SHIFTING PARADIGMS
Changing Practice
Values-based instructional leadership in schools

Parent
Learner
Teacher
Curriculum

Classroom

School
(or school system)

Community
(home for this group of students)

The world at large
(beyond the community)

Dr Allistair Witten
SHIFTING PARADIGMS

Changing Practice

Values-based instructional leadership in schools

by Allistair Witten
Shifting Paradigms – Changing Practice: Values-based instructional leadership in schools

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CHAPTER 1

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 is 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 starts 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.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

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.

Case Study cont.

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.

Values-based instructional leadership in schools
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.

As you read through this chapter, what stands out for you? Do you understand the difference between leading and managing in your school?
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>✓</th>
<th>Leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Plan, organise, coordinate</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Inspire, influence and motivate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Maintains/complies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenges/develops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Relies on control (positional authority)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inspires trust (an authority, is competent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A short range view</td>
<td></td>
<td>A long term perspective (visionary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Asks how and when?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asks what and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Focuses on the present (what we want to achieve now)</td>
<td></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></td>
<td>Focuses on people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Asks “how” and “when?”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asks “why?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do things “right”</td>
<td></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.


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

10 isXhosa 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.

Figure 2.1

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.
Shifting Paradigms – Changing Practice

Figure 2.2 shows a picture of an iceberg, which is often used in management training to explain human behaviour.

![Iceberg Diagram]

**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, explain why this is so. They note that each person has espoused theories (what we publicly say our values and beliefs are) 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 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**

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.

**ACTIVITY**
### 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.
CHAPTER 2
VALUES-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

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:

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.”

Cape Argus
• 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.
Values-based instructional leadership in schools

CHAPTER 2  VALUES-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

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>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I focus on no more than three priorities at a time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I ask the question: “Will this (decision/action) support teaching and learning in my school?”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I allocate sufficient resources to effectively support teaching and learning in my school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Values-based instructional leadership in schools

CHAPTER 2  VALUES-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

6. I delegate effectively and support my colleagues in their roles.
7. I am building a strong SMT to improve instruction in my school.
8. I communicate well with my staff.
9. I give encouragement to my staff about the progress they are making.
10. I provide support and professional development opportunities for my staff to improve their teaching practice.

Total

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>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The principal is monitoring curriculum coverage according to the plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The principal, deputy, and each HoD has her/his own curriculum management supervision plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Each HoD has a strong focus on supporting teachers to improve teaching practice.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Teachers regularly reflect on their teaching, identify areas that need improvement, and work together to improve practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. There are one-on-one meetings between the principal and HoDs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. There are subject/phase meetings of the HOD and her/his teacher’s weekly.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. There is an Annual Assessment Programme for all grades and subjects in the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The school is on track with the assessment programme.</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>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>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Subject/phase committee meetings are held at least once a term to discuss learner performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Our composite school timetable is in place and it is CAPS compliant.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Our SMT meetings are being held weekly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The school has a budget (approved by the SGB).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Parents’ meetings are being held every term (sometimes more).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. At parents’ meetings learner performance and behaviour is discussed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The SMT actively maintains/improves relationships with the community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The school has up-to-date class registers (and period registers, if appropriate).</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Teachers and learners are consistently on time in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21. The school makes plans to improve (or maintain) learner attendance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The school communicates with parents of absent learners.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The school has an up-to-date teacher time book.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The school has an up-to-date teacher leave book.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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></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>Our school has the right # teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are short (# teachers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have ‘excess’ (# teachers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the PPN:

- 80–100%
- 50–80%
- 0–50%

Every learner has their own textbook in every subject.

**COMMENTS:**

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
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Values-based instructional leadership in schools
Endnotes

5 ibid
13 Ibid
Developing a framework for understanding instructional leadership in schools

In this chapter we continue to explore instructional leadership, and start thinking about the role school leaders play in determining learner performance. We look at two different frameworks of instructional leadership that focuses on teaching and learning, and connect the other aspects of school-related work to it.

We explore how we can locate the work of school improvement in South Africa within a framework of instructional leadership; and further explore research and literature on the topic of instructional leadership.

Defining learner performance

The matric results and the ANA scores are important indicators of the learning outcomes, but they are not the only ones that define learner performance. For the work that we do at the various schools within which we work, we define learner performance to include:

- academic performance as measured by assessment results;
- the readiness of learners for the next phases of schooling (in terms of their academic proficiencies);
- critical thinking and problem-solving skills; and
- the dispositions and skills required by learners that prepare them for life (responsible citizenship, social and environmental justice, etc.).

Given all of the above, learner performance is therefore about the cognitive and psychosocial development of the whole child.

Identifying a framework for improvement

Research has shown that what happens in the classroom has a significant effect on academic achievement; and that teachers are the most important factor in contributing to learning – teachers have a direct effect on learning outcomes1.

The effect of the school leader on learning outcomes is less direct because the leader is not in a position to teach all the learners in her/his school. We say that the effects of the school leader on learning is mediated rather than direct – in other words the school leader has to create the enabling conditions in the school for effective teaching and learning to occur.2
During our research, we identified four key areas or domains that the school leader can work in to create the enabling conditions for instructional improvement.

These are:

- Effectively leading and managing the **School Management Team (SMT)**
- Building the **School’s Capacity** to support teaching and learning
- Nurturing a **School Culture** and sense of order that is conducive to effective teaching and learning
- Building relationships and partnerships to enable **Community Support** for the school

This is shown in Figure 3.1.

![Figure 3.1](image)

**Figure 3.1** The school leader’s influence on learner performance

When the school leader supports and strengthens the work of these four domains, it has a positive effect on the instructional core by building teacher capacity in terms of content and pedagogic knowledge (teaching choices); and stimulating learner receptiveness and engagement in the classroom. The outcome of effective teaching in the classroom is an improvement in learner academic performance.

**Using the framework for instructional improvement**

So what are some of the things that school leaders can do in the four domains identified to influence and support teaching and learning?
1. Focus on the School Management Team (SMT)

The SMT is the key driver of instructional improvement in the school. The SMT should be the unit where the school leader spends much of her/his time building its strength and capacity to effectively lead instructional improvement in the school. The key for effective instructional practice and improved learning outcomes is critical and substantive engagement with the teaching and learning processes; and the outcomes of these processes in the school.

The focus of the SMT should be on planning, monitoring, guiding, directing, evaluating, and supporting these core activities of teaching and learning in the school. This is the essence of instructional leadership in schools.

Effective instructional leadership ensures that:

- there is a functioning curriculum management system in place for the school;
- knowledge and expertise in the content and pedagogic fields are constantly being developed and that problems related to these are addressed regularly;
- the SMT functions effectively as a team that is characterised by commitment, collaborative decision-making, and reciprocal accountability; and
- that there are regular meetings to review work and assess progress towards the school’s improvement and instructional goals.

While some of the functions in leading school improvement can be delegated, responsibility and accountability for the work and how it gets done always remains with the school principal. The instructional leader not only manages this unit, but should also be directly involved in regular conversations with the SMT members and the staff about teaching and learning in the school.

Much of the work of the SMT is framed within a legislative and school policy context, and complying with this is an important first step in school functionality and improvement. However, there is always the danger that compliance can become an end in itself – where school leaders go through the motions of complying with policy directives as a ticking off the box exercise to meet the requirements of the district, rather than paying attention to how these policies translate into effective instructional practice and learning outcomes.

2. Focus on the school’s capacity to support learning

The school’s capacity to support learning refers to all the systems, structures, procedures and activities that take place in a school and contribute to its effective functioning.

This will include, amongst others:

- effective administrative processes and systems designed to promote teaching and learning;
- the optimal allocation of teachers to grades or subjects;
Values-based instructional leadership in schools  

CHAPTER 3  DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

- manageable workloads;
- efficient financial administration and the allocation of resources for teaching and learning;
- adequate infrastructure and facilities;
- a clean, safe and stimulating learning environment; and
- mechanisms to deal with some of the social challenges.

When the school leader builds the school’s capacity to support learning, she/he is in essence creating the enabling conditions that are conducive for effective teaching and learning.

The School Governing Body (SGB) plays a key role in this domain, providing support to the principal and SMT, and ensuring the effective functioning of the school in order to achieve its improvement goals.

3. Focus on the school’s culture and sense of order

A key attribute of well-functioning and effective schools in the country is a sense of order.

The school’s sense of order involves the rhythms, routines, and practices of functionality. This relates to the daily, weekly and monthly practices around teaching activities that include time on task; punctuality (learner and teacher); curriculum meetings that focus on teaching; and reflection sessions to assess whether the school is on track in achieving its improvement goals. The regularity of these practices builds a shared understanding of “how things work at our school”, which informs and influences the thinking and practices of teachers and the other school stakeholders.

The school’s sense of order forms part of its culture, and incorporates the norms, attitudes, mindsets, beliefs, rituals, and values that underpin the collective behaviours inside of the school. This is also referred to as the school’s climate – the feel one gets when walking into a school.

Real change only occurs in a school when its culture, as explained above, changes. Although changing culture is no easy task, it can be done, and leaders have a crucial role to play in influencing and reshaping practices and beliefs in the school. They do this by sending important signals about what behaviours they value; redefining roles and relationships; and establishing clear expectations for what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning in the school.

The principal and SMT members give expression to the vision and mission of the school by nurturing and maintaining a vibrant, dynamic and welcoming school culture within which the core activities of teaching and learning are embedded.
This culture is characterised, amongst others, by:

- a belief in the ability that all the learners can learn, and setting high expectations for learning;
- a sense of agency or a *can do* attitude;
- a collective commitment to *time-on-task* activities in the school;
- an openness to learning, at the individual and organisational level;
- professional and collegial behaviours; and
- a strong focus on teaching and learning in the school.

**4. Focus on the importance of community support in achieving the improvement goals of the school**

We define *community* or the *education publics* as including all parents, community members, organisations, and other institutions who come together around the *common purpose* of supporting a school or grouping of schools to achieve a particular goal. This definition includes but goes beyond the more common understanding of community as one identified by geographic location and proximity to a school, and can include businesses, universities, and national and international NGOs.

Efforts at improving the functions of schools without linking them to the broader community will at best yield short-term, limited results for learners. As noted in Chapter 1, schooling does not occur in a vacuum, insulated from the social environment in which schools are located. Social context matters, and the negative influences of poverty and social inequality in many communities will invariably affect the learning and developmental outcomes of children and young people.

Our research has shown that many schools serving urban township and rural communities are often characterised by:

- high absenteeism rates;
- poor academic performance;
- violence on and around the school premises;
- the lack of infrastructural and financial resources;
- a lack of qualified teachers, and
- low educator morale.

While schools are not responsible for, and cannot solve many of the social challenges on their own, they cannot afford to ignore them either.

In our country, there is significant potential for schools (led by the principal and SGB members) to tap into the assets of the broader community and collaborate with its members and partners to address some of these challenges to schooling, in order to support to teaching and learning. These collaborations will have greater efficacy if they form part of a coherent system of support for the school and are aligned to its instructional goals. We will come back to the importance of community support in a later chapter.
How does my work as the leader support the instructional core?

A slightly different diagrammatic representation of the framework for school improvement is shown in Figure 3.2.

**Figure 3.2** Framework for school improvement

In this diagram, we locate the instructional (teaching and learning) core as central to the work of the school; and the four domains of schooling are shown in support of teaching and learning.

Schools with a strong focus on instruction start their planning for the following year by drawing up the curriculum management and supervision plan as their first priority. While members of the SMT may develop the plan, it is important that the other key stakeholders – the teachers, learners, and parents – are consulted about it.

The curriculum management and supervision plan incorporates all aspects and activities related to teaching and learning in the school. These activities range from the allocation of teachers to subjects (based on competence and qualifications) and the drawing up of the timetable, to assessing the effectiveness of teaching through monitoring and reflection and the provision of support and relevant professional development opportunities for teachers. These activities (including meeting schedules) must be deliberately planned for and built into the weekly operations of the school.

The key question that the school leader must constantly ask when implementing the plan is: How do all of these activities support the improvement of teaching and learning in our school, and what do we need to change if any of these do not?

Once the curriculum management and supervision plan has been developed, then all the other aspects of administration and school activities are built around and in support of it.
The school budget prioritises resource requirements of the plan; the SGB and school governance focuses on how best to support the plan; the work of external partners is linked (directly or indirectly) to the plan; and the school culture displays the appropriate behaviours, values, attitudes and rituals that will give effect to the plan. The work of the SMT in implementing the curriculum and supervision plan is called instructional supervision.

We define school-based activities as *instrumental* to the instructional core, where explicit connections are made between the activities and its effects on teaching and learning. But we have noted the strong bureaucratic impulse that continues to permeate school leadership in South African schools, which promotes policy compliance without substantive and critical engagement as to how these policies translate into practice, and its effects on the core functions of schools. The practice of instructional leadership thus necessitates a shift in focus from bureaucratic management (where teaching and learning is incorporated as one of the many management activities) to centralising instruction, and connecting the other activities in the school to it.

### The quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning

Think about the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning at your school by working through the checklist below:

1. Is teaching and learning effective at your school?  
   Explain your answer:
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________

2. Do you have regular meetings to discuss teaching and learning?  
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________

3. Is teaching and learning monitored on a regular basis?  
   Explain your answer:
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
The following exercises build on the previous ones in Chapter 2 and focuses on the work in the school.

Consider the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your school by completing the appraisal form below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What systems are in place at your school to ensure effective teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and learning is taking place?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a school timetable and does everyone stick to it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the school making maximum use of the allocated teaching time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does each teacher have a year plan for each subject and grade; and a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>term, weekly and plan for each lesson?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a system of monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning at your school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you describe it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a system of mentoring and supporting teachers at your school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you allow learners to evaluate your teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a year plan for assessment at your school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a plan to offer remedial support to learners who are not coping in the various subjects?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a clear, written statement of what your learners need to achieve in each subject and grade? (i.e. content knowledge and skills?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO)

**Endnotes**

Leading change to improve instruction

Looking back

We started this book by stating that schools are complex organisations to lead and manage. As educational institutions, they are located at the intersection of a number of societal influences that are political, economic, and social in nature. Schools do not function in a vacuum, where they are insulated from these influences – they are, in fact, affected by them.

We also noted that effective leadership is a critical part of school improvement. As leaders, school principals have to manage both the internal dynamics of their schools as well as the effects of the external environment on the core functions of teaching and learning. However, much of the current training for school principals focuses on the school as an organisation and the internal arrangements required for its effective functioning. Much less attention has been given to the systemic influences on the school and the role of the principal in mediating their effects.

Given the above, school leaders will not have the answers and solutions to all the challenges facing them in schools. Nor should we expect them to. In many instances, effective ways of addressing these challenges will have to be created by school leaders. This calls for a different approach to thinking about and practicing leadership in our schools.

Leading in a complex world

Many of the traditional management and leadership paradigms and models have been based on command and control in order to deliver on predetermined outcomes – a practice strongly located within the Newtonian logic of the Industrial Age. This approach, while useful in managing the more technical aspects of organisational life, has proven to be inadequate in helping leaders respond to the more complex dynamics of their organisations that often give rise to pressing problems for which solutions have yet to be invented. The Newtonian paradigm, also known as the mechanistic paradigm, is grounded in Newton’s belief that the universe was a piece of clockwork – operating like a machine with static controls and apparatus that determines a predictable outcome and conclusive beginnings and endings. This concept is also firmly ensconced in bureaucracies – where there is a strong focus on order, hierarchy, and control – elements that are necessary to manage large administrative systems. Compliance with policy is thus important, as it allows the bureaucracy to function more effectively.
The operational logic of more recent theories has challenged the notion of organisations working as *machines*, arguing that they operate in *living systems* with human beings and complex contexts – where change is a constant and dynamic occurrence that often affects outcomes and goals. This shift in thinking has prompted calls for a dramatic change in how leaders think about and respond to change. Complexity theory emerged as a response to better understanding the dynamics in environments, organisations, and systems that are complex, and where a number of elements are connected and interact with each other in many different ways. These interactions give rise to outcomes that are often determined not by a single cause, but multiple ones. In many instances, the outcomes are unexpected and come as a surprise to us. This is what is called emergence – in instances where the outcomes could not have been predicted beforehand, the effects of the whole are often greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Senge (1991), when describing the functions of organisations in large systems, refers to this as *dynamic complexity*, where the contextual forces that affect an organisation – in our case the school – are understood as being multi-dimensional and interact over time to give rise to certain challenges. This is particularly true in many of our urban township and rural schools that are more vulnerable to the socio-economic and political influences in their communities. Crime and violence, substance abuse, ill-health, and service delivery protests are but some of the external issues that affect school functionality. Schools are not immune to the negative effects of these influences – the core functions of teaching and learning are often affected by it.

As our research has shown, school leaders, despite their participation in some of the professional development programmes, were often ill-prepared to deal with these challenges. In the instances where they responded to some of the challenges, these were often reactive, short term, and limited in its effects. As one principal mentioned, it felt like he was *putting out fires much of the time*. This is what can make the work of the school leader so hard and frustrating at times.

So how can school leaders deal with some of the challenges that come from operating in complex environments? In much of the school leadership training, the challenges to school improvement are sometimes understood as being linear, having a single cause, effect, and solution. This then leads to the formulation of simple, one-size-fits-all solutions that are short term and limited in their effect. Addressing some of the more complex challenges to schooling therefore calls for a change in the way leadership is thought about and exercised in our schools.

