

## Instructional leadership: the impact on the culture of teaching and learning in two effective secondary schools

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Currently there is a drive to improve the culture of teaching and learning in South Africa, particularly in secondary schools. Recent studies have indicated a direct relationship between the instructional leadership role of the principal and the effectiveness of a school. Initiatives introduced by the government to reform education include the introduction of new curricula and the increase of site based management responsibilities. With these and other increasing responsibilities principals are still accountable for the success of the schools' academic outcomes. The practice of instructional leadership and its impact on the culture of teaching and learning at two effective secondary schools are investigated.

### Introduction

Principals of South African schools face two major challenges in their day-to-day management duties, namely, (1) handling a greater variety of school-based decisions than before, and (2) creating a sound culture of teaching and learning in which effective education can take place. The current international trend in education reform and restructuring is the decentralisation of decision making powers to the local and school level. The vehicle of this reform is school-based management which implies an increase of the responsibilities of school management teams and school governing bodies (Squelch, 2000:128, Dimmock & Wildy, 1999:298). Together with these structural reforms of decentralisation the South African government has also embarked on curriculum reform and a general drive to enhance the culture of teaching and learning in schools. The restoration of the culture of teaching and learning is one of the most important factors to improve the quality of education in South African schools today (Garson, 2000:4). The central role that a principal plays in all the programmes of a school and the impact that he/she has on the tone and ethos which are conducive to teaching and learning is crucial in the process of building a sound culture of learning and teaching. This article will focus on the role of the secondary school principal and school management to create and maintain a sound culture of learning and teaching by means of instructional management in schools situated in supportive socio-economic environments.

### Background and the research problem

The poor matric results of the past number of years, the lack of learner discipline, the low teacher morale, as well as other educational problems in some of the schools in South Africa have led to a general drive to improve the culture of teaching and learning and the overall quality of schools in the country (Lethoko, 1999:1). A dominant belief in educational and government circles is that principals can and should make a difference in the academic standards of schools (Christie, 1998:291). Principals should, therefore, become leaders of instruction and with dynamic and inspirational leadership focus on raising the teaching and learning practices in schools. The responsibility of the principal to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place in the school is therefore one of the major issues in the endeavour to improve the culture of teaching and learning and thereby create effective schools.

This responsibility of the principal to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place is, however, not new — it can be and was always regarded as his/her primary task (AASA, 1992:21). The complexity and weight of the contemporary principal's task, however, necessitate a clear understanding of this responsibility and the tasks associated with it. In recent years, a great deal of research has been done in order to identify the properties of effective schools. One of the most general conclusions of this research is that a principal can exercise a significant effect on the efficiency and success of the school. In addition, global changes are taking place in education that are resulting in the decentralisation of decision-making powers to school management level, which is further reinforcing the role of the principal as a key figure in the provision of effective teaching and learning.

The duties of principals, however, are wide-ranging. They in-

clude current initiatives to reform the schooling system such as an increase of site-based management responsibilities and the inclusion of more parent participation in school governance as well as the introduction of new curricula. Principals have to divide their time between issues of curriculum and instruction and a large number of non-education matters such as labour relations, financial management and empowering governing bodies. The effective execution of all the functions of a principal will undoubtedly ensure the establishment of a positive culture of teaching and learning and so doing contribute to the effectiveness of the school. However, the principal's main responsibility is to create conditions in the school in which the learners can receive quality instruction (Heck, 1992:21; Olson, 2000:1). The effective management of the school's instructional programme is one of the key school management aspects that can create favourable conditions in the school and promote a sound culture of learning and teaching ensuring a school's effectiveness (Heck, 1992:29, Preedy, 1993:1-5, Chisholm & Vally, 1996:24-29). There is, however, widespread agreement, that the principal's workload is becoming unmanageable and that many secondary school principals lack the time for, and an understanding of their or instructional leadership task (Olson, 2000:1, Budhal, 2000:45). The question that arises from this is how principals of effective schools can ensure that effective instructional leadership takes place to develop and maintain a sound culture of teaching and learning.

An attempt is made to answer this question by describing the way in which instructional leadership is carried out in two effective schools (schools assumed to have sound cultures of teaching and learning) where both the principals' time is spent increasingly on more management responsibilities. As one of the principals succinctly stated:

... the principal's responsibilities have shifted from that which he is actually trained for, from being an instructional leader to much more business principles.

