging in the teaching and learning processes are dispersed across the school management teams (SMTs), and is not solely the work of the principal.
- most of the principals in their study focused on creating the enabling conditions for effective instruction by concentrating on the organisational and cultural aspects of the school.

While this focus on creating and managing a functional environment is important, it cannot be undertaken as a bureaucratic management function that is isolated from teaching and learning in the school. Good and effective management is not an end in itself – it is the means to strengthen teaching and learning in the school. A good question to always ask when making key decisions in the school is: “How is this connected (directly or indirectly) to instruction?” The response to this question then becomes the rationale for taking action.

**ACTIVITY**

1. Reflect on what you have read about instructional leadership. Now consider the activities you are involved in at your school.

The table below gives you a sense of your instructional leadership profile. Complete the table and identify areas that you would like to improve in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I prioritise my leadership activities around teaching and learning in my school.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I focus on no more than three priorities at a time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I ask the question: “Will this (decision/action) support teaching and learning in my school?”</td>
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<td>4. I allocate sufficient resources to effectively support teaching and learning in my school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I spend more time on working to improve teaching and learning in my school than I do on other administrative matters.</td>
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</table>
Values-based instructional leadership in schools

CHAPTER 2
VALUES-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

Seldom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. I delegate effectively and support my colleagues in their roles.</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I am building a strong SMT to improve instruction in my school.</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I communicate well with my staff.</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I give encouragement to my staff about the progress they are making.</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I provide support and professional development opportunities for my staff to improve their teaching practice.</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO)

2. Complete the profile of your school below and identify the areas you would like to improve in:

SCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL PROFILE:

NAME OF SCHOOL: ____________________________________________

CIRCUIT: __________________________________________________

For each question, put a tick (✓) in the column which best describes where you are now as an SMT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For each question, put a tick (✓) in the column which best describes where you are now as an SMT</th>
<th>We do this routinely with confidence</th>
<th>We are trying, but need help</th>
<th>We are not able to do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The school has a Curriculum Management &amp; Supervision Plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The principal is monitoring curriculum coverage according to the plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The principal, deputy, and each HoD has her/his own curriculum management supervision plan.</td>
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<td>4. Each HoD has a strong focus on supporting teachers to improve teaching practice.</td>
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<td>5. Teachers regularly reflect on their teaching, identify areas that need improvement, and work together to improve practice.</td>
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<td>6. There are one-on-one meetings between the principal and HoDs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. There are subject/phase meetings of the HOD and her/his teacher’s weekly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. There is an Annual Assessment Programme for all grades and subjects in the school.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>We do this routinely with confidence</td>
<td>We are trying, but need help</td>
<td>We are not able to do this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. The school is on track with the assessment programme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The SMT knows our school's results for last year, has set targets for this year, and has shared the plan to improve learning outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Subject/phase committee meetings are held at least once a term to discuss learner performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Our composite school timetable is in place and it is CAPS compliant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Our SMT meetings are being held weekly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. The SGB meets regularly with a written schedule for four meetings per year and supports the instructional improvement goals of the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. The school has a budget (approved by the SGB).</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Parents’ meetings are being held every term (sometimes more).</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. At parents’ meetings learner performance and behaviour is discussed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. The SMT actively maintains/improves relationships with the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. The school has up-to-date class registers (and period registers, if appropriate).</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Teachers and learners are consistently on time in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. The school makes plans to improve (or maintain) learner attendance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. The school communicates with parents of absent learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. The school has an up-to-date teacher time book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. The school has an up-to-date teacher leave book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. The school keeps good financial records (asset register; cash receipts and payment journals; bank reconciliation statements).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For each question, put a tick (√) in the column which best describes where you are now as an SMT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We do this routinely with confidence</th>
<th>We are trying, but need help</th>
<th>We are not able to do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our school has the right # teachers</td>
<td>We are short ( # teachers)</td>
<td>We have ‘excess’ ( # teachers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the PPN:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>80–100%</th>
<th>50–80%</th>
<th>0–50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Every learner has their own textbook in every subject.

COMMENTS:

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
Endnotes


5 ibid


13 Ibid