**Leading for change**

One of the first steps on any change journey is to reconnect the work of the school to its broader vision. All our schools have vision statements. But are these living statements, or mere expressions of good intentions? When last was the vision shared with others? How is the work of instructional leadership connected to the vision of the school? Is the school’s vision just a compliance document? These questions are crucial to the work of leaders in schools.
The school’s vision – giving purpose to and guiding the work of the school

The school’s vision is important, as it responds to the fundamental question of why it exists. The vision has aspirational value – the core work of schools, in educating young people, is about advancing the interests of society; contributing to the common good; and building our collective humanity. Leading effectively thus not only contributes to the achievement of the school’s instructional goals, it also leads to the gradual realisation of its vision and affirms the rationale for its existence. Inspirational vision and mission statements always look beyond the present and paint a picture of the desired future that goes beyond that of the individual organisation. In many cases, these connect to the broader societal themes mentioned above.

School leaders must constantly refer to and articulate the vision of the school. Not only does it remind the team of why they are doing what they are doing, it also underscores the importance of teaching and learning in the school. Communicating the future-focused vision of the school that is connected to the context of the school and community also generates interest, buy-in, and commitment from the different stakeholders in the school.

The school’s vision, like that of any other organisation, does not have to be cast in stone. Given changing circumstances, contextual realities, and the achievements related to it, the vision should be reviewed from time to time. What’s important here is that it is done collaboratively, with the participation and input from all the school’s stakeholders.

**Think about the vision of your school and reflect on the following questions:**
1. Is our vision still relevant?
2. Do I know it and when last did I share it?
3. Do we all agree with it?
4. What must we change?
5. What must we add or take out of our vision?

One of the key roles that school leaders play is that of vision champions. In developing the vision, leaders engage in three important process.10 The first of these is referred to sensemaking – where the leader works with others to understand the current reality or the contexts within which they work. For the school, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of the educational, socio-economic, and political contexts within which it operates. Through interactions with parents, other community members, and education stakeholders, school leaders can capture the complexities of the environment, and articulate the issues that they believe are affecting the core functions of their schools. Understanding the realities of the current context makes it easier to create a shared vision of what the school wants to achieve in the future.
While sensemaking provides a picture that depicts the current reality, the second process, called visioning creates a view of the future. School leaders must involve other stakeholders in this process and, through ongoing dialogue, should develop a sense of the future reality they hope to produce. The vision of a school is often made more compelling when it is located within a set of beliefs and practices that are centered on the concept of caring in the school and community, where care is combined with an understanding of how learners are affected by the educational, socio-economic and political contexts of schooling.

Thirdly, school leaders have to act upon the vision, and begin the work of inventing, which involves devising processes that seek to move the vision from abstract ideas to concrete action plans that can be implemented. Having a compelling vision without acting upon it only creates unfulfilled expectations that are likely to lead to failure, disappointment, and an erosion of trust and confidence in the leader. This is where the mission of the school becomes important. The mission is connected to the vision, and defines the purpose of the school by focusing on the questions of: what the school does; who it does it for; and how it does what it does. Nested in the mission of the school are the core functions of teaching and learning. It is from the school’s mission that the strategic goals and operational plans around teaching and learning are developed. These plans must have a strong instructional focus and a set of criteria to assess whether the school is on the road to achieving its goals.

School leaders must continuously articulate the vision and mission of their schools to ensure that all the role-players know how their daily work contributes to accomplishing the short-term goals of the current state of the school (as set out by the mission), as well as how it contributes to moving the school forward in achieving its desired vision.
Reflecting on the vision of your school

Reflect on the vision of your school and respond to the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is it achievable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is it inspiring but realistic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do our actions reflect that we are moving towards it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Can it be used to build our team and unite us?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are our school’s goals and plans connected to it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shifting the paradigm

Leading for change necessitates a paradigm shift – it means that we should start thinking differently about the role of school leadership in improving learning. Albert Einstein wrote, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” In an earlier section, we highlighted the prevalence of the bureaucratic impulse in the education system that operated on the basis of the mechanistic paradigm – with static controls, predictable outcomes, and conclusive beginnings and endings.

Alternative theories that locate the work of organisations within complex living systems have emphasised the need for school leaders to think differently about their roles and leadership practice. In complex systems, a problem may be the result of many different influences. We say that the problem is multi-layered, with no clear cause and effect relationship. In situations like these, there may not be one right answer, or a simple response to resolving it. Rather than jumping into problem-solving mode, the school leader should attempt to develop a deeper understanding of the problem. They do so by engaging with others and being open to multiple perspectives that will allow them to see across the layers of the education, socio-economic and political systems, and to make sense of its influences on their schools.
Developing a deeper understanding of the problem allows school leaders to see the multiple connections to it and enables them to make informed decisions in terms of taking action to address it. Shifting the paradigm therefore implies a change in thinking about our work as leaders, especially as it relates to some of the challenges we are trying to address. It means resisting the temptation to jump in and seek simple, quick-fix solutions. In complex environments like schools, these challenges often require more thoughtful, multi-faceted responses that include changing behaviours and attitudes. This is what will lead to real change and sustainable solutions to some of the challenges that schools face.

**Brain @ work**

_Spend a few minutes thinking about your leadership, then write your reflections in response to the questions below:_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Describe your leadership role (what you do)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Describe your leadership style (how you do it)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Who/what influenced you to adopt your leadership style.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Would you describe your leadership role as being more bureaucratic (keeping to the rules) than transformative (changing things at school)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Name one or two new things you have learned about leadership in this chapter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Name one or two things that you may want to incorporate into your role as school leader.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Name one or two things you may want to incorporate into your style of leadership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influencing rather than controlling the outcomes

When addressing some of the complex challenges experienced by schools, the leader may not be able to fully control the outcomes or end result. There could be multiple parts to the solution, some of which may lie outside of the school as an organisation or the sphere of influence of the individual leader. Addressing this problem will require that the school leader adopts a longer-term view and engages with other key community stakeholders in resolving it. It will involve listening, probing, testing assumptions, identifying patterns, and then working with others to develop a collective response to addressing the issue. When working with a diverse array of stakeholders to solve complex problems in this manner, the school leader exercises influence rather than control.

Stephen Covey has developed a useful tool for helping leaders tackle complex challenges. He proposes that challenges fall into two areas, which he terms the Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence. The Circle of Concern represents some of the more complex issues that the leader is trying to address, the resolution of which may not entirely be in his/her control. An example of this is crime and violence in some communities that may sometimes spill over into the school. The Circle of Influence represents the things the school leader has control over and can do something about. These things fall under her/his direct sphere of authority and influence, which is often at the level of the school. This is where the leader starts the work of addressing the challenge. This may involve increasing safety measures in the school like fixing the fences or monitoring the gates as well as making the learners and their parents aware of the problems. The leader then looks at expanding the Circle of Influence through identifying and building relationships to address the challenge with a number of stakeholders who may fall outside of the Circle of Influence. In this case it could be the police services, churches, police community forums, NGOs, etc. to come up with a community wide plan to address the issue of learner and teacher safety. In a systems context, the Circle of Influence is not fixed or bounded, and can be extended as the principal seeks to work with internal stakeholders (inside the school) and external stakeholders (from the community at large) who can support the goals of the school.
The technical and adaptive work of change

As mentioned earlier, leading and managing a school in the South African context is an inherently complex task. One of the big paradigm or mindset shifts that we are calling on leaders to make is to adopt a complexity-based view of the world. While there are many technical or ‘quick-fix’ issues that leaders need to work on to ensure the school functions smoothly like maintaining the property, preparing the annual school calendar, or procuring textbooks, our research reveals that the role of the leader in ensuring school effectiveness is a more challenging one. School leaders have to make decisions based on the contextual realities that they face. They have to understand that school functionality and effectiveness in nested within a bigger system. Schools operate as part of this bigger system, where a number of components interact to give rise to certain situations that occur in a school.

An assumption that many of us hold is that when children walk through the school gates each day, they are ready to be taught and to learn. Yet, we know that in many of our schools, this is not the case. Children’s health and wellbeing are affected by the environment they grow up in. The deleterious effects of poverty and inequality are often more acutely experienced by them, who together with women form the most vulnerable groups in our society. Malnutrition, ill-health, different forms of abuse, behavioural problems are but some of the things that affect learner academic performance. Schools cannot afford to ignore these challenges – they have to find ways to address them. A systems approach acknowledges these complex realities and underscores the point that there is no ‘silver bullet’ or single solution to the problems of school effectiveness. School leaders who accept complexity in the system realise that some of the challenges are multi-layered, and that there is often no simple, single best course of action in dealing with it. They start addressing these challenges by developing a deeper understanding of the system’s dynamics in order to make sense of and define the current reality. Following this, they identify areas where they can exert influence, directly and indirectly, and then take action based on this knowledge. Of course the leader does not adopt a ‘lone wolf’ approach in doing this work – it is underpinned by dialogue, collaboration and consultation, inquiry, and ultimately, learning. This is what leading for change implies.

School leaders can make quick decisions and in some instances this should happen. These decisions are often related to bureaucratic responsibilities and require technical skills. When making these decisions, it is assumed that the know how and skills to address an issue already exist. Technical skills can be applied when an issue is clear, and the policies, solutions, formulas, and routines for dealing with it are available and in place at the school. Procuring textbooks (after consulting the teachers) becomes a technical exercise that requires existing skills and expertise, as well as following the procedures for placing the orders.
In complex organisational environments, both short and long-term decisions often call for *adaptive skills*, as the solutions to some of the challenges are often not clear or easily understood. Addressing the challenges may require new forms of knowledge and different ways of thinking and working in order to resolve some of it. Sometimes the situation or challenge that confronts the school leader demands a response that is outside of the leader’s repertoire of skills. The current *know how* or expertise to solve the problem is just not sufficient. These challenges are often *messy* and can bring tension and conflict into the school.

Ron Heifetz developed the concept of *adaptive leadership* as a means to understand and deal with some of these complex challenges. He uses the example of someone who has a heart problem and has to undergo sophisticated heart surgery. The faulty part may be fixed after surgery, but there is still the challenge of getting the patient to live a healthy lifestyle. It is much easier to fix the heart (the technical work), but more difficult to get the patient to change personal habits – to stop smoking, exercise more regularly, and do exercise. This is the essence of adaptive work. It requires leaders to work with others in analysing problems and developing solutions. This process includes examining the beliefs, values, attitudes, assumptions and behaviours that may underpin the problem and will have to change in order to effectively solve it. This is what makes change so difficult as it leads to conflict over what people value and have to give up in the process of change.

With adaptive challenges, it is important that the people who are part of the problem become part of the solution. In other words, the leader must resist the temptation to solve the problem on her/his own by taking it off the shoulders of the people who are involved in it. Solving problems for others can create dependency and diminish peoples’ capacity to exercise agency and become involved in solving their own problems. In dealing with adaptive challenges, leaders don’t necessarily have to provide the answers – their role is rather to frame the right questions that encourage staff to identify and reflect on their values, attitudes and behaviours that have contributed to the challenge in the first place, with a view towards changing them.

Heifetz is clear when he says that the single, biggest failure of leadership in modern times is to treat adaptive challenges with technical fixes. This also holds true for education. Often, we try to address a challenge to school improvement by developing new policies. These policies remain well-intentioned words on paper that hold few implications for the changes in the behaviours and practices that are required to effectively address the challenge. In the following table, we consider the differences in the technical and adaptive work of school leaders.
### Technical versus Adaptive work of school leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Technical (bureaucratic, mechanistic)</th>
<th>Adaptive (living systems, developmental)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Provide answers</td>
<td>Ask questions, set direction, articulate vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues, other role-players (teachers, etc.)</td>
<td>Follow directions/instructions</td>
<td>Discover answers/co-create solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin systems</td>
<td>Fixed, unchangeable</td>
<td>Constantly reviewed, responsive to context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>One way (top-down, instructive)</td>
<td>Two way, coaching, guiding, supporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>Easy to identify, require quick solutions</td>
<td>Difficult to identify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Not often used, manager has answers</td>
<td>A joint exercise involving dialogue, reflection, and changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships and approaches to the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes</td>
<td>Often very small, usually in one place</td>
<td>Occur in numerous places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures (organisational)</td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
<td>Web, circular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation Leadership</td>
<td>Machine (separate parts), bureaucratic, individual</td>
<td>Network, interconnected distributed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is important to remember, that the work of leadership is both technical and adaptive. However, the tendency for many school leaders is to fall back into the predominant technical or bureaucratic mode when dealing with difficult or complex issues at their schools. Recurring challenges in the school or ongoing conflict around an issue may require adaptive work from the leader. This work is harder to do as it sometimes requires changes at the personal level, which can lead to resistance, discomfort, tensions, and frustration. It may also take longer to resolve some of the issues, and the leader will require both patience and resilience in doing the adaptive work.

To sum up, adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to address difficult issues or challenges in the organisation so that it can achieve its goals. Adaptive work requires changes in action and in beliefs and assumptions. It calls for reflection and dialogue instead of jumping to solutions, and allows people to grapple more deeply with the issues at an organisational as well as the personal levels.
Reflection and dialogue often lead to new ways of seeing and understanding the world that can guide problem-solving efforts. Put simply, it’s not only about “What must change out there, but also in which ways must I change (at the personal level) to effectively address the problem.”

### Addressing issues at a school

Consider the following issues in a school. Decide on whether addressing it requires technical or adaptive work. If it is both, provide your reasons for this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Adapt.</th>
<th>T &amp; A</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Putting a system in place for learner and teacher attendance registers.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Drawing up the school’s budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Developing the curriculum management and supervision plan for the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Raising school fees</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Conducting an emergency (fire) drill</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Addressing the issue of late-coming at school</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Appointing a candidate in a promotion post</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Rearranging the school schedule to allow time for more regular reflection on teaching practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Allocating teachers to grades/subjects that match their qualifications, skills, and competencies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Ensuring all learners have the textbooks and materials to start the new school year on the first day</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case Study

PETTY CASH

Read carefully through the following case and then respond to the questions:

1. What are the key issue/s in this case? The issue/s you identify should be based on the facts of the case, not what you think is going on.

2. What advice would you give the principal in this case? In resolving the issue/s, what is the technical work and/or the adaptive work that needs to be done?

Mrs Thembu is an experienced Principal with over 10 years of experience as a headmaster. She has recently been appointed as the new Principal at Smitsview Secondary School in Limpopo, a reputable high school on the outskirts of Polokwane.

Shortly after taking up her post, Mrs Thembu discovers that there are issues with the financial management of the school.

The school’s bookkeeper, Mrs Mokgoko, who was responsible for handling the petty cash box resigned 6 months ago. Her replacement has been appointed but will only be joining the staff in two months’ time. Mrs Thembu has discovered that the way in which the petty cash system is being utilised and managed by the staff, since Mrs Mokgoko left, is in total disarray.

It turns out that there are multiple keys for the cash box where each of the Head’s of Department hold their own key. This way of working was implemented after Mrs Mokgoko left to make it easier for HoD’s to access cash and reimburse teachers in their departments as quickly as possible when they purchase supplies. Each of the HoD’s has their own way of managing the process of collecting receipts and compiling claims information. Mrs Thembu has also received complaints about the lack of availability of cash in the box and she has not been able to find out who is responsible for managing this aspect of petty cash. She knows that it is important to have a good financial management system in place in the school, and is wondering how to address this issue.
Endnotes


15 Acona, et al., 2007

The role of the SMT in instructional improvement

The role of instructional leaders in supervising the work of the school

As the senior leaders in the school, the principal, deputy principal, HoDs, and other teacher leaders must encourage and model the behaviours, dispositions, and competencies of teaching as a professional practice. Teaching is a public service that contributes to the good of our society. Our educators are valued professionals, and their work is underpinned by a body of content and pedagogic knowledge, and the skills of practice.

There is also a set of principles and values that informs and guides the behaviour and work of teachers as professionals, which is called ethics. It forms an important part of any profession. It is within this context of professional practice that we need to locate the roles of principals, deputy principals, and SMT members as instructional leaders in schools. They spend time in guiding, monitoring, supporting, and assessing the work of the teachers, as it is connected to the school’s core functions of teaching and learning.

Teaching is the heartbeat of a school, and leaders have to maintain an ongoing focus on it, engaging in conversations and developing strategies for how it can be strengthened. An important role that school leaders will play in this regard relates to supervising the work of others in the school.

In the current policy environment, the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) forms the key part of the strategy for improving the schooling processes and learning outcomes and should inform the School Improvement Plan. The improvement of teaching practice is central to this instrument and the performance standards it contains focus on planning, lesson presentation, the appraisal of teaching practice, and support for its enhancement. However, our work in schools reveals that in many cases, this instrument, which should form the basis of the routines, behaviours and practices around instruction that characterise the daily work of schools, is more of a compliance document that is attended to and completed towards the end of the year in preparation for submission to the district office. Supervision is an integral part of the IQMS, and its potential as a tool that supports and strengthens teaching has yet to be fully realised in many schools.
What is supervision?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *supervision* as: *the action or process of watching and directing what someone does or how something is done.*

This definition highlights two important components of supervising:

1. It involves the process of **observing**
2. It involves the actions of **directing, guiding and supporting**

To put more simply, educational supervision is a professional service that builds teacher capacity and improves teaching in a school. Supervision is a key part of the organisational functions of a school as it focuses on guiding the daily work of teaching by directing, stimulating, and coordinating the efforts of teachers. It also involves cultivating good personal relationships with teachers so that they all work towards effectively achieving the instructional goals of the school.