### Key concepts and related issues

**Managing the instructional programme to build a productive school culture**

One of the most general conclusions emanating from the research on effective schools is that a principal can exercise a significant effect on the efficiency and success of the school (Hawley, Rosenholtz, Goodstein & Hasselbring, 1984:53). The school effectiveness studies emphasised the importance of the principal's instructional leadership role which concerns the principal's responsibility to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place. It relates to the core activities of the school, i.e. teaching and learning in the classroom involving all the beliefs, decisions, strategies and tactics which principals utilise to ensure instructional effectiveness in every classroom. Instructional leadership occurs when the principal provides direction, resources and support to both educators and learners with the aim of improving teaching and learning at a school. Good instructional leadership is the path to good teaching and learning and instructional leaders ensure a sound culture of learning and teaching in their schools at all times.

Although there are different views on the precise nature of the instructional leadership task of the principal, many authors identify

specific management functions or elements of the principal's management task that have a significant effect on teaching and learning results. Several efforts have been directed to identify commonalities within a vast array of research data on the instructional role of the principal. The following five functions generally typify instructional leadership (Krug, 1992:432-433, Parker & Day, 1997:87):

- Defining and communicating a clear mission, goals and objectives: Setting, together with the staff members, a mission, goals and objectives to realise effective teaching and learning.
- Managing curriculum and instruction: Managing and co-ordinating the curriculum in such a way that teaching time can be used optimally. Principals need to support the teaching programme and provide the resources that teachers need to carry out their task.
- Supervising teaching: Ensuring that educators receive guidance and support to enable them to teach as effectively as possible. The focus of the instructional leader should be more orientated to staff development than to performance appraisal. This implies implementing programmes that may enrich the teaching experience of educators or motivating them to attend such programmes.
- Monitoring learner progress: Monitoring and evaluating the learners' progress by means of tests and examinations. Using the results to provide support to both learners and educators to improve as well as to help parents understand where and why improvement is needed.
- Promoting instructional climate: Creating a positive school climate in which teaching and learning can take place. In a situation where learning is made exciting, where teachers and learners are supported and where there is a shared sense of purpose, learning will not be difficult.

Although these functions relate directly to the instructional leadership task of the principal, all the other management areas in a school tie within the educational aims. This indicates the interrelatedness of the various tasks of school management.

It is generally accepted that the different functions of instructional leadership can be carried out within the following two aspects or domains of school management (Fidler, 1997:33, Firestone & Wilson, 1985:19, Blase & Blase, 1999:353, Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982:40):

- Bureaucratic and structural aspects which directly influence teachers and instruction: These may be regarded as the formal tasks such as co-ordinating the curriculum, framing school goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, providing resources, monitoring learner progress and supporting professional development sessions.
- Informal aspects which indirectly influence teachers and instruction: These may include aspects of establishing a favourable and supportive climate for teaching and learning by means shared decision-making, collaboration, etc.

These two aspects may be conceptually distinct but the actions of a principal, however, may influence both simultaneously. According to Firestone and Wilson (1985:19) the allocation of resources is a good example of this — the allocation of resources that support instruction can promote commitment among teachers and signals that instructional priorities are important. Both these aspects of school management through which instructional leadership is realised indicate the relationship between the principal's behaviour, the organisational culture of the school and the culture of teaching and learning. These two methods of practising instructional leadership and their influences on the culture of teaching and learning formed the basis on which the interviews, conducted during this research, were structured.

### The organisational culture of the school and the culture of teaching and learning

The organisational culture of a school is an important aspect of school life and it has a profound effect on all the other elements of a school. Nowadays more people realise the effect that the organisational cul-

ture of the school has on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes in a school and the school as a whole. The organisational culture of a school refers to the convictions, values and expectations of the members of the school which influence the attitudes and work practices of educators, as well as learners, and have a determining influence on the culture of learning and teaching in a school (Hoy & Forsyth, 1986:99). According to Davidoff and Lazarus (1997:42) the culture of the school is the most pervasive aspect of school life, and touches and affects every other aspect in the school.

A school with an established teaching and learning culture will also have a well-developed organisational structure and instructional programme that focuses on all aspects of academic achievement and the professional development of educators. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997:42) further indicate the link between organisational culture and the culture of learning and teaching by pointing out that both the written and unwritten rules and norms of the school determine a certain pattern of behaviour. In other words, the organisational culture ratifies what is proper and ideal for the school, it exerts pressure on both learners and educators to conform to the standards and validate the high expectations or performance as outlined in the school's mission statement and policy. By means of the principal's instructional leadership task he/she can influence the organisational culture of the school by emphasising academic aspects such as staff development programmes, involving educators in decision making, providing resources, supervision and provision of instructional time.