A more formal definition of supervision describes it as a “… process that is put in place to help teachers to carry out the task of teaching to expected levels according to stipulated policy guidelines set out in an education system …”

The more formal aspects of supervision in schools include guiding, directing and supporting the work related to: lesson planning and presentation; assessing the effectiveness of teaching; monitoring records of tasks; analysing learner performance; and identifying areas for teaching improvement that will lead to improved learning outcomes. These activities are central to instructional leadership in our schools. It should receive the most attention and take up the largest amount of time in the school’s schedule, forming a key part of the daily and weekly routines that characterise its institutional culture.

Supervision is in essence a relationship. This relationship has two very important aspects to it: The first is the professional dimension of the supervisory relationship. The focus is on the administrative and operational tasks associated with the work. It ensures that systems are put in place for effective curriculum management and includes scheduling; monitoring and assessment of activities; compliance with policy directives; the efficient allocation and use of resources for teaching and learning; and supporting teachers in their work. Instructional leaders also require knowledge and skills related to the work of supervision. This includes subject content and pedagogic knowledge; an ability to collect and analyse data related to the teaching and learning activities; and an understanding of some of the challenges to these two essential processes in the school.
The second aspect of the supervisory relationship is the personal dimension. This is about the human interactions associated with supervising. It often involves the how of working with others and includes emotions, mindsets, attitudes, and behaviours associated with the work. We refer to this as the soft skills of supervision because it involves working with people; engaging in reflective conversations about teaching and learning; giving feedback; and demonstrating good practice related to improving teaching. These skills play an important role in motivating others to achieve the instructional goals of the school.

The supervisory relationship is an educational and collegial one. It is understood and accepted as part of the instructional mandate that policy places on the leader – to support, guide and direct the work of teaching in order to strengthen it.

The essential components of supervision

For supervision to be effective in a school, it requires a school culture that is characterised by personal and professional relationships of trust; an atmosphere of working together or collaboration; and a school-wide focus on teaching as the most important work in the school. School leaders have a key role in shaping the school's culture, as one that is characterised by a lack of collaboration and communication, fear, conflict, and distrust is unlikely to be conducive to creating a safe space where authentic teacher learning, and professional and personal development can occur.

Why is supervision important?

The core focus of schools should be improving:

- teaching processes and practices
- learning experiences
- learning outcomes as the core focus area of schools.

However, these core focus areas will not improve on their own. A deliberate system needs to be put in place to ensure improvement. This is a key responsibility of instructional leaders in a school. Supervision is at the heart of improving learner outcomes in our country. The school principal and deputy principal, through supervising the work of the HoDs, have a direct influence on building the strengths of the school’s SMT. A well-functioning, strong, and effective SMT, involved in supervising teaching practice, will in turn build the teaching capacity in the school that will lead to improved academic performance from the learners.
Case Study

The Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO) is one of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) funded initiatives to improve teaching and learning in schools. One of the defining features of PILO is its emphasis on working across the system to support the core goal of curriculum coverage – an area consistently identified by research as one of the main reasons for poor learning outcomes in South Africa’s schools. The programme works at all the levels of the system (the classroom, school, district and province) and provides district officials, teachers and school management teams with the tools and training needed to have a positive change on the behaviours necessary to increase curriculum coverage in all classrooms so that learning outcomes improve across the system. The programme is being implemented in two Districts of KwaZulu-Natal, uThungulu and Pinetown, which covers 36 circuits, 1 200 schools and approximately 650 000 learners. The theory of change informing the PILO model is that if curriculum coverage improves, then learning outcomes will improve. In order for curriculum coverage to improve, the following behaviours associated with curriculum coverage must improve: monitoring curriculum coverage, reporting this to the level where action can be taken, and the provision of supportive responses to solve problems associated with curriculum coverage. The work of PILO has important implications for how we think about, design, and implement school improvement initiatives in our country.

One of the important focus areas of PILO is on supervision in order to support and improve curriculum coverage, and the diagram below is used by the programme in one of the professional development modules that focuses on supervision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF A TEACHER?</th>
<th>HIS/HERSELF</th>
<th>HIS/HER EMPLOYER</th>
<th>THE PROFESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers drive their own professional development:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Through reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Through collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By having professional conversations based on evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HODS support the professional development of teachers by Deepening Reflection in the evidence-based conversations about curriculum coverage and encouraging:</th>
<th>ARE THESE THE SAME?</th>
<th>REFLECTING ON CURRICULUM COVERAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Conversations within subject teams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer-to-peer conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher-HoD conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values-based instructional leadership in schools
Accountability

In Chapter 3 we looked at different frameworks. In the systems framework for school improvement, the SMT is the key driver of instructional improvement in the school, and should be the unit where the principal spends much of her/his time, building its strength and capacity. Effective instructional leadership ensures that there is a functioning curriculum management system in place for the school; that knowledge and expertise in the content and pedagogic fields are constantly being developed; that the SMT functions effectively as a team that is characterised by commitment, collaborative decision-making, and reciprocal accountability; and that there are regular meetings to review work and assess progress towards the school’s improvement and instructional goals. As instructional leader, the principal not only manages this unit, but should also be directly involved in conversations with the SMT and the staff about teaching and learning in the school. While some of the functions in leading school improvement can be delegated, responsibility and accountability for the work and how it gets done remains with the school principal.

The roles of the principal/deputy principal/SMT members as supervisors are also important because it not only allows them to direct and guide the work of teachers within a relationship of trust and respect, but also to function as accountable members of the SMT with the knowledge and expertise to support the growth and development of teachers.

The principal leads the SMT on an instructional mandate and has legitimate authority to direct the work of the curriculum in a professional manner; to monitor work of HoDs and teachers; and to provide the support that they may need.
As supervision takes place within the context of a professional relationship, the notion of accountability becomes very important.

**LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE**

By **accountability** we mean:

The **obligation** that an individual or organization has to **explain** (account for) how tasks or activities were carried out to achieve goals; to **disclose and share** the outcomes of these actions; and to **accept responsibility** for the outcomes.

**Educational accountability**

Increasing attention is being given to the notion of educational accountability in South Africa. Previously, the concept of accountability was often understood and discussed within a narrow bureaucratic frame that is informed by the hierarchical structures of power and authority. In this frame, the responsibility and burden for learner success falls solely on the teachers and learners, regardless of the conditions of teaching and learning. This narrow view of accountability has promoted a culture of blame, in which the education stakeholders apportion blame for learner failure on each other.

What is required for improved learner outcomes in South Africa is what some scholars call reciprocal accountability. This form of accountability has two elements to it:

1. Accountability for learner outcomes resides in the structures, actions, and behaviours at all levels of the system, with each level having a set of responsibilities for supporting teaching and learning. These levels include the home and community (parents and other education partners); the teacher in the classroom; the SMT (and HoD); the principal and school (as a whole); the district and province; and the national department of education. The structures, actions, and behaviours at the different levels of the system should all be aligned (or connected) to support learner achievement.

2. Reciprocal accountability involves providing support and building capacity (where needed) at the different levels of the system. This form of accountability is based on the notion that for each unit of improved performance that is required, there should be the provision of a reciprocal unit of support and capacity. In other words, asking people to improve their practice without helping them acquire the skills and providing the resources for them to succeed, is a recipe for failure. On the other hand, if investments have been made in relevant training and professional development for teachers, then they have a mutual obligation to demonstrate how these interventions have changed their practice.

The school leader, in her/his professional role of supervisor therefore has an important role to play in providing the necessary support to build teacher capacity in order to improve learning outcomes. In summary the work of supervising should not only be regarded as a compliance process – where the principal, HoD, teachers, and subject advisors go through the motions of change and tick boxes to show that the work has been done. Rather, and more importantly, supervision should be regarded as a developmental process – where reflection, learning, behavioural change and improved teaching practice occurs. This is one of the defining elements of instructional leadership. Richard Elmore also refers to two levels of accountability:
internal and external accountability. Internal accountability is school-based and focuses on ensuring that the principal, HoD, and teachers are clear about what they are responsible for in terms of teaching and learning; how they are going to achieve their goals; and the process they engage in to account to each other for their work. External accountability is about how the school as a unit and the outside educational stakeholders (the district, parents, etc.) account to each other for what they do. Elmore notes that internal accountability must take place before external accountability can occur.

**LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE**

**Reflection exercise:** As you reflect on this unit, think and write about the following aspects about your role in supervision:

1. What kinds of support do I need from the principal and subject advisor that would help me do my work more effectively as a supervisor in my school?
2. What will help me build better relationships with the teachers I supervise? (what must I change about the way I relate to and interact with the teachers?)

**Activity**

Work with the members of your SMT on the following exercise. This exercise focuses on teaching and learning in your school. Assess where the SMT is on each criteria, by discussing each one and then agreeing where it falls on the scale:

1. **There is a strong focus on improving teaching in our school and we have created a sense of urgency around it.**
   - Not yet started 1 2 3 4 well established

2. **There are strong and supportive supervisory relationships in our school.**
   - Not yet started 1 2 3 4 well established

3. **There is widely shared understanding of what good teaching is in our school.**
   - Not yet started 1 2 3 4 well established

4. **In our school, there is a strong collective focus on setting high expectations for each learner; using relevant curriculum materials; and building respectful relationships in the classroom.**
   - Not yet started 1 2 3 4 well established

5. **Teachers and learners know what quality work looks like in our school.**
   - Not yet started 1 2 3 4 well established

6. **Supervision is an important part of our school’s culture. It has become part of our school’s routines, and constantly focuses on improving teaching and learning.**
   - Not yet started 1 2 3 4 well established

7. **As a school, we identify what support and professional development opportunities we need to strengthen teaching practice, and organise these for our teachers.**
   - Not yet started 1 2 3 4 well established
8. As an SMT, we use relevant data on a regular basis to assess learning and work on adjusting our teaching in response to these.
   Not yet started       1        2        3        4        well established

9. The different stakeholders in our school (learners, teachers, parents, principal, SGB) are clear about the responsibilities that each group has for supporting and strengthening teaching and learning.
   Not yet started       1        2        3        4        well established

10. In our school, we have created a “safe space” to have open and difficult conversations about what needs to change in order to improve instruction.
   Not yet started       1        2        3        4        well established

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**Supervision as reflective practice**

Reflection is both a personal and collective exercise. It is thinking deeply about what we do and learning from our experiences about our teaching practice. Reflection is about a rigorous examination of what we are teaching and how we are teaching. It not only focuses on content and methodology, but also on our relationship with the learners; their engagement in the learning process; and the effects of our teaching in terms of what learners are learning. As educators, we spend too little time engaging in reflective practice in our schools. This is often because of heavy work schedules that do not allow time for reflection. How do we define reflection in our schools?

Reflective practice differs from deflecting blame in terms of “I taught it, but they (the learners) did not learn it” in that it seeks to understand some of the reasons for the learning gaps as a personal and professional responsibility. When reflective practice is a regular and ongoing activity, it becomes a powerful tool to develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours to improving teaching and learning in the school.

Reflective practice in a group not only involves reviewing teaching practice, but also accepting feedback about practice as understood, interpreted, or observed by our colleagues. It involves, planning, describing the planning, and checking the plans with others. Following this process, comes the putting of the plans into teaching practice. When reflective practice occurs in a safe, professional space, it allows members of the group to invite feedback and ask questions about assumptions (why we think the way we do about something) and beliefs. The questions can also focus on the effects of the decisions and actions on the school and its improvement goals, the teachers and learners, on policy, and on future practice.

It is important to note that reflective practice is not only about “all talk and no action”. In other words, members of the group question and talk about issues, but also take responsibility for the decisions and actions that follow. Lastly, and very importantly, with reflective practice, questions always need to be asked around whether the decisions and actions taken are moral or ethical – especially in relation to the best interests of the learners in our care.
A reflection tool for teachers

The Reflective Practice Cycle in Teaching

Teaching experiences
What is happening right now?
What is worrying us?
What are we struggling with?

Decision and actions
What am I going to STOP doing?
What am I going to do DIFFERENTLY?
What am I going to keep the SAME?

Observe and Analyse
How do I explain it?
How do others explain it?
What else do I know about it?
What have I read about it?
What more can I find out about it?

Rethinking the issue
Did I get new information/insights?
Did this change my thinking?
What am I thinking now?


As noted earlier, reflection is a powerful tool for learning and changing teaching practice. However, in order for it to be effective, reflection sessions must be built into the SMT’s schedule of activities. This brings us to question of how time is spent at school and the effectiveness of meetings.

SMT meetings

Every day, thousands of meetings take place in schools across the country. Many of these meetings are important, as they assist in the smooth functioning of the school and the achievement of some of its operational goals. Sometimes however, we can sit in a meeting for more than an hour and feel that the substance of the meeting could have been handled in five minutes. Meetings like this can lead to frustration on the part of teachers, who may rightfully feel that the time could have been better spent doing something else. The purpose and nature of meetings also differ at the school, and these have to be carefully thought out and planned in advance. If a school has a strong focus on instruction, then the schedule of SMT meetings takes a central role in school planning.

Meetings are not only vehicles for passing down instructions or for information sharing. They can also serve as spaces for learning and creating ideas.
Meetings can be frustrating experiences for teachers and leave them feeling bored and even angry. When this happens, the teachers lose interest in the meeting. They engage in side conversations, check their phones, mark books, nod off to sleep and do other things to make the time go by quickly.

Brain @ work

Below is an example of a pie chart showing Mr Dlamini’s feelings about how he perceives meetings at his school. The sector marked A shows the meetings that he thinks was an excellent use of his time. The sector marked B shows the meetings he thinks was a satisfactory use of his time. and the sector marked C shows the meetings he thinks was a waste of time.

Use the circle below and create your own pie chart of three sections that depict how you, on average, experience meetings at your school.

A = excellent use of time
B = satisfactory use of time
C = waste of time
Thinking about meetings

We have all had experiences with good and bad meetings. The following activity highlights these experiences:

1. List the three worst meetings you have attended at your school.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

2. Write down everything you can think of that made these meetings bad.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

3. List the three best meetings you have ever attended.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

4. Write down everything you can think of that made these meetings great.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Effective meetings

So what can we do to improve SMT meetings in our school? An effective SMT meeting is one that makes progress in reaching the goals of improving teaching and learning at the school. Here are some essential elements that contribute to making meetings more effective:

1. Each meeting must have a Purpose

Each SMT meeting must have a clear purpose and objectives, and the teachers who participate in it should know what these are. There are different kinds of meetings that can be held at school, each with a different purpose. It may be to share information, give feedback, brainstorm an idea for implementation, or to plan, review and reflect, etc. Once the purpose of the meeting is clear, the objectives should be stated at the start of the meeting and revisited at the end to ascertain whether the meeting has reached its objectives.
CHAPTER 5
THE ROLE OF THE SMT IN INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

2 Prepare for the meeting

Sometimes it is helpful to distribute materials before the meeting. This could be in the form of documents, notes, reports, an agenda, and minutes of the previous meetings. Teachers can be asked to read the documents in preparation for the meeting or bring others with them. For example, with subject meetings, teachers can be asked to bring samples of learners’ work with them, so that the conversations are based on evidence of what the learner is doing in the class. When teachers prepare for the meeting, they come to it more ready to ask questions, enter discussions, and make decisions.

3 Connect the meeting to other SMT meetings

The upcoming meeting should connect to the objectives of earlier meetings and complement or build upon these objectives. This helps make the case for why the meeting is important and assists the teachers in understanding how it contributes to the larger goals of improving teaching and learning at the school.

4 Ensure that feedback from previous meetings have been incorporated into the forthcoming meeting

Sometimes suggestions are made around how the next meeting should go or certain issues may be identified for follow-up in the next SMT meeting. Teachers will lose interest and become frustrated or bored if they perceive that their feedback or suggestions have been ignored. Even if all of the suggestions made in previous meetings cannot be acted upon, then the meeting facilitator must make it clear why this is the case. Meetings that do not effectively respond to earlier feedback or suggestions often become meaningless and irrelevant to teachers.

5 Engage the teachers and challenge their thinking

A good SMT meeting always challenges and stimulates teacher thinking. This could be done in the form of asking questions, inviting differing viewpoints, and seeking deeper understandings of issues. Stimulating teacher thinking must be carefully monitored in terms of the time allocated for it; otherwise it may prolong the meeting or divert attention away from the meeting objectives.
6 Assign roles for the meeting

All meetings must have a facilitator or a chairperson who is clear about the purpose and objectives of the meeting. It is also good to have a timekeeper to keep the meeting on track, as well as a note-taker to record the meeting. The time allowed for each agenda item should be done during the planning stage, and the facilitator/chairperson should ensure that each agenda item has a realistic time allocation. It is not a good idea to have the facilitator acting in the role of timekeeper as s/he has to manage the flow of the meeting and ensure that the agenda is covered. The role of the note-taker should also be clearly established and a decision must be made beforehand as to whether all the discussions in the meeting are captured, or just the decisions and next steps. Sometimes it is good to have someone in positional authority taking notes. This helps with developing effective listening skills and gives others a chance to speak in the meeting.

7 Close the meeting by allocating time for outlining the next steps and assessing whether the meeting achieved its objectives

This is an important part of planning for meetings. Next steps or follow-ups tend to arise throughout the course of the meetings, but it is good to summarise these at the end as it gives the group a sense of the actions required by some of the decisions that have been made in the meeting. A good way of bringing closure to a meeting is by spending a few minutes checking in with the group around whether the meeting objectives have been achieved. The facilitator goes back to the beginning by restating the purpose of the meeting and then reflecting with the group as to whether the decisions and outcomes of the meeting have connected back to its purpose. When this happens, teachers feel that the meeting has been productive, and some of the feedback can be used to make the next meeting even more effective.

Meetings constitute an essential part of the operations of a school. SMT meetings are even more important as they are connected to instruction and the improvement of teaching and learning in the school. It is therefore important that these meetings are built into the culture, practices, and routines of school life, and are conducted effectively. Meetings form part of the collaborative activities of schools and should be underpinned by group norms that are set at the beginning of the school year and become implicit in the meeting processes, informing and guiding the interactions that take place in the meeting. Norms like respect for others; listening without interrupting; starting and ending on time; etc., provide a safe space for an effective and productive meeting. It is a good practice to remind the group of the meeting norms from time to time.

The following exercise is based on the checklist for effective meetings described above. Complete the exercise and identify areas in which you think your SMT meetings can be improved.
Checklist for SMT meetings at my school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Checklist</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are there <em>materials/documents</em> that we can distribute before the meeting in preparation for it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do we need to <em>remind</em> the group about <em>meeting norms</em> before we start?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have we identified clear and important meeting <em>objectives</em> that contribute to improving teaching and learning?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Have we established the <em>connection</em> between this meeting and other meetings?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Have we incorporated <em>feedback/suggestions</em> from previous meetings?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Have we included activities in the meeting that will <em>challenge/stimulate thinking</em> and discussion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do we have a <em>chairperson/facilitator, a timekeeper and a note-taker</em> for the meeting?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Did we <em>allocate time</em> for the items on the agenda and is there enough time for <em>next steps</em> and to assess whether we have achieved our meeting objectives?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The importance of working together as the SMT

Schools benefit in a number of ways when teachers work together. It reduces teacher isolation and the sense that teachers are struggling on their own; it increases collegiality and the professional ties that teachers have with each other; it facilitates the sharing of ideas, resources, and experiences; and it enhances the learning and professional development of teachers. When teams work well together and have a strong focus on improving teaching, this is likely to lead to better learning outcomes for learners.

So what are some of the things that the SMT should be doing when working with their teams? Firstly, team meetings that focus on instruction should make strong connections to teaching practice. In meetings that are called to address instructional issues, the group often gets stuck on identifying the challenges that stand in the way of achieving the school’s instructional goals. While it is important to identify and discuss the challenges, the SMT member, as the instructional leader, must move the conversation along to focus on what can be done to address some of the challenges. If teams get stuck in talking about the challenges to improvement, it becomes easy to believe that there is very little that can be done about it, that what is needed to address the challenges lies beyond the ability of the individual teacher or that of the school as a whole. When this happens, it becomes easy for the team to sink into negativity and despair, and some members may even feel a sense of helplessness and frustration. In these situations the teachers sometimes lower their expectations...
for what the learners are capable of doing in the classroom. Low expectations for learning then become a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure – because we believe that children cannot learn due to all the challenges, we believe there is nothing or very little we can do to help them, and therefore we suspend our efforts to effectively teach them. This is the worst tragedy we can inflict on our children.

However, there is always something that can be done to improve teaching and learning in our schools. This is where instructional leadership plays a pivotal role. While acknowledging the challenges, instructional leaders point out that these are both internal and external to the school. In other words, the challenges can fall within the school’s (and the teachers’) sphere of influence and control, or lie outside of it. Effectively addressing the challenges sometimes requires changes in both the internal (with the teachers and learners) and external (with policy, the district, the broader community) environments of the school. Even though challenges from the outside may seem overwhelming, can take long to be addressed, and may frustrate our individual efforts, there is always something that can be done inside of the school to improve teaching and learning. It is easy to blame things beyond our control for poor learner performance. This may be true, but it does not justify us (as educators) relinquishing our professional responsibilities to address some of the challenges to improving teaching and learning in our schools. Research has shown that schools serving poor and marginalised communities that have performed well despite tremendous challenges have leaders who are visionary and teachers who believe in the ability of their learners, who work as a team, and are committed to learner success. They refused to sink into a state of helplessness and blame poor learning outcomes on factors beyond their control.

Endnotes

6. This section on effective meetings is based on the book: Parker Boudett, K., and City, E.A. (2014). Meeting Wise: Making the most of collaborative time for educators.
Communicating effectively

Communication as a tool for effective supervision

Communication can be defined as …the process of transmitting information and developing a common understanding (of the information) within sectors and between individuals in an organisation. The word communication is derived from the Latin word *communis*, meaning common, which underscores the importance of developing a common understanding as one of the key goals of communication.

Communicating is one of the most important tools that school leaders use to achieve their goals. Schools often stall in achieving their mission when communication is not clear or information is withheld.

**LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE**

The THINK – PAIR – SHARE process

5 min exercise to discuss in small groups of two/three and then share in the bigger group.

1. Can you list the different methods of communication at your school?
2. Now comment on the effectiveness of each of these methods

The communication process

We communicate on a daily basis and are often not aware of the process of communicating. In every communication there is a sender and the receiver. The sender initiates the communication based on a desire or need to convey information, ideas, or concepts to others.

The *sender* encodes the idea (s/he wants to convey) by selecting words, symbols, or gestures to compose the message. The receiver is the individual to whom the message is sent. The message is sent through a *medium* or channel. The channel can be face-to-face conversation, telephone call, or written report. The receiver *decodes* the message into meaningful information. *Noise* is anything in the carrying of the message (the medium) that can distort it. Different perceptions/interpretations, emotions, interruptions, language barriers, and attitudes are all examples of noise.

Lastly, *feedback* occurs when the receiver responds to the sender’s message and returns the message to the sender. Feedback allows the sender to understand whether the message has been received and understood.
Effective communication requires us to be more mindful of how we are sending the message to others. This requires ongoing practice.

**IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

1. **Plan** before communicating, especially when you are using more formal means like in meetings with teachers. Determine the purpose of each communication and decide what you want to get out of it. Also consider the attitudes and needs of those who will receive the message. Ensure that your message is clear.

2. Consider the physical and human setting where the communication will take place. This will include where the meeting will be held, the relationships between members of staff, and the activities taking place at the school.

3. When communicating, be aware of your tone of voice, expression and how you will respond to others. These are the subtleties or hidden messages of communication and can affect the listener’s reaction to the message. Your choice of words is often important, as it can be interpreted differently by the listener.

4. Try to understand the other person’s point of view. Staff members are more open to listening to a leader when he or she takes their interests into account.

5. Be patient. Give the talker time to finish talking. Do not interrupt. Ask follow-up questions and encourage the talker to express his/her thoughts/views. This is part of feedback, and allows you as the sender of the message to understand whether it has been understood.

6. As leader, you need to seek not only to be understood, but also to understand. Be a good listener. Put the talker at ease and show him/her that you want to listen. Give your full attention to the speaker and do not do other things while listening (like reading text messages on your phone, shuffling papers around, etc.).

7. Be attentive to body language and take this into account while communicating. Taking non-verbal cues into account can help you communicate more effectively.
**Brain @ work**

We have two ears but only one tongue.
This may be a message that we should listen more than we talk.
Listening is also received by two ears, one for meaning and one for feeling.

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**Essential conversations in a school**

As discussed in the previous chapter, communication is an important tool that leaders use to build teams and mobilise teachers and other stakeholders around its goals. The interactions in schools can be characterised by three types of conversations: the instructional conversation, the learning conversation and the community conversation: 11

**The instructional conversation**

This conversation is around the processes of teaching and learning in the classroom. School leaders with a strong focus on instruction pay constant attention to these processes as they support and enhance teaching practice in the school. Effective instructional conversations lead to acquiring new forms of knowledge, deeper insights about issues, and skills.

**The learning conversation**

This conversation applies to school leaders, teachers and the other school stakeholders talking about how to improve instruction. It often takes the form of reflection on teaching practice, analysis of learner work or assessments, and asking questions about what needs to change in order to improve the structures, policies and practices around teaching and learning in the school.

**The community conversation**

This conversation involves a broader group of participants and is a vehicle for people to share and express a diverse range of views, ideas, and opinions. In contrast to talking in the classroom, these conversations occur at a higher level and often involve talking about the school’s vision, mission, and strategic goals to achieve it.

This conversation has the greatest potential for building social capital in the school, and often involves dialogue as a means to build bridges in which the school can engage with the community at large. Dialogue is a key vehicle for promoting participation in the school and for learning, despite differences in experiences and viewpoints.
Active listening

Active listening is a more purposeful form of listening to someone, and is an important part of instructional leadership. Active listening means that in your role as listener you must be on the lookout for both the verbal and non-verbal content of what is being said. Active listening looks for the *meaning* component as well as the *feeling* component in the message. The receiver must let the sender know that the message content as well as her feelings are recognised. In your role as supervisor, if you are not sure of what the sender of the message is saying, or you are getting mixed messages, then you should ask for clarification. One of the ways of doing this is to restate or rephrase the message from the sender and ask if the rephrased message is the correct one. This is really important, as it allows the sender to give more information and deepens the receiver’s understanding of the message.

Different ways of listening

| Repeat back the content (use the words you hear) |
| Paraphrase the content (use your own words and check with the sender for accuracy) |
| Inquire and look for further meaning (ask questions) |

**When to use:**
- Receiving directions
- Conflict management, reconstructing events/sequences (what happened?)
- Decision-making (restate the decision)

**When to use:**
- Agenda setting – paraphrase major items on agenda and ask for confirmation
- Paraphrase long statements from a speaker
- Closing a meeting – summing up key points/decisions

**When to use:**
- Supervision – ask questions for deeper meaning
- Defining a problem – listen for meaning
- Offering help – look for meaning to clarify the kind of support needed
Your role as supervisor in giving feedback

The key underlying principle of effective feedback is that it should be directed at improving job performance and making the staff member a more valuable asset at your school. It is NOT a personal attack on an individual. Here are some important elements of effective feedback:

1. **Be specific**: Give the key information to the teacher that will improve performance. General information does not help a teacher to improve on performance, and leaves questions in a teacher’s mind that may lead to confusion and frustration.

2. **Be descriptive**: Tell the staff member what areas need improvement in descriptive and objective terms, rather than presenting a value judgement.

3. **Be clear**: Effective feedback must be clearly understood by the recipient. A good way of checking this is to ask the recipient to restate the key points of the discussion. Non-verbal communication, like facial expressions show whether the feedback has been understood and accepted.

4. **Be accurate**: The feedback you give must be reliable and valid. Check your data and information before giving feedback. Incorrect or inaccurate information may lead the staff member to believing that you are biased and could lead to resistance.

5. **Practice**: Feedback forms a very important part of the professional and supportive conversations in supervision. When providing feedback to teachers, leaders should keep in mind that its purpose is developmental – it should raise issues that need to be addressed in order to enhance teaching practice, but it should also be undertaken in a manner that maintains and strengthens the professional relationship. Providing feedback is a skill that takes practice and we should be mindful of the processes involved in it. While giving feedback is a key part of supervision, school leaders must also be open to and encourage receiving feedback. After all, communication is a two-way process.

**Difficult conversations**

While feedback forms part of the routines and practices of supervision in the school, all leaders will at one time or another have to deal with situations that involve policy infringements, unprofessional conduct, or the relinquishing of professional responsibilities. When this happens, school leaders have to engage in difficult conversations. This is a necessary part of the work of instructional leaders. These difficult conversations should ideally happen as a last measure before instituting disciplinary action. It should not be about personal attacks on individuals, or disparaging them. Rather, it should be about their performance as professionals and the improvement of practice. This conversation is not easy because it is sometimes difficult to separate the *professional* from the *personal*. Very often, there are emotions and issues of identity involved in this kind of conversation. As a leader, you have to be aware of this, and have to communicate in a way that does not make the message seem like a personal attack.
Steps to follow when having a difficult conversation

**STEP 1**
Choose the **right time, place, and setting** for the meeting: A difficult conversation should be held in a private space or a room where there is no one else present. It must be conducted at a time that is appropriate for both you and the teacher concerned. There should also be sufficient time for the conversation, and you should not feel that you have to rush through it. Keep your tone collegial.

**STEP 2**
Start by **outlining** what you would like to talk about. Be **objective** (impartial) not **judgmental** in the way you outline what the meeting is about.

**STEP 3**
Once you’ve outlined the purpose, tell the teacher concerned that after you’ve described the situation, you will invite his/her input in discussing the situation and then resolving it.

**STEP 4**
Describe the situation/issue. Be **clear** and **concise** (to the point, not long winded).

**STEP 5**
Describe the **impact/effect** the situation/issue has had on the learners, the teachers, and the school. If a policy has been violated, point this out.

**STEP 6**
Invite input. Give the teacher a chance to **respond** to what you are saying. **Acknowledge** their responses.

**STEP 7**
Frame the situation/issue within the school’s, or DBE’s **policies** and point out what the implications could be in terms of policy.

**STEP 8**
Decide on the **steps** you would like to take to resolve the situation and **share** this with the teacher, inviting their **input**.

**STEP 9**
Explain **why** you decided on these steps and the benefits it could bring to the teacher involved, the learners, and the school.

**STEP 10**
**Summarise** the steps once more; give the teacher a last chance to say something. Thank the teacher for coming to the meeting.
Here is a difficult conversation for you to consider. How will you as leader deal with this issue?

You, the principal/deputy principal have collected learner books from some of the grades to verify the reports and conversations you had with HoDs.

As you work through the Grade 6 Maths books, you discover that there is very little written work done and some of the exercises are not marked. Ms. Ntuli is the Maths HoD responsible for Grade 6. In all your supervision meetings with Ms. Ntuli she confirmed that she does check learner books and they are in order.

You have called Ms. Ntuli to your office and must prepare for how you will conduct a difficult conversation with her. What will you say to her? (Keep the above steps in mind).

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**Endnotes**

2 This section was based on the book: Jentz, B, (2007). Talk Sense: Communicating to Lead and Learn. Research for Better Teaching, Inc.
3 This section was adapted from the SMT training manual developed by the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO) to the Jika Imfundo campaign in two school districts of KwaZulu-Natal.
4 Adapted from leadership development material developed by the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance.
Building the team

**Strong working relationships – the glue that holds teams together**

Sociologists have developed the concept of social capital to describe the process by which individuals and groups use relationships and social networks to procure resources and achieve goals that will benefit them.¹

Social capital can be defined as: ‘... the rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and society’s institutional arrangements, which enable members to achieve their individual and collective objectives...’ (Narayan, 1997, p. 16)²

Social capital is in essence that relationships and the value it brings to individuals and organisations. A number of other scholars have written about this topic pointing to its value in unlocking resources and garnering support to achieve an organisation's goals. One scholar, Pierre Bourdieu (1986)³ introduced the concepts of social and cultural capital to complement those of economic capital (financial, physical, and natural capital), and show how individuals and groups interact and organise themselves to generate economic growth and development. Another scholar, James Coleman (1990)⁴ emphasised the importance of the social and cultural capital of families in determining the child's social and cognitive development.

School leaders play an important role in using social capital to build relationships that facilitate the achievement of the school's goals. Leading and managing in this sense is a relational process in which people are mobilised to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve common goals.⁵

**Bonding and bridging capital**

School leaders can make use of two types of social capital – bonding and bridging capital – to build a team that is focused on instructional improvement.

**Bonding capital**

Bonding capital is defined as the relationships between individuals within groups and between groups that serve to build a sense of common purpose, solidarity, identity, and cohesiveness.⁶ When school leaders focus internally on improving their own school or organisational system around teaching and learning, this creates bonding, introspection, and a school-wide sense of belonging and identity. These are the key elements of an instructional focus that leaders have to build within the SMT as well as the staff as a whole.
When this is done on a regular basis, and instructional practices (like scrutinising learner work and identifying learning gaps; reflecting on lessons; identifying problems around teaching and learning and responding to it; etc.) become part of the daily and weekly routines of the school, it will eventually become embedded within the school culture and be seen as the normal way of doing things at the school. Scholars refer to this as “academic press” – when school leaders build strong relationships around teaching and learning, it becomes a cultural norm or value of the school, where the academic work of the learners takes priority over everything else.

**Bridging capital**

School leaders also use bridging capital to facilitate access to resources and information from external groups, individuals, and institutions that can help the school achieve its goals. While bonding ties form an important part of the personal networks that come from working in teams in organisations, bridging ties are part of the set of public networks that leaders can build to advance the interests of their organisations. The ties in the public network are characterised by formalised organisational relationships, and while they are not as strong as personal networks in terms of sharing trust and common norms, they do allow an institution like the school to reach outside the immediate environment to access information, support and resources for its initiatives.

In underserved communities where schools may need to address many of the challenges associated with poverty and inequality, it becomes important for school leaders to use bridging capital that provides access to high quality resources to address these challenges and create the enabling conditions for teaching and learning. School leaders play an important role as *institutional agents* – they are the adults in the public network who can access psycho-social and educational resources for young people who need it.

**Dialogue – the key to building good relationships**

To build good relationships with parents and the broader community, school leaders must be prepared to move away from traditional hierarchical management styles to ones that seek to empower teachers and parents.