### The culture of learning and teaching

The concept of a "culture of learning and teaching" is widely being used in the education context of South Africa. In general it refers to the attitude of all the role players towards teaching and learning and the presence of quality teaching and learning processes in schools. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997:43) identify the following aspects of a sound culture of learning and teaching:

- where all role players value the processes of teaching and learning;
- where practices reflect a commitment to teaching and learning;
- where the resources needed to facilitate this process are available;
- where the school is structured to facilitate these processes.

The following are some of the most important factors that contribute to the lack of a sound culture of learning and teaching in some of our schools (Blauw, 1998:8-9, Chisholm & Vally, 1996:5-30):

1. Negative attitudes amongst learners and educators which are remnants from the opposition against the segregated education system of the apartheid era.
2. The poor state of repair of school buildings and facilities.
3. Large shortcomings in the provision of resources, facilities and equipment.
4. Overcrowded classrooms.
5. The lack of management skills needed to deal with the challenges of school management which are crucial to forming a sound culture of learning and teaching in a school.
6. Poor relationships among principals, educators, learners and parents.

A poor culture of learning and teaching in a school refers to a school situation where proper teaching and learning has broken down. According to Chisholm and Vally (1996:1) the collapse of a culture of learning and teaching is most pronounced in secondary schools. Although schools with a lack of a culture of learning and teaching should be understood within their contexts, the following are common observable features of a poor culture of learning and teaching or a lack thereof: weak/poor attendance, educators do not have the desire to teach, tensions among the various elements of the school community, vandalism, drug abuse, high dropout rate, poor school results, weak leadership, management and administration, demotivation and low morale, disrupted authority and the poor state of buildings, facilities and resources. At the base of these features lies the absence of a sound philosophy, values and norms which shapes the deeper attitude of the

role players in the school with regard to education and schooling in general.

On the other hand schools with a sound culture of learning and teaching will display certain common characteristics: a positive school climate, sound classroom environments, sound home-school relations, effective leadership, management and administration, neat buildings and facilities, availability of resources, high professional standards by educators, healthy relationships among all role players, order and discipline, effective instructional leadership and a shared sense of purpose.

### Research design

To be able to understand the nature and impact of the instructional leadership role of the principal on the realisation of effective teaching and learning activities the following were undertaken in this research:

- A literature study of the instructional leadership task of the principal and its effects on the culture of teaching and learning.
- A qualitative study of the application of the principles and functions of the instructional leadership task of two principals in secondary schools on the East Rand with good matriculation pass rates.

The objective was to clarify the perceptions of the principals and to identify the formal and informal actions taken by the principal to give direction in the school's academic or instructional programme in order to cultivate a sound culture of teaching and learning.

### Sample

After a literature study was undertaken the second stage of the study involved the selection of the two schools displaying academic effectiveness. Purposeful sampling was used based on the schools' matriculation results during the past three years. The superintendent of education in the East Rand region was contacted to obtain permission to visit the two schools. He identified the schools and informed the principals of the planned visits. After the two schools indicated their willingness to participate the principals were contacted by the researcher to make the necessary arrangements for the visits.

The schools are two typical middle class secondary schools, situated in supportive socio-economic environments, with diverse populations of learners ranging in terms of income and family background. The choice of schools was influenced by the following two factors:

- Almost all studies on the influence of instructional leadership on the culture of teaching and learning investigated schools in the previously disadvantaged areas.
- Although the surrounding community of a school can play a role in shaping the school's culture, the principal's instructional leadership role is a key element in contributing to learner achievements, yet only a few studies on school effectiveness have focused on schools in supportive socio-economic environments (Heck, 1992:21, Dimmock & Wildy, 1995:300).

### Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the following strategies to minimize researcher bias were followed (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:404-411):

1. Triangulation of methods: interviews conducted with principals and educators, observations during normal school days, analysis of relevant school documents and a literature control were the methods utilised in the research.
2. Mechanically recorded data: all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.
3. Verbatim accounts: Direct quotations from the transcribed data were used to illustrate the participants' views.
4. Participants' language: the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, the language of the researcher and the participants.
5. Field research: the research was done at the schools in the natural location of the participants.
6. Low-inference descriptors: concrete and precise descriptions

from the interviews, observations and documents were used in the research findings.