Collaborative work builds social capital and relational power within school teams, which enhances its collective problem-solving capacity and allows members to take ownership of the work of the team.

One of the key strategies for building relationships with the community is through dialogue.
We will use these responses in the following chapter when we discuss partnerships that will support your school.

**Beginning to engage in dialogue**

School leaders can play a role in developing a culture of dialogue in their school communities based on the following principles:

- **Practice is based on power with not power over**
- **It is not just about giving answers, but also about asking questions**
- **Be at ease with uncertainty, discomfort, ambiguity**
- **Allow voice to emerge, don’t only focus on actions**
- **Focus on the question of what we are learning**
- **Listening is just as important as speaking**
- **Pay attention to process, not just outcome**
- **Be open to learning from others**

There are many ways leaders can begin to engage in dialogue. Some of these may be in conversation with small groups of parents while others may involve multiple stakeholders like other community members, service providers, religious leaders or local government officials.

Using dialogue as a tool to mobilise individuals and groups around addressing a common challenge or taking collective action can assist the school in achieving some of its improvement goals. Here are two examples to of this:

**Changing the nature of the education conversation in South Africa**

The challenges confronting the education system in South Africa continue to receive attention in the public domain. Much has been spoken and written about poor academic outcomes, problems in schools, the textbook debacle, and the general failure of the different education stakeholders to deliver on their mandates to provide a quality education to all of South Africa’s learners. Raising these issues is important, as it creates awareness of what is not working in the schooling system.

However, the public discourse on education has at times degenerated into a deficit debate. This debate readily identifies problems and apportions blame, yet does not go far enough in deepening our understanding of some of the problems in education and how these can be addressed.

The South African public education system does indeed face many serious
challenges. These challenges are most acutely experienced in schools serving urban township and rural communities, and, at times, can be almost overwhelming. Much has been reported about this in the media, and the portrayal of these problems sometimes give rise to public despondency and a sense of gloom about improving the educational opportunities and life chances of all the children and young people in our country.

Despite this, we should not allow the problems in education to drive us towards a situation of hopelessness and despair. Much has already been done to address the many challenges, and we must continue with these efforts. A good starting point for this is having deeper and more meaningful conversations about the state of education in our country.

Promoting dialogue as an essential starting point for improving the quality of education in South Africa

So why do we need to continue the dialogues on education? Firstly, dialogue helps us to understand the nature of schooling in the country. The problems in education are complex and multi-faceted, and schools do not function in a vacuum, insulated from external influences. We require a deeper understanding of how societal forces affect school functioning and especially the processes of teaching and learning if we seek to formulate effective and sustainable solutions to some of the challenges in education.

Secondly, the dialogues allow us to hear more voices from the field. Currently, academics, government officials, policymakers, and union representatives primarily drive the public discourse on education. Their voices shape public opinion and influence policy. Very often, we exclude the voices of the other education publics – the practitioners in the field. This will include principals and teachers, parents and community members, education-focused NGOs, and learners.

The third reason why we need to engage in dialogue is because it serves as an essential platform to initiate action. The dialogue in education should not only be confined to ideas – it should be both descriptive and analytic in nature, and should strive to build multiple and shared understandings of what the problems are and why they exist. The dialogue should also be generative and responsive, seeking to build consensus and a collective commitment to action in addressing these problems.

Conversations about school leadership

In these dialogues, we should consider the importance of school leadership in school improvement. Effective schools are always characterised by strong leadership. What school leaders do matters in terms of learner outcomes. Amongst the many functions school leaders fulfill is the need to set the educational vision, serve as instructional leaders, manage the teachers and support staff, oversee school facilities and resources, administer departmental procedures, and maintain relationships with district officials, parents, community members, and other education stakeholders. Besides this, they need to juggle a myriad of other school-related responsibilities. All of these functions make the job of school leaders – especially that of the principal – complex, demanding, and challenging.

In these dialogues, we also aim to develop a deeper understanding of the role of the principal and other members of the leadership team in school functionality – especially in the context of schools in South Africa. Consideration must be given to how they engage the daily tasks of schooling, what some of the leadership challenges are in relation to these tasks, and some of the good practices required for strengthening teaching and learning in the school. Participants in these dialogues must include principals and other school leaders, university faculty members, public officials, and members of partner organisations working in the area of school support and improvement.

There is renewed focus on school leadership in the country. The Department of Basic Education has released the South African Standard for Principalship that defines the roles of school leaders. In addition, a new qualification for school principals is also being developed. These developments provide for an engaging and rich discussion on school leadership in the country.
Educating in the Eastern Cape: Hope or Despair?

NMMU partnered with the Eastern Cape Herald to engage different stakeholders in a series of dialogues on education in the province. We sought not only to deepen our understanding of the issues that affect education, but also to invite participants to identify and commit to actions – individually and collectively – to address some of the challenges.

We are halfway through the series, and are slowly coming to realise that the emerging answer to the question contained in the title is not as straightforward as many of us might imagine it may be. By listening to the views of the different stakeholders on the state of education in this province thus far, we are beginning to realise that the situation can indeed lead one to despair. We don’t need to list all the issues here; they are well known in the public domain. Yet, the same participants also share stories and work of hope that is happening in schools and communities. These elements of despair and hope seem to co-exist in education and the world at large. We are invited to embrace it as part of the work we do.

Our last dialogue focused on the role of teachers in the province. Teachers, principals, and representatives from a union participated. Here again, the elements of despair and hope emerged. The teachers participating in the dialogue pointed to the difficulties of teaching in tough neighbourhoods and the lack of support they received from the department. One teacher questioned the role of the educator by asking, ‘Am I a teacher? A pastor? A social worker? What role do I play?’ Another pointed to the general apathy amongst teachers about the state of education in the province. She bemoaned the fact that ‘We as teachers tend to accept everything and pretend that things are ok.’

A learner at one of the high schools was more critical about the role of teachers and questioned the low standards for passing exams. She asked, ‘How do we (as learners) respect a 30 percent requirement for a pass rate?’ She challenged us to think about what kind of society we would have if, ‘We had doctors who only know 30 per cent of their work?’

A school leader was also clear about the role that teachers and the department should play in the Eastern Cape. She emphasised: ‘It is unacceptable when teachers are unprepared; when they do not mark their work; when they are not in class on time. It is unacceptable not to be part of a team, if textbooks are late; and if training is inadequate.’ This was a clear call for teachers to reflect on their roles as professionals, especially as it relates to the core functions of teaching and learning in schools.

The dialogue also highlighted possibilities for hope. A young teacher in his second year of teaching in one of the township schools shared a powerful antidote for improving education in the country. He noted that ‘You cannot close yourself off to the problems of the children, we must smile with them… show that they are loved, we need to fall in love with education.’ A principal echoed this sentiment and underscored the importance of being connected to and caring for the learners. More importantly, this principal raised a question about the greater purpose of education. He asked, ‘What is it we want South Africa to be, and how do we prepare our kids for it?’ This is the question we should all be asking before we can begin to improve education.

So whose voices are still missing in this dialogue? We have already spoken to teachers, principals, learners, students at university, and some people working in support organisations. We still need to hear the voices of parents and community members, the department of education, as well as the unions. All of these voices are important in not only helping us to deepen our understanding of schooling in the province, but also to identify ways in which we can take collective responsibility for addressing some of the challenges we face.

And so Paulo Freire, one of the foremost education philosophers, reminds us that these dialogues are important and necessary. The elements of despair and hope help us to better understand the world around us. They not only enable us to see ourselves as subjects of historical and current processes, but also as agents of collective action and change.
Values-based instructional leadership in schools

CHAPTER 7

BUILDING THE TEAM

The role of the school leader in building a culture of collaboration

Given the roles and responsibilities of leaders in the school, they cannot be expected to do all the work on their own. Effective leaders get the work done with and through others, and one way in which this can be achieved is through collaboration.

School leaders have an important role to play in creating an environment that supports collaboration in the school. In previous chapters we described school culture as: The set of behaviours, norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations that governs and defines the way people work together in the school. It can also be referred to as 'the way we do things in our school'.

Collaboration occurs when members of an organisation come together regularly to:

- share ideas
- develop common understandings of goals
- decide jointly about how these goals can be attained
- work together to achieve them.

Building a culture of collaboration in a school

School leaders play the following key roles in building and maintaining a culture of collaboration in a school:

1. Creating consensus on the vision for the school’s future

To alter professional practices and change beliefs and understanding of a school’s key stakeholders (SMT, SGB, teachers, learners, parents and community members), the school leader has to have a clear and compelling vision in mind. Rallying support for a credible, realistic, and attractive vision of what the school can become; and persuading the stakeholders to buy into it is part of the daily work of school leaders.

2. Identifying, promoting, and protecting shared values

Values are the means by which a school reaches its vision. Values underpin the actions and activities that take place at the school and carry the message of common purpose and agreed upon standards to which the teachers and leaders hold themselves accountable on a daily basis.

Think about the current conversations you are having at your school:

- With who are these conversations taking place?
- What are topics of these conversations? Are they focused on improving the school?
- Who may be missing from these conversations?
- What aspects of the principles of dialogue mentioned above need to be included to make it more effective?
- Are there other topics that the school needs to engage the stakeholders on?
Besides the elements of respect, integrity, competence, and compassion that are needed to build trust, the leader should also be an effective communicator. Teachers, other staff members, parents and learners appreciate an open flow of communication from the school leader (both positive and negative), as well as professional confidentiality on sensitive matters. The opposite of this – where the leader withholds information or engages in gossip – breeds distrust, and leads staff members to rely on rumours to understand what’s going on in the school.

Leaders must also show confidence in their teachers’ professional judgment. Teachers need to earn their leader’s trust, but the leader must also reach out by involving staff in school improvement and other meaningful roles. Teachers who know that they are trusted by their leaders have a sense of increased confidence and credibility. They are more open to taking risks and, in turn, to pursuing professional growth. Another way to build trust is to validate the work of others and recognise contributions from all levels. All too often recognition and appreciation go unstated, or accomplishments are indirectly credited to those in formal leadership roles. It makes a world of difference when teachers are thanked for a job well done and made to feel like an integral part of the overall effort.

Teachers also trust leaders when they provide them with constructive feedback. When leaders give mostly judgmental feedback to staff, teachers quickly learn to interpret any communication from the office as critical rather than supportive. Teachers thrive on positive comments which point out areas that require improvement. This helps them to improve their teaching and makes them more open to school improvement initiatives.

3. Supporting the professional development of teachers

While always looking for and praising what’s positive in classrooms, SMT members should also be aware of where improvements can be made and organise ongoing, relevant job-embedded professional development. Expecting professional growth cultivates an environment in which teachers feel consistently challenged and motivated to develop their individual capacities.

4. Empowering teachers and encouraging leadership beyond the classroom

Teachers need to hear and understand that their participation and leadership beyond the classroom are essential and leaders need to act with diligence in making the structural and operational changes in schools that make these roles sustainable. These broader contributions are vital to keeping teachers professionally alive, enhancing their classroom teaching, and contributing to improved learning outcomes.

5. Encouraging experimentation and creativity in doing things

A key to school improvement is persuading people to approach their jobs from a different perspective and to experiment in using new techniques and strategies. School leaders need to support teachers when they want to try something new, and encourage them to learn from failures and mistakes.
Building a professional learning community will take time, thus the leader must be diligent and consistent in applying the above principles. Over time, these practices will become embedded in the school’s culture and serve as the basis for school improvement.

**Cultures that discourage collaboration in schools**

Two education scholars describe the following cultures that discourage collaboration in schools:

- **Balkanisation** – where there is not a strong sense of common purpose among the staff. Instead there are separate and competing groups, all seeking power and influence to meet their own ends.
- **Comfortable collaboration** – the level of teamwork is superficial, and members do not engage in relationships that foster critical reflection and problem-solving to improve teaching practice or achieve the team’s goals.
- **Contrived collegiality** – team members are nice to one another. Members go through the motions required by bureaucratic procedure as part of compliance rather than engaging in authentic, collective participation in the work of the group.

These are referred to as non-collaborative cultures that do not promote or support the development of deep professional relationships aimed at improving teaching and learning in the school.

Klein points to additional obstacles to collaboration that include having an illusion of consensus that ignores complex issues; failing to develop a vision that is underpinned by a common working vocabulary; having a group that is too large; and not involving all the relevant stakeholders.

In addition, Knapp notes that there is also the danger of becoming preoccupied with the intricacies of collaboration and losing sight of its ends – improving teaching and learning in the school.

**Effective teamwork**

Through effective teamwork, we can achieve goals that are much bigger and broader than that of any individual in the organisation.

Our society is characterised by change – it is one of the few variables that remain constant in our lives. In our schools, we are confronted by change on a regular basis. As leaders, we do not have the luxury of ignoring the constantly changing contexts and dynamics in which our schools operate. Change will not go away. In fact, it may only become more and go faster. Making changes in our schools will almost always be a challenging task. It not only involves changes to structures, processes, and policies, but also to the behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of the people involved in the change. Policy, on its own, will not bring about effective change.
One of the key reasons why change fails in many organisations is because very little thought is given to managing its impact on the people.

No school leader can run a school on his or her own. This is common wisdom, given the complexities and challenges faced by various stakeholders in schools in South Africa. Yet, many school leaders often struggle to mobilise and motivate teachers to work together to achieve the schools’ goals. The work is made even more challenging when school leaders have to deal with change.

When making changes, other stakeholders may feel a sense of loss, fear, uncertainty, and even frustration. This could lead to resistance and the behaviours that result in tensions, conflict, disengagement, and ultimately, non-performance.

Leading change thus requires a strong focus on building a resilient team that will effectively work in the gap between what is (the current situation), and what will be (the future desired goal).

**Building the team**

Improving teaching and learning in our schools requires a collective effort on the part of educators, and leaders have to build the teams that will help the school achieve its instructional goals. Teams are comprised of people, who bring their personalities, talents, aspirations, individual strengths and weaknesses to the work.

Teamwork is ultimately a human endeavour and leaders have to continually work on the team dynamics that serve as barriers to building trust, resolving conflict, engendering commitment, developing accountability, and focusing on achieving goals. Many change initiatives fail because school leaders pay little attention to building an effective team that will assist them in doing the work.

Patrick Lencioni (2002), in his book, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, points to five key issues or dysfunctions that leaders must work on in order to build successful teams. These have particular relevance for the work in schools – especially the work of the SMT in collaborating with the staff and other stakeholders to achieve the instructional goals of the schools.
Absence of trust
Teams will not function well when its members do not trust each other. Trust is the most important component for building the team and is the foundation on which the interactions of its members are based.

Relational trust (between the staff) is a significant resource for improving learner achievement and can be used to strengthen collaborative social relations within the school, build bridges between school and the home, and foster greater school–community commitment to the development of students.

Fear of conflict
The lack of trust among team members leads them to avoid conflict. Difficult issues are not tackled in an open and safe space, and teachers are afraid to share their views, withholding their ideas and contributions. Change initiatives often come with tensions and conflict. These occur in any healthy, well-functioning organisation, and come as part of the process of putting people with differing views, opinions and ideas together to achieve a common goal or to solve a problem. If conflict is handled constructively, it will lead to buy-in, creativity, and productivity.

If conflict is not handled well, the issues become buried and will continue to fester below the surface of the organisation. This often leads to corridor conversations – where the issues are discussed outside of the meetings, and become distorted by rumours and gossip. This can be destructive for the organisation, leading to personal attacks, the resurfacing of old, unresolved issues, a breakdown in relationships, apathy, disengagement, and the eventual failure in achieving the organisation’s goals.

School leaders can deal with tensions by acknowledging the problems and working to resolve it. This involves including all who are experiencing the problem in finding the solution to it. It is important for the leader to create a safe space that will allow teachers to talk about the issues without fear of being belittled, marginalised, or victimised when they disagree or ask difficult questions. In these engagements, the focus should be on the issues, not on attacking the person. The leader should appreciate and acknowledge different viewpoints, allow for a discussion of these, encourage new ideas, and then move towards making a decision that takes into account the best interests of teaching and learning (and ultimately the learner) in the school.

Lack of commitment
If tensions and conflict are not effectively dealt with in the team, it will lead to members withdrawing their participation and commitment to achieving the goals that have been set. When team members feel that they have been given a chance to share their ideas, and their opinions are respected and considered (even if they are different), they are more likely to buy in to the final decision.

Once a decision has been made, the team has to be clear about how it will be implemented. The lack of clarity around a strategy for implementation can lead to ambiguity and uncertainty amongst the team members – which can have a negative effect on their commitment. When making the final decision and planning for implementation, leaders have to ensure that all the team members are on the
same page about what has been agreed upon and the course of action that will be taken. This prevents different understandings of what the decision is, and conflicting messages about how it will be implemented.

**Avoidance of accountability**

When there is lack of commitment in a team, its members will tend to avoid accountability for achieving the team’s goals.

A simple definition of accountability is: *The obligation that an individual, group or organisation has to explain (account for) how tasks or activities were carried out to achieve goals; to disclose and share the outcomes of these actions; and to accept responsibility for the outcomes.*

In South Africa, the concept of educational accountability has traditionally been understood and implemented within a bureaucratic framework that is informed by the hierarchical structures of power and authority. In this framework, the responsibility and burden for learner success falls disproportionately on the teachers and learners, regardless of the conditions of teaching and learning. This view of accountability has promoted a culture of blame in which the education stakeholders apportion blame for learner failure on each other.

Accountability starts with team members holding each other accountable for their behaviours and actions in the team. This is called *peer accountability* and is an important team performance driver. In instances where team members are close to each other, they may hesitate to identify and address negative behaviours and actions for fear of jeopardising personal relationships. The lack of holding team members accountable has a negative effect on team morale, the quality of the work, and eventually the goals they set for themselves.

The leader can strengthen accountability in a team by making the organisation’s values explicit; clarifying the goals and what is required to achieve it (the strategy); making time for review and reflection; and supporting members to achieve the collective goals of the team.

**Inattention to results**

The lack of accountability in a team deflects the focus from achieving the team’s goals to the actions and behaviours of individuals in the team. This leads to stagnation in the team, where members concentrate on things they like doing or that will promote their individual status rather than on the goals of the team. Members who are not focused on achieving the team’s goals will not take responsibility for it, deflect blame, and seek to protect their personal reputations.

Perhaps more than with any of the other dysfunctions, the leader has a key role to play in working through the team processes while at the same time keeping it focused on its goals. This occurs when members are constantly reminded about the purpose of the team, how this purpose relates to the instructional goals of the school, and ultimately, its vision and mission.
The roles that teachers can play in teams

School leaders can encourage teachers to play important roles in contributing to the success of teams. One scholar proposes three crucial roles that they can take on. These are:

1. Critical colleague

Many teachers work on their own when it comes to lesson planning and implementation. Working in isolation does not allow opportunities for other views, opinions, and advice to emerge. Getting regular comments and input from colleagues around curriculum activities in an honest, specific, and descriptive manner can be a great tool in helping teachers perform even better in the classroom. Schools with collaborative cultures allow teachers to be able to take on this role in a non-threatening and non-judgmental manner.

2. Analyst of interim assessments of learners’ work

Reflective sessions with colleagues in which teachers look at the impact of their teaching on learners throughout the year; and then adjusting their teaching methods and styles to bring about improvement in learning outcomes, is an important mechanism for assessing the effects of teaching and identifying areas for change or improvement in practice.

The author, McTighe, lists some important questions that teacher teams can ask when looking at learner work:

**Describe:**
- what knowledge and skills (of the learners) are being assessed?
- what kind of thinking was required? Recall, interpretation, evaluation?
- the results we expected. Were there any surprises or anomalies?
- in what areas did the learners performed best. Which areas were they weak in?
- if there were any improvements or declines. What caused them?
- what misconceptions were revealed?

**Evaluate:**
- by what criteria we are evaluating learner work.
- whether these were the most important criteria.
- how good is ‘good enough’? What’s the standard?

**Interpret:**
- what this work reveals about learner performance.
- what patterns are evident.
- what questions this work raises for us.
- Is this work consistent with other achievement data?
- the different possible explanations for these results.

**Identify improvement actions:**
- What teacher actions would improve learning and performance?
- What learner actions would improve learning and performance?
- What changes in curriculum, scheduling, teaching, and so on, would improve learning and performance?
3. Continuous learner

A sign of a good school team is one in which teachers are open to learning more about their practice all of the time. It is often difficult to find time to read, but sharing short reading pieces on developments in teaching, new teaching techniques, or new and interesting articles on subject content are good exercises to create a teacher-focused learning environment. Conducting experiments or small research projects that help teachers to improve practice can also be a powerful tool for learning.

Learners can be asked some of these questions:

• Was the lesson interesting?
• Do they (the learners) understand why they are learning different aspects of different subjects?
• What are the learners’ impressions of school?
• What subjects are challenging (or easy) and why?
• What percentage of questions that I (as teacher) ask in class is made up of factual recall, application, synthesis or evaluation?

Team survey

Use the rating scale below to indicate how each statement applies to the team you are working in at your school. Please complete this survey on your own and be honest when responding to each statement.

Rating scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 – Most times</th>
<th>2 – Sometimes</th>
<th>1 – Rarely</th>
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1. Team members speak from the heart and say what’s on their minds in meetings.
2. Team members speak out when other members are not pulling their weight or do things that contribute to the team not achieving its goals.
3. Team members know what the other members are working on and how this contributes to achieving the goals of the team.
4. Team members apologise when they do things that are inappropriate or that negatively affects the team.
5. Team members willingly make sacrifices (for example, time, money) for the good of the team.
6. Team members acknowledge when they make mistakes or admit their shortcomings to the team.
7. Team members are actively involved in meetings and the meetings are not boring.
8. Team members leave the meetings knowing that the team members are committed to the decisions that were made even though there may have been initial disagreement.
9. The morale of the team is low when it fails to achieve its goals.
10. During team meetings, both the most important and difficult issues are put on
    the table to be resolved.
11. Team members are concerned about not disappointing or letting down their
    team members.
12. Team members know about one another’s personal lives and are comfortable
    discussing them.
13. Team members end discussions with clear decisions and goals, and action plans
    to implement them.
14. Team members challenge one another about their plans and approaches to
    achieving the team’s goals.
15. Team members are slow to seek credit for their own contributions, but are quick
    to acknowledge the contributions of others.

Endnotes
3 Bourdieu (1986). ‘The Forms of Capital’ in Richardson, J. G. (ed.). Handbook of Theory and
    and Practice. New York: Teachers College Press.
    Learning: The Four Paths.
11 Ibid
    Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers, Victoria Seminar Series, No. 136.
    School
    University Press.
15 Knapp, M.S. (1995). ‘How Shall We Study Comprehensive Collaborative Services for
17 McTighe, J. (2008), ‘Making the Most of Professional Learning Communities in The
18 Adapted from: The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, by Patrick Lencioni.
Creating networks of support for learners

Are we not all created equal?

Children in South Africa grow up in a highly unequal society, and in many communities the challenges to learning and development occur before the child even enters school. Unfavourable environmental conditions such as poor housing infrastructure; lack of access to water and adequate sanitation facilities; poor hygienic conditions in the home; malnutrition; and exposure to differing forms of violence and abuse, all contribute to ill-health that affect the well-being and development of children.\(^1\) This socio-economic and political context is where South Africa's basic education sector (schools) is located and operates. With over twenty-six thousand schools in our country, the majority of these schools serve the educational needs of these poor and marginalised communities. In addition to this, the lack of intellectual stimuli and good early childhood development programmes affect the cognitive development of children and their academic performance in school in later years.\(^2\) These challenges disadvantage the educational development of children and young people.

In these vulnerable communities that are characterised by high levels of poverty and lack of resources, support, infrastructure, and capacity to address multiple social challenges, the families who live in it will experience concentrated disadvantage. As these disadvantages build up over time, its negative effects on the development of children become amplified. This is referred to as cumulative disadvantage. Many learners in our schools suffer from both concentrated and cumulative disadvantage; and this drastically reduces their chances of educational success. But the challenges that arise from poverty and social inequality should not condemn our children to educational failure. As one scholar notes, 'poverty is not a learning disability'.\(^3\) Given the right conditions, children from both our urban and rural township communities can achieve and thrive academically and socially.

What is required is the building of strong networks of support around the development of children and young people. These networks comprise a range of actors across the public and private sectors joined in common purpose to enhance the quality of schooling in the country. Schools cannot be held solely accountable for poor academic performance. If we acknowledge that some of these challenges are societal – they arise out of the structural arrangements and material conditions in the country – then a collective effort should be made to address them. We can (and should) do more for our children and schools in these communities, and must continue to lobby government and other education partners to be more active in creating the enabling conditions that support the holistic development of learners.
Why building education partnerships is important

Earlier in this handbook we noted that context matters; and poverty and social inequality remain primary determinants of whether our children will succeed in schools or not. We also highlighted some of the social challenges that schools in poor and marginalised communities have to address. We noted that it is unfair to expect these schools to solve many of these challenges on their own. It is also disingenuous to compare these schools (in terms of functionality and performance) to the ones located in more affluent communities that serve the children of families who have sufficient resources to support their physical and psycho-social development.

In addition, children develop and learn across a range of contexts and institutional settings. These include the home, the school, childcare and pre-school education, after school programs, religious organisations, museums, libraries, sports, and other community-based activities. Two researchers identified eight key elements, which, when consistently applied and encountered across the different learning contexts, will contribute to positive social and cognitive outcomes for young people.

These are:
1. Physical and psychological safety that is a precondition for effective participation in learning activities.
2. Appropriate structures that set out boundaries within which goals can be set and pursued.
3. Supportive relationships that foster emotional well-being and builds self-esteem.
4. Opportunities to belong that accommodate individual skills and interests.
5. Positive social norms that are set to induce healthy behaviours and aspirations.
6. Support for efficacy that encourages and enables initiative and persistence in working towards individual and group goals.
7. Opportunities to build skills that include the development of physical, intellectual, social, psychological and emotional skills.
8. Integration of family, school and community efforts to reduce inconsistencies and promote supportive synergies across the different settings.

For young people to experience the above elements on a consistent basis across the different settings, the school and non-school contexts of learning should be linked. This has given rise to the concept of complementary learning, which was developed by the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP). Complementary learning focuses on the notion that the different contexts in a child’s life (the school, home, public library, church, and so on) should complement one another and promote consistent learning and development outcomes for children and young people.

Rather than waiting for help to come from the outside, instructional leaders can be proactive in building networks of support that enable children’s learning and development. One of the ways in which this can be done is by reaching beyond the traditional school boundaries to involve the community – defined broadly as including parents, community members, community organisations, businesses, the local clinic, universities, and so on – in addressing the effects of poverty on children and their families.

Schools that are engaged in this work are open longer than normal. They welcome family and community members, and offer after-school activities and
education enrichment programmes for learners. They also integrate social and health support for learners into the broader operation of the school. Some schools offer adult education programmes and technical skills training for parents and community members in the evenings. When schools do this, they become a hub for development, improving safety and stability in the community.  

In this chapter, we explore the work of school leaders from the Manyano Network of Community Schools in the Eastern Cape. Their focus is on building networks of support for the holistic development of the learners they serve. Leaders in the network understand that their schools are an integral part of the community, and they work across the broader school–community spectrum to create the conditions and initiate interventions that will lead to school and community improvement. In our work with the Manyano school leaders (comprising principals, teachers, parents, and other community members) we were able to identify certain forms of knowledge and skills that were important in assisting them to establish effective school–community partnerships.

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOLS

‘Schools cannot solve all their problems on their own, but they can tap into the assets of the community and collaborate with its members and partners.’

Closing The Gap

Schools operate in their communities, but communities don’t always operate in their schools. A strong link between the two is important for several reasons – and not all of them are obvious.

Before we talk about the connections between schools and communities, let us clarify the concept of ‘community’. By ‘community’ I mean all parents, community members and organisations, and any other institutions (the ‘education publics’) who come together around the common purpose of supporting a school or a group of schools to achieve a particular goal.

This goes beyond the more common understanding of community as being identified by geographic proximity to a school; it can include businesses, universities, and national and international NGOs.

Schooling in many of South Africa’s township communities is characterised by high absenteeism, poor academic performance, violence on and around the school premises, a lack of infrastructural and financial resources, a lack of qualified teachers, and low educator morale. These challenges often have a negative effect on learners’ cognitive and psychosocial development.

Schools cannot solve all of these problems on their own, nor can they afford to ignore them. But schools can tap into the assets of the community and collaborate with members to address some of these challenges.

Strong connections between schools and communities bring direct benefits to children. Research in other countries has shown that schooling becomes more meaningful to learners, and their learning is enhanced, when schools reach out to parents and access the social and cultural resources of the community.

Connections between schools and communities promote civic participation in education. This increases accountability for learning, and ensures sustainability by empowering the stakeholders as authentic partners in the educational enterprise.

When learners see the community as an extension of themselves, they start to see themselves as an extension of the community. This sense of belonging creates better citizens.

Linking schools to communities matters because it allows a broad constituency to develop a ‘public voice’ that can call attention to the problems in education, and engage
the state around addressing these. Recent examples of this include the shortage of textbooks and non-payment of teachers in some provinces, where civil society organisations, working together with schools and communities, took up these issues with government.

Schools form an integral part of the communities they serve, and they should have natural links to their communities. This is often not the case. So, what are the reasons for this?

Schools discourage relationship building when they have cultures that are unwelcoming of parents and other community members. In many schools, leaders and teachers fail to develop a deeper understanding of lives of their learners, and often hold ‘deficit views’ of families, regarding them as problems rather than as partners.

Many teachers are territorial about the school as their professional domain, and some might see outside involvement as an intrusion. While improvement initiatives encourage schools to involve parents and community members, many teachers fear that this will lead to diminished public regard for their professional status, a loss of authority, and increased levels of accountability. Because of this, the school as an organisation remains closed and inward-looking unresponsive to the possibilities of community collaboration.

While these challenges to effective school–community connections may seem daunting, overcoming them is not impossible, and the benefits to both the school and the community can be widespread.

A growing body of research shows that meaningful and authentic partnerships between schools and community stakeholders can result in positive learning and developmental outcomes for learners, can strengthen civic participation, can enhance social responsibility, and can attract additional resources into the community.

The NGO sector can act as an external lever, functioning as an intermediary between policy mandates and actualised effects in people’s daily lives. These organisations are close to the communities in which they can operate, and can respond quickly to needs. NGOs can also communicate more efficiently with government to make known the successes and failures of various policy actions.

Connecting schools to communities is important anywhere. In South Africa, these efforts will enable schools to become important sites – not only for learner development but also for the development of communities as a whole.

**ONES TO WATCH**

**TAKE A LONG-TERM APPROACH**

Penreach takes a cradle-to-career approach, offering services from birth to post-secondary school. Ten integrated programmes focus on teacher development, learner support, school leadership development, IT-assisted teaching and learning in under-resourced schools in rural communities.

**BE COMMUNITY LED**

The Philippi Collective is a cross-sector collaboration between schools, parents, organisations, NGOs, government departments and other community leaders. They identify challenges facing schools, map existing services, and come up with local community-led solutions.

**TURN PARENTS INTO TEACHERS**

Epworth Children’s Village recognises that psychosocial stressors impact negatively on learning, and gives teachers the skills to better manage learner needs. It also shows parents how to play a meaningful role in their children’s education, while encouraging learners to take leadership roles.

**LEARNERS AS CHANGE AGENT**

Enke’s Trailblazer Programme empowers young people to design and run projects that address the most pressing social issues in their communities. These projects give the learners a sense of social responsibility, while giving them practical project management and leadership experience.
Defining partnerships

A partnership can be defined as collaboration between independent groups or individuals, where the processes and products have greater value than would have been the case had these actors worked on their own. Partnerships are, by definition, voluntary in nature. They are based on formal or informal agreements to work together to accomplish a common purpose.

Educational partnerships are primarily formed to address the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and ethical development of children and young people. School–community partnerships can both be school-linked – where the school forms part of a broader external network, or school-based – where the partnership is located within the school. Partnerships can range in complexity from single-entity partnerships (one-on-one) to multi-layered alliances.

The Manyano Network of Community Schools have been active at building partnerships to support the learners. In order to do this the school leaders realised that they had to enhance their existing knowledge and skills to more effectively engage parents and other key education stakeholders in building partnerships to support the school. The areas identified were consistent with the literature on school partnerships, where the role of the leader is key in mobilising and building community support for their schools.

The knowledge required to build effective school–community partnerships

Knowledge of the System

The Manyano school leaders realised that to overcome the challenges of education they needed to develop a more systemic view of their work. Schools function in a context of dynamic complexity in which the forces that affect school functionality are understood as being multi-dimensional and interact over time to give rise to certain situations and challenges. In complex systems, not everything can be controlled, and very often the challenges experienced by schools cannot be fully understood or effectively dealt with if viewed from a single perspective. Partnerships allow leaders to see the outside layers of the system and make sense of the dynamics within and between them.

Once a school leader begins to understand the system dynamics, the problems facing the school no longer appear linear, having a single cause, effect or solution. Some of the current failures of school improvement initiatives are based on the thinking that solutions to problems are linear and one-dimensional, hence the formulaic or quick fix approach to solving them. This often gives rise to narrow, technical solutions that leads to limited success and sometimes failure.

For school leaders in South Africa, adopting a systemic view of schooling means recognising the importance of school–community partnerships that offer opportunities to connect to communities in ways that would not only support the work of schools, but also make them sites for community revitalisation.
Knowledge of the Community

The Manyano school leaders realised that they had to develop deeper understandings of the communities that their schools served in order to effectively engage them and counter the deficit perspectives of parents and families as being disinterested in their children’s education. Communities have dynamic characteristics. While people in them may share similar socio-cultural features, no community, group or household is homogenous; and working with its members requires an understanding of its context. This includes its socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, as well as the contours of power running through it.\(^\text{14}\) Given the demographic changes in many schools in the country where learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are enrolling in them, it is important for school leaders to nurture a school culture that is welcoming of all learners, in which they (the learners and their families) feel welcome and their identities are affirmed and celebrated.

In many communities, local political, religious, and traditional leaders can play important roles in enriching the curriculum and supporting other school–community partnerships. Getting to know the community will help leaders and teachers understand learners’ cultural and social contexts and recognise that communities have assets.\(^\text{15}\) These assets range from financial resources to social and cultural capital – all of which can be used to support children and young people.\(^\text{16}\)

Another lesson that the Manyano school leaders learned was that they had to be sensitive to the dynamic relationship between the school and the community. This includes getting to know the local conditions in the community and how these affect the core functions of the school. In poor urban and rural communities, this involves understanding the causes and effects of poverty on learners’ health, well-being and cognitive development.\(^\text{17}\) Service delivery protests, gang violence, and community upheavals can disrupt the schooling processes. Thus school leaders have to be in touch with these dynamics, and, when there are disruptions, must make decisions in the best interests of the learners and of teaching and learning in the school.