### Data collection and analysis

Data were collected by means of the following three methods:

- Semi-structured interviews with the principal and two senior teachers of each of the schools. The principals were interviewed in their offices and the duration ranged from one and a half to two hours. The principals were asked to identify two senior teachers for the interviews. The rationale for this was to interview teachers with experience who might play important roles in managing the curriculum. The teachers were interviewed in a focus group at an arranged venue in the office block of the school and the interviews lasted for more or less an hour.
- Observations during a normal school day according to a pre-developed schedule.
- Examination of relevant school documents which included:
  - The school's mission statement
  - School and Instructional policy
  - Programmes for staff development
  - Examination and test time-tables
  - The budget of the school
  - The school's Constitution

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions. The questions focused on the two aspects or dimensions of the principal's instructional leadership role, namely, the formal and structured aspects of instructional leadership and the informal influence of the principal on the instructional programme of the school. Four focus questions were asked of the principals: How do you as a principal make provision for instructional leadership? What formal steps do you take to ensure that teachers perform their teaching duties effectively? What role do you play to influence the climate of the school in an informal way? What steps do you take in drafting the school's budget and how does it support the instructional programme? The following three questions were posed to the teachers: What formal actions does the principal take to support your teaching task? What informal support do you receive from the principal? How do you as a teacher contribute to the culture of teaching and learning?

Permission was granted by all participants to tape record the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the home language of the respondents. All the interviews were transcribed by means of a word processor. The quotations from the interviews used in this article were translated according to the original transcriptions. Data obtained from the different interviews were analysed using Tesch's approach (Tesch, 1990:89-91, Poggenpoel, 1998:334). The transcripts were studied and, in the process, units, categories and themes were identified. A literature control was conducted to identify similarities and differences and to establish this study's contribution to previous research conducted on the topic. Discussion of the results will focus on the responses from the interviews and the information obtained from the documents that were studied. The observations at the schools will be included in the discussions where applicable.

### Discussion of the results

The aim of the research was to establish the way in which principals carry out their instructional leadership task and their influence on the culture of teaching and learning at effective schools taking into account their heavy workload during the present period of transforming the schooling system. The categories emerging from the interviews generally coincided with the categories of instructional leadership identified in the literature overview.

To the initial question on how the principals make provision for instructional leadership in their busy schedules, both principals answered that they did not have the time to practise instructional or educational leadership as they wished to. Both principals indicated that many of the formal or structured instructional leadership tasks, which include aspects of curriculum management and supervision, are dele-

gated to heads of department or subject heads and that they as principals influence the instructional programme in a more indirect way. The following comments illustrate this:

School A: A lot of my [educational] competencies are delegated to the heads of department, they are quite towers of strength.

School B: ... one relies more on subject heads to give direction in the classrooms with regard to formal and informal meetings, discussions about problematic situations in the classrooms.

These views coincide with a number of findings on instructional leadership, according to which principals spend little time directly attending to teaching and learning but play a more indirect and supportive role (Haughey & MacElwain, 1992:106, Heck, 1992: 22, Dimmock & Wildy, 1995:318, Keller, 1998:2).

#### Formal bureaucratic methods

With regard to the formal instructional leadership responsibilities the following categories were identified in the interviews:

##### *Instructional policy and planning*

Both principals indicated that formal instructional leadership begins with well-designed policy documents with regard to educational matters and well-designed year and quarterly planning. The policy documents that were studied included general aims for the school as well as explanations of instructional aspects such as: subject policies, subject meetings, subject files, differentiation, assessment and discipline. Goal setting and planning is one of the formal aspects of instructional leadership mentioned in a number of studies (Haughty & MacElwain, 1992:116). Both principals stressed the importance of well-designed planning. As the principal of School A stated: "I think that the programme (year plan) creates a certain sense of security ..."

In the beginning of the year clear goals are also set by both learners and teachers. The principal of school B gives the senior learners as well as the teachers opportunities to set and explain their goals for the year. During a staff meeting at the beginning of the year the goals are discussed and during subject meetings these goals are elaborated on and discussed in more detail as they should be applied in each subject.

##### *Curriculum management and leadership*

"You should design a system that works." These are the words of the principal of School B, referring to curriculum management and leadership. Both principals indicated that the responsibility of curriculum management and leadership is shared with heads of department and subject heads and that they are minimally involved in these aspects. The system for managing the curriculum is structured according to the needs and