Knowledge of Partnerships

Before starting the partnerships, school leaders need to have a clear understanding of the rationale for the partnership — the purpose it serves (especially in supporting teaching and learning), its advantages, constraints and risks.\(^\text{18}\) Effective partnerships have a unifying purpose and committed members who assume specific responsibilities and can work with others who represent the different constituencies.\(^\text{19}\) Many partnerships also require certain preconditions in order to work effectively. These include committed and visionary leadership, trust and reciprocity, stability in the community, a common agenda, and waiting for the right time to start.\(^\text{20}\)

Well-functioning partnerships are ones in which common interests and needs are addressed, where participants see the benefits as outweighing the costs, and where the group owns and enforces its rules and regulations. Before entering into any kind of collaborative work, school leaders need to know what some of the critical school–community needs are, especially the ones that, if addressed, will enhance the education experiences of learners. The next steps would be to identify possible partners and assess the potential of these partnerships for addressing those needs.\(^\text{21}\)
The approach to school governance, as stipulated in the South African Schools Act (SASA), promotes broader community participation and encourages the development of school–community partnerships. This approach places an emphasis on local initiatives, capacity building at the level of community, and linking participatory activities to policy frameworks. However, school leaders are unlikely to encourage partnerships if they do not see and understand the benefits it can bring. These can be financial (cash or in-kind contributions); curricular (enriching academic programs); teacher-focused (professional development, and so on); and learner-centered (direct tutoring and other forms of academic and development support).  

Knowledge of the Organisation

The public and academic discourses on education in South Africa often treat schools as institutions that operate in isolation from the contexts of the communities they serve. When this happens, it overlooks how school functionality is influenced by social context; how learner well-being and their readiness to learn are affected by factors external to the school; and the degree to which teacher morale and motivation is linked to the social conditions in and around the school. School functioning and organisation are connected to the dynamics at play in communities. In other words, what happens in communities has an effect on schools. The reverse is also true – what happens in schools can also affect communities.

The Manyano school leaders realised that they had to deepen their knowledge of the school as an organisational entity in relation to (not in isolation from) the community. This included the understanding that some schools operate in relatively stable environments and often have mechanistic structures – rigid task definitions, formalisation of authority, vertical communications structures, and centralised control mechanisms – while the ones that face rapidly changing environments are characterised by more organic structures, with more flexible task definitions, less formalised levels of authority, greater lateral communication patterns, and diverse control mechanisms. Schools that operate in complex, changing, and unpredictable environments must adapt their structures and policies in response to multiple external influences that come from national, regional and local levels.

During the process of identifying potential partners, leaders also have to be guided by a clear understanding of the core values that inform the vision of the school. Amongst some of the common values cited in the vision statements of many schools are good citizenship, a sense of community, inclusion, trust, respect, and a quality education for all learners. These values appeal to different stakeholders, as they often overlap with those of their own organisations. Interacting with other organisations also helps school leaders to learn their core values and understand the different professional cultures. This knowledge is helpful when making the necessary connections and developing a common discourse for collaborative work. In addition, having a working knowledge of the institutional contexts of partner organisations helps the school leader to better understand the conditions that shape the interests and affect the needs and goals of these partners.
Knowledge of the Self

The hierarchical and rigid structures of schools are often not conducive to self-reflection, inquiry and collaboration. In order to work effectively at the interface between the school and community, leaders must develop an awareness of their strengths, weaknesses, interests, temperament, leadership styles and views of the world. Peter Senge\(^{26}\) regards this as one of the key disciplines of effective organisations, asserting that leaders have to be self-reflective and become aware of their own mental models and that of others around them in order to understand how they affect the goals of the organisation. Daniel Goleman’s\(^{27}\) work on ‘emotional intelligence’ (EI) makes a further contribution to helping us understand the importance of self-knowledge in collaborative work. Emotional intelligence comprises the interrelated domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Self-awareness is the knowledge of one’s own strengths and limitations. It enables individuals to read their own emotions and recognise the impact they may have on others. Leaders with strong self-awareness are realistic about what they can do and are not overly self-critical or naively optimistic. Self-management is the ability to control disruptive emotions; and leaders who self-manage are more transparent, flexible, and inclined to take the initiative in the change process. The combination of these two aspects of the self is called personal competence; it forms the basis for nurturing and sustaining relationships that lie at the heart of effective collaborative work.\(^{26}\)

School–community work will also require school leaders to have social competence, which is defined as the ability to manage relationships. Social competence is made up of a combination of social awareness (empathy, awareness of organisational dynamics) and relationship management (empowering others, being a catalyst for change, managing conflict, and building relationships). Emotional intelligence competencies are not considered innate. Knowing what they are and developing them are crucial for strengthening and sustaining relationships, which form the building blocks of effective school–community partnerships.\(^{29}\)

Institutions per se do not collaborate – except through the people who represent them. Relationships between individuals in groups are thus important, as they allow collaboration to become institutionalised. Emotional intelligence also facilitates relationship building, as it will help leaders better understand the interests people bring to the relationship, gauge their levels of commitment, and familiarise themselves with their capacities and needs. Partnerships can be made more challenging when leaders must deal with the complexities of the psychological dispositions of individuals on the one hand, and the complexities of the institution, with its structures, histories and organisational interests, on the other.\(^{30}\) Issues of power, cultural values, and styles of communication further compound these complexities.\(^{31}\) By developing their EI competencies, leaders will be able to identify and utilise different strategies that will strengthen the understanding and the comfort levels of the different partners in the process of collaboration.\(^{32}\)

Starting collaborative work

In this section, we identified five key areas of knowledge needed for effective collaboration. While all five knowledge domains are important and should be
developed across the leadership spectrum, having a broad knowledge of the system and a deep understanding of community dynamics are prerequisites for starting collaborative work. They allow leaders to make the connections between the different parts of the system and identify points of leverage for possible partnerships. Much of the learning in all five areas also occurs through the actual process of collaboration, and leaders need to start the work by focusing on small-scale projects before launching into bigger, more comprehensive ones.

An exclusive emphasis on acquiring knowledge in the above areas – while it may lead to good school–community relationships – does not guarantee school improvement. In fact, these relationships may become an end in themselves, and this can detract from a focus that seeks to improve the teaching and learning processes in schools. Furthermore, these are by no means the only forms of knowledge that school–community leaders need to have. Rather, they are meant to complement the existing knowledge base that informs the multiple roles played by instructional leaders (managerial, facilitative, coaching, and so on). The effectiveness of leadership will lie in an ability to determine what role needs to be played and when it needs to be played as leaders seek to build partnerships in support of the schools’ goals. In addition to this, for leaders to work effectively at the interface between school and community, these forms of knowledge will have to translate into a set of prerequisite leadership skills, which we expound on in the next section.

**Enhancing the repertoire of school leadership skills**

The work of school leadership is complex and multifaceted, and spans a number of roles, tasks and responsibilities. A study by the University of Washington identified school–community relations as one of the seven key functions of school leadership. However, school leaders do not spend much time doing this as they are often preoccupied with a number of other competing demands that include the day-to-day management of the school, budgeting tasks, and class scheduling, as well as the increasing pressure of the accountability system to comply with district directives.

In this section we consider how the knowledge of leaders can translate into the skills required to do this work. These skills are grouped into three broad leadership roles:

**The Leader as Vision Builder**

School leaders have to articulate a shared vision for collaborative work. Peter Senge points out that building a shared vision involves bringing to the surface and challenging prevailing *mental models* (ways of understanding the world and nature of the work) and fostering more systemic patterns of thinking. For this to occur, schools need to become *learning organisations* that operate around the principle of creative tension. This comes from being able to see where the organisation wants to be (the vision), and being honest about where it is (the current reality). With creative tension, Senge asserts, the energy for change comes from the juxtaposition of the vision or desired state against the current reality.

In building a vision for the school, the leader has two key tasks: (1) to work with others in and outside the organisation to develop more insightful views of the reality within
which the organisation operates; and (2) to nurture a shared vision by listening to the visions of others and seeing their own vision as part of a larger, evolving collective vision. The leader is thus able to identify elements that overlap and create a common language that assists with the integration of these elements into a collective vision.\(^{37}\)

To sustain the purpose of the groups involved in collaborative work, the leader should clearly and continuously articulate the vision as part of the broader moral purpose of schooling, which is to ‘make a difference in the lives of all learners, and help produce citizenry who are committed to the common good’.\(^{38}\)

The vision is made more compelling when school leaders locate it within a set of beliefs and practices that are centered on the concept of caring in the school–community.\(^{39}\) The vision should also underpin the dual processes of restructuring as well as reculturing, both of which are needed to transform schools in order to make them more welcoming and inclusive of parents and other education stakeholders.

Michael Fullan\(^{40}\) defines the term in the following way:

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Restructuring refers to changes in the formal structures of schooling in terms of organisation, timetables, roles and the like…. reculturing, by contrast, involves changing the norms, values, incentives, skills and relationships in the organisation to foster a different way of working together. Reculturing makes a difference in teaching and learning… (p.3).

**The Leader as Strategist**

Once the leader understands the benefits of school–community partnerships and has identified (in consultation with other stakeholders) the kinds that are most needed, they will identify the potential partners the school can work with. One of the ways to do this is by adopting an asset-mapping approach that highlights the assets of a community.\(^{41}\) Families, clinics, faith-based organisations, non-profits, businesses, local government, organisations, and organisations that extend beyond the boundaries of communities are all community assets that can make a range of contributions to supporting the work of schools. An asset-based focus is not only a powerful counter to the deficit approach; it also has significant implications for addressing many of the challenges learners and schools face. For example, dealing with a truancy problem may mean going beyond the short-term (and often inadequate) solution of notifying the parents/guardians and reminding them of their duty to ensure that the learner is in school every day. Instead, an asset-based approach will seek to understand the underlying reasons for the problem and then identify and work alongside other community stakeholders to deal with it. This approach is proactive, it taps into the assets of the community, and it seeks to integrate these assets in ways that create different conditions within which children live and learn.

Asset-mapping also involves communicating and linking resources in ways that seek to achieve collective goals, and should avoid duplication, competition or the setting up of contradictory goals.\(^{42}\) It is therefore important for leaders to assess the capabilities of the school and other organisations to carry out partnerships. Effective partnerships also require financial knowledge and capabilities, technical knowledge to run programs and the political will to collaborate with different partners.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{37}\) Michael Fullan, *Leading Learning Communities*, p. 3.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 3.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 4.
leaders will need to identify the strengths and shortcomings in each of these areas before they make any decision to partner.

Due to the diverse nature of the groups involved in partnerships, school leaders must also develop a strategy for communicating the vision and goals of the collaboration. Open and accurate communication not only elevates the rationale for collaboration, but also serves to strengthen the linkages between partners and minimise the behind-the-scenes politics that always accompany these efforts.  

External communications (outside of the school) are equally important, and even before the school can attract external partners, it may have to embark on a public relations campaign to enhance its own image. Using the local media and school newsletters to publicise special activities, events, and awards can be effective in raising the public profile of the school. A strategy that is often used is the social awareness or social marketing campaign, which targets the different stakeholders and helps to increase their understanding of the reasons, purposes, and potential benefits of collaboration. External communication is also important in projecting the image and mission of the collaboration, and generating public support for the work.

Besides focusing on achieving the goals of the partnership, leaders also need to be strategic about ensuring that the collaboration is responsive to the goals of the school as well as the individual and institutional interests of each partner, and should work with others to develop a plan for moving from vision to action. In initiating the partnership, the leader plays an important role in setting the direction, establishing goals, redesigning organisational structures and processes, setting expectations and benchmarks, and providing support for the work.

The leader as Boundary Spanner

Collaborative work straddles different stakeholder groups, and school leaders must take on the work of boundary spanning. This work involves representing perceptions, building relationships, conveying influence, mediating conflict, setting expectations, and communicating and strengthening the understandings of the goals of the collaboration.

Boundary spanning also involves steering the organisation into territory that extends beyond the traditional boundaries of the school. It requires that the school leader becomes proactive in not only engaging with the external environment, but also serving as a change agent within the school. For this to occur, leaders must show a willingness to transcend their traditional school management roles; develop political and listening skills to manage conflict and build coalitions; articulate a strong belief in collaborative work and services as effective ways of resolving many of the development challenges facing children and young people; and model collaborative behaviour to others. One study of school–community partnerships referred to the principal spending a part of each day ‘… seeking to ensure, or at least negotiate, within school cooperation…’. The principal worked towards integrating the initiative into the public school setting, changing teacher perceptions to make it seem a normal and necessary part of what the school was doing.
Boundary spanning also involves the leadership practices of risk-taking, considering alternatives, facilitating dialogue across the different stakeholders, and offering a sense of purpose and safety. 51 This enables the different partners ‘...who are working in the same setting with the same children to better understand and empathise with each other’s different professional cultures, responsibilities and perspectives on addressing children’s needs...’. 52 Due to the complex nature of working across diverse organisations, boundary spanning further allows the leader to create higher levels of interdependence amongst the different individuals and groups. A study shows that leaders who did this created higher levels of comfort and understanding regarding the goals and activities of the partnerships. 53

In an effort to bring together those who can advance the goals of collaboration, as well as those who will be affected by it, leaders must also span boundaries of every type —between sectors, gender, race, ethnicity, and religions. 54 This calls for a commitment to diversity that not only requires an understanding of the social, cultural and historical contexts of communities, but also sensitivity to and respect for them. 55 In this context, the work of boundary spanning also means learning to see the world through the eyes, values and sense making of others.

Establishing effective school–community partnerships: leadership challenges

In establishing school–community partnerships, leaders need to understand some of the challenges this may present and be prepared to deal with them. While recognising that these are not the only challenges, we have identified the following ones because they arise when some of the above-mentioned leadership knowledge and skills are lacking:

Underestimating the complexities of communities

Many participatory approaches to education are often inadequately informed of the contextual realities, and the social and political dynamics of communities. 56 Overlooking questions of power, assuming that communities are homogenous, and failing to identify sources of conflict can dramatically shorten the lifespan of partnerships, or even prevent them from starting. 57 For school leaders in these situations, having knowledge of the education system, the community, and of partnerships becomes important in helping them to navigate their way around some of these challenges.

Lack of community interest and involvement

Low levels of community participation make it difficult to establish and sustain partnerships. There are a few reasons why this may be the case. Firstly, many parents do not become involved in schooling because they believe that education is primarily the responsibility of the state. 58 Secondly, parents and community members are sometimes unfamiliar with the bureaucratic practices of schools and do not know how to get involved. 59 Thirdly, cultural and language differences between the school and the home also make parents feel unwelcome or inadequate in terms of supporting their children in school.
Other reasons that contribute to a lack of community involvement include the adults own negative schooling experiences and their low levels of education, which create asymmetrical school–community power relations that discourage participation.\textsuperscript{60} To deal with these challenges, leaders need to use a number of outreach strategies that are aimed at connecting to community groups, building trust, and generating interest in the activities of the school.

**Lack of training and support for school leaders**

One shortcoming of the decentralisation process in South Africa after 1994 was that school leaders have not been given adequate training and support to prepare for the dramatic shift in both mindset and role. This period was characterised by dramatic changes across all sectors of society and the state, including education. Systemic transformation was characterised by a raft of policy changes and enactments. The consequences of this have been confusion, uncertainty, frustration and work overload for leaders and educators. While more professional development opportunities for school leaders have been made available in recent years, these have to form part of a continuum of support that focus on expanding their systemic knowledge of the dynamic relationship between education policy, the school, and the external environment. School leaders with a deeper understanding of this relationship will be able to identify points of leverage for developing effective school–community interventions.\textsuperscript{61}

**Asymmetrical power relations**

*An imbalance of power* between the school and community, as well as the *concentration of power* around the school principal are probably two of the biggest challenges to forming effective partnerships. School leaders and teachers fear that working with parents and other community stakeholders may lead to a loss of their power and authority.\textsuperscript{62} Furthermore, collaboration increases the levels of accountability, which can be seen as a threat to the autonomy of teachers, making them less likely to want to participate in collaborative activities with the community.\textsuperscript{63}

However, school leaders can empower community partners by sharing information with them, building their leadership capacity, and bringing them into the decision-making processes. This is called *distributed leadership*\textsuperscript{64} and contributes to the development of a collective political voice that can be powerful enough to call attention to the needs of the school and community at large, and challenge the structures that serve to maintain inequalities.\textsuperscript{65} When this occurs, the school actually accrues power in the form of social and political capital, while at the same time gaining the support it needs for the learners.

During the process of asset mapping, the leader is also exposed to large amounts of information and has to filter and disseminate it to the different stakeholders. This can be problematic, as the decisions around what information should be shared is often left to the discretion of the leader. The lack of sharing information serves to concentrate knowledge and information around one individual, which can lead to a centralisation of power.\textsuperscript{66} This has particular relevance for the decentralised governance model in South African schools. Research shows that principals sometimes interpret the functions of school governing bodies in ways that support their personal views of how the school should be run.\textsuperscript{67}
Increased responsibilities and work overload

As mentioned earlier, schools face many challenges that arise from within the system as well as the external environment. School leaders have to address a number of these challenges in order to create the enabling conditions for teaching and learning. This makes the work very hard at times, and has increased the levels of stress amongst school leaders and educators. Research in the US shows principals now confront increasing responsibilities due to pressure to show results; experience work-related stress caused by bureaucratic and time demands, union agreements, and managing the instructional process; and often have weak incentive structures for the work they do. All of these challenges serve to prevent school leaders from focusing on collaborative work. In addition to this, in communities that experience multiple social challenges, the work of engaging with these problems may seem overwhelming. School leaders may be reluctant to take them on, fearing they may not be able to resolve them, and that their efforts at doing so may lead to failure.

However, while the challenges of establishing effective school–community partnerships may indeed appear to be daunting, the consequences of not collaborating could be far worse in terms of the academic and health costs to learners, the deterioration in the quality of teaching and learning in the school, and the social costs of school failure and eventual dropout. These costs contribute to increased levels of unemployment, gang activity, and crime and violence, which serve to entrench the cycle of poverty in many communities. Leading in challenging environments thus requires school leaders with courage and a strong commitment to creating the conditions for effective teaching and learning in their schools.

Leadership in building partnerships is a collective function

The recurring theme of this book is that schools operate in complex environments, which make them one of the most difficult public institutions to lead and manage. This work requires different forms of knowledge and a vast array of skills, and it can often feel overwhelming, confusing, and even frustrating. No single leader comes with all the prerequisite skills required for effective school–community collaboration, nor should they be expected to have them all. School leadership should thus be understood as a collective and community-wide construct that is not the exclusive domain of those holding formal positions of authority, but extends to organisations and other individuals within and external to the school.

Furthermore, the practice of leadership will vary across situations and emerge through interactions between individuals, groups, and the environment. This is best described as distributed leadership, or leadership that is stretched out across the broader context of the school and community, and taps into the collective body of knowledge, wisdom and expertise that resides across this spectrum. When leadership is exercised in this manner, it is likely to achieve goals that are much bigger that any single leader can achieve on her or his own.
This chapter focused on the role school leaders can play in building partnerships to support the goals of the school. Consider the following graphic that shows school–community partnerships and its impact on learner achievement.

Think about your school in relation to these activities and respond to the questions that follow:

1. What partnership activities is your school involved in?
2. Which one/s do you think will be appropriate to better support teaching and learning at your school?
3. Keeping in mind some of the key points in this chapter, develop a plan for how you would go about developing a partnership to support learning at your school.
Endnotes

1 South African Child Gauge, 2013.
6 The Harvard Family Research Project published a series of Evaluation Exchange issues in recent years that highlight what research and evaluation show are essential supports for children’s learning and achievement. All issues can be found on HFRP’s website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/archives.html.
46 Rubin, 2002.


54 Rubin, 2002


Conclusion

In this book we have highlighted the role of leadership in strengthening teaching practice and improving learning outcomes in the school. We refer to this as instructional leadership. This kind of leadership is not as much a leadership style as it is a leadership orientation. It is central to a leader’s identity and actions, and is the foundation that informs leadership practice in the school. In other words, all the leader’s actions, activities, and leadership styles should be oriented towards improving teaching and learning in the school.

Instructional leadership also focuses on redirecting the attention, structures, activities, and resources of the school to support teaching and learning. We know that these are the core functions of a school, yet it remains difficult to change leadership practice that is steeped in bureaucracy and a culture of compliance that is often disconnected from the improvement goals of the school.

This calls for a dramatic shift in the way we understand and practice leadership in our schools, and compels us to embrace change as an essential condition for improving our schools.

TOWARDS A NEW EDUCATION AGENDA

Rethink the role of the community school, writes Al Witten

A good deal of healthy public debate revolves around what needs to be done to improve the quality of schooling in South Africa. This is important, as few initiatives have the potential to be as pivotal to the transformation of South African society as the systematic improvement of schools. In rekindling debate, I would like to revisit an old concept for enhancing the educational experiences of children and young people in South Africa – the simple, yet powerful concept of the community school.

Any efforts to improve schools – especially many of the schools serving our townships and rural communities – must take into consideration the forces that shape the realities of schooling and influence the teaching and learning outcomes.

Persistent poverty and inequality in our society affect the life experiences and chances of young people and their families, threaten the stability of communities and undermine their potential to participate as active citizens in the country’s growth.

We are aware of many of the problems related to these socioeconomic conditions. They include, among others, ill-health, fragmentation of the family, poor school attendance and discipline problems, increased school dropout rate, psychosocial trauma and an increase in the number of orphans attending school.

Schools, on their own, are unlikely to deal effectively with these challenges. What is needed is a broader, bolder and
more integrated approach to school improvement. This will reconnect the school to its community and other stakeholders in multiple initiatives aimed at engaging the challenges that confronts learners and their families, while strengthening the instructional (teaching and learning) core.

A broader approach to school improvements places the school at the centre and focuses on the addressing the internal and external challenges to the core functions of teaching and learning. The community school is connected to and works with parents and other education stakeholders to identify the challenges and to design and implement interventions to address them. These stakeholder groups can include the local clinic, businesses, religious organisations, libraries, civic groups and universities.

Of course, the role of the state – at provincial and national levels – is crucial to support and implement such an approach. It should involve collaboration at the intra- and inter-ministerial levels where networked structures within the education department are connected to other ministries, such as health and social services, to deliver more coordinated services to schools and the communities they serve.

The state plays a key role in creating an enabling environment that allows the community school to be established. Through a consultative process, it can develop policy frameworks that facilitates cross-sector collaboration. It should also provide resources to assist the community school to achieve its improvement goals.

Schools can collaborate with one or more of the stakeholder groups to develop projects that range from giving direct support to learners and teachers, such as an after-school mathematics enrichment programme run by a university or NGO, to working with parents and the local clinic to provide health services to learners.

It is important for these to be clearly identified, grounded in the real context of the school and community and aligned to the improvement goals of the school. In addition, the projects should not be regarded as ‘addons’, hovering on the periphery of schooling. Instead, they should be integrated into the school’s improvement strategy – that coherent set of actions that connects the school’s organisational structure, policies, resources and culture to the changes that need to be made.

Our public schools, especially those serving townships and rural communities, have the potential to becoming thriving community schools. There are a number of factors that favour this. Firstly, schools, as with religious and other civic organisations, are sites of social cohesion in many communities. They bring young people, parents and stakeholders together around the educational enterprise. Schools are also shared public spaces that are used by the community for purposes other than education, such as church services and community meetings and events. The institutional connections that schools have to these groups hold significant potential for future collaboration.

‘What is needed is a broader, bolder and more integrated approach to school improvement that reconnects the school to its community and other stakeholders in multiple initiatives.’

Another factor that supports the community school is that children and older learners spend much of their waking time in school. In this setting, learners become more accessible to external groups, who can provide them and their families with support and services, such as after-school programmes, health projects and parent workshops and activities.

Finally, schools have access to officials from across the public service spectrum (such as education, health and social services) that should form part of comprehensive school improvement strategies involving multiple sectors of society.

While there are often negative public perceptions about the state of schooling in the country, any approach to creating the community school should be asset-based and tap into the hopes and aspirations, as well as the creativity and energy, of the school and community.

Implementing community schools can have a number of benefits for society. Most importantly, it focuses on educating the whole child. This not only involves direct efforts to improve teaching and learning, such as enhancing the qualifications and skills of teachers, or providing extra lessons but also on those issues that affect learners’ quality of life and wellbeing. It means that sport and cultural activities, nutrition, health,
counselling and social support must be built into the functions of schools with clear connections being made between a healthy mind, healthy body and healthy community.

The community school also has a strong developmental orientation. Schools can be centres that serve broader community needs, such as providing literacy and skills training for unemployed parents and other community members. They can facilitate projects that lead to income generation for parents. School-based micro enterprises that draw on the strengths and expertise of the community, such as carpentry shop, a school uniform and clothes manufacturer and an organic vegetable and herb gardening project, help to build an entrepreneurial base in the community that can become self-sustaining over time.

Another benefit of the community school is that it has much to contribute in terms of knowledge generation aimed at solving local problems. This knowledge is context-specific and is generated through interactive discussions between school leaders and teachers, community members, learners and other stakeholder groups. These interactions are empowering because they allow the community 'voice' to emerge when formulating solutions to some of the challenges that confront the community.

Community schools help learners develop global competencies by not only teaching the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics (a core area of improvement), but also by encouraging creative thinking and problem-solving through tackling problems.

When learners are engaged in an environmental project that involves the design of a clean and safe water reticulation and sanitation system, or when they study the business model of a local micro enterprise, they are exposed to applied skills and professional forms of knowledge that are essential to the global world of work.

Efforts to improve the functions of schools in isolation from the broader social transformation of society will, at best, yield short-time, limited results. It is important therefore that we give thoughtful consideration to some of the options being put on the table. The challenges we face as we seek to move the education system in a north-easterly direction on the improvement graph are complex and multifaceted and we should be careful not to adopt a ‘one-size-fits-all’ or an ‘anything goes’ approach to dealing with them. Instead we need flexible strategies that are grounded in theory and research, and draw on good practices. We also need an enabling policy and resource environment in which to do this work.

It is time for us to revisit the old notion of the community school and rethink the role of the school and of leadership at the school, district and national levels. The community school was the defining idea of ‘People’s Education’, which contained the blueprint for an alternative education system in South Africa that would help learners develop critical thinking skills and prepare them for full participation in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of the country.

School remains one of the few intact social institutions in many of South Africa’s urban and rural communities and their potential to improve learning and making significant contributions to community improvement remains untapped. What is needed is the collective will of all stakeholders – from government ministries to communities and schools – to rekindle the powerful notion of schools that are integrated into a broad network of support for learners and their families. This will breathe new life into the African adage: ‘...it takes a village to raise a child...’

Allistair Witten

Why is change difficult?

The essential work of school leaders is to transform the set of institutional arrangements, commitments, procedures, practices, and routines to more effectively support the instructional mandate of the school.

Changing practice and behaviours is hard and slow. It makes demands of people’s time, and requires them to work together in new and different ways. The work of
improvement calls on everyone (at the school and district levels) to examine existing practices and their thinking about the work they do. It requires people to work in groups as opposed to individuals working in silos, and disrupts the institutional culture that privileges bureaucratic compliance over substantive engagement with how to improve and support teaching and learning in schools.

As schools embark on the journey of improvement, three distinctive but related processes occur:¹

1. The knowledge and skills of teachers and leaders are increasing, especially in relation to instructional practice in schools.
2. Teaching practice and reflections on it has become more collaborative. Internal accountability in the school grows, where teachers start taking more responsibility for improving their teaching practice.
3. The school is aligning its resources to make the improvement of teaching and learning a priority.

All of these processes take time. In the work of school improvement, they don’t take a linear trajectory that moves in a typical northerly direction on an improvement graph (as shown as in the graphic below). Instead, the work of improvement is messy, uncertain, and even confusing at times. It is sometimes about taking one step forward and two or three steps backwards. The reasons for this are many and may include resistance to change, obstacles that could be encountered along the way, a loss of focus, or a lack of resources and support.

It should, however, not be surprising that resistance is a natural and expected response to the work of change. Humans do not like the uncertainty and anxiety that comes with changing practice and behaviours. Psychologists refer to this as cognitive dissonance – which occurs when our existing knowledge, beliefs, values and ideas (which give rise to our current behaviours and practices) are confronted with new information and ideas that are contradictory to the ones we already...
hold. This causes mental stress, anxiety, and discomfort. The human response is to protect oneself and one’s identity by reducing the stress. This is what causes the resistance and makes change so difficult. No matter how well intentioned people are, they almost instinctively want to go back to the comfort zones of their existing beliefs, knowledge and behaviours, to the old way of doing things. Hence the quote that we often hear: The more things change, the more it stays the same.

What role do leaders play in the change process?
Adaptive leadership² is required when deeply held beliefs and values are challenged as alternative views, ideas, and perspectives emerge. At the personal level, this causes stress, anxiety and even fear that often lead to resistance. At the organisational level, we may have disagreements, tensions, and low levels of conflict. Ron Heifetz points out that when this happens, leaders must refrain from seeking quick fix, short term, top-down technical solutions to reduce the levels of stress in the organisation. In other words, leaders must resist the temptation to be reactive and make the problem go away quickly in order to return to the normal way of doing things.

Instead, the leader should see this as a change moment and establish a safe space for the group to engage in dialogue to identify and understand some of the deeper issues around the conflict; to examine assumptions (the beliefs we hold in our heads about the people, our work, and the world) related to the issues at hand; and to reflect on practices and behaviours. This is not easy leadership work, and the leader must display patience, resilience, and calmness when the organisation is going through these challenging situations.

Leading change
Leading change also calls for flexibility on the part of the leaders. Being rigid and inflexible can lead to destructive conflict that has a negative effect on the organisation. During times of change, the leader has to lead from the front. The leader has to be accountable, take responsibility for what it happening (instead of blaming someone or something for it) and work to support others through it. As the organisation works through the tensions and conflict of change, the leader also has to stay positive, look to the future and remind others of the organisation’s vision and what they are trying to achieve collectively.

There are also times when things feel stuck – that no matter how hard people are working, they just don’t see the results of their efforts. This is when instead of giving up, the leader must encourage the team to reflect and dig deeper in trying to understand what the reasons are – this is an essential element of a learning organisation.

With any change initiative, it is unlikely that there will ever be complete buy-in. Change can be quite difficult as it means moving people out of their comfort zones, or it may mean changing their way of thinking or the manner in which they behave. It is good to move along with those who are on board, while continuing to encourage those who are skeptical. The leader should constantly articulate the rationale for why the change is important and celebrate small victories as the organisation moves forward.
The following exercise represents a scale between six sets of priorities that create tensions in an organisation.

1. Identify the leadership behaviour you tend to demonstrate when you are responsible for leading change. Put an ‘X’ on each line that shows your balance of the tensions.
2. Is this where you spend most of your time when leading change?
3. Which of the six priorities do you think you should pay more attention to?
4. What would you like to shift on the scale?

Remember: Depending on circumstances, you may move to different positions on each scale. The most important thing is that your leadership styles and actions have to respond to where you are on the scale.

The Six Tensions of Leading Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Catalyse change</td>
<td>Champion an initiative or a significant change, consistently promote it, and encourage others to get on board</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Show a sense of urgency</td>
<td>Demonstrate the need to take action; accelerate the pace of change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cope with transition</td>
<td>Recognise and address the personal and emotional aspects of change</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Demonstrate realistic patience</td>
<td>Know when and how to slow the pace so that people can cope and adapt</td>
<td></td>
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Values-based instructional leadership in schools
3. Be Tough
Make difficult decisions without hesitation or second-guessing

Be empathetic
Take others perspectives into account; understand the impact of your actions and decisions

4. Show optimism
See the positive side of any challenge; convey that optimism to others

Be realistic and open
Speak candidly about the situation, and don’t shy away from difficulties; admit personal mistakes

5. Be self-reliant
Be confident in your ability to handle new challenges

Trust others
Be open to others’ input and support; allow them to do their part

6. Capitalise on strengths
Know your context and personal and organisational strengths; confidently apply them to new situations and circumstances

Go against the grain
Show willingness to learn and try new things—even when the process is difficult or painful

Instructional leadership as a system-wide construct

So, who are the leaders we are talking about in the above section and throughout this handbook? The focus of this handbook has been on schools, so we may assume that these leaders are the principals, deputy principals, and the Heads of Departments. We are indeed referring to them – but instructional leaders are more than just those who hold formal positions of authority in a school. They are all the people in the education system, in both formal and informal positions of authority, whose work is strongly orientated towards supporting and enhancing teaching and learning in our schools.

The classroom is the micro unit of our education system. It is also the most important, and should be the core focus or the bull’s eye of all our efforts in education. In this sense, instructional leadership should not be confined to the levels of the school and the classroom – it should be a system-wide construct. In other words, instructional leadership should be exercised at every level of the system, from schools across to districts as well as the provincial and national education departments.
Defining instructional leadership in this way calls for a redefinition and refocus of the roles and responsibilities across the entire system that are coordinated and aligned to supporting instruction. In addition, we also have to examine, our paradigms, beliefs, practices, behaviours, and attitudes to determine whether these are conducive to creating the enabling environment we require for learner success. In far too many instances the things that are happening in our schools seem to be about something else, and not about teaching and learning. We need to reconnect to the core – to the essence of what it means to teach, to learn, to run a school, and to administer a system that is geared towards fulfilling the mandate and promise of education in our country.

We are all leaders, just as we are all followers – we take the lead for one thing or another at some time in our homes and families, communities and organisations.

Thus we don’t have to be in a leadership position to be in a position to provide leadership.

Endnotes
1 Elmore, R.F. & City, E. (2007). “The Road to School Improvement It’s hard, it’s bumpy, and it takes as long as it takes.”
Notes
About the author

Al Witten is Adjunct Professor at the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town. He was the founding director of the Centre for the Community School, which is located in the Education Faculty of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Al has been involved in the field of education for over 30 years, and has more than 20 years experience as a teacher and principal in township schools in Cape Town.

Al previously held the interim position of Director at The Principals’ Centre at Harvard University, USA, where he was involved in leadership training and development for school leaders in the United States and across the world.

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Please note: Teacher’s Guides are available for all of these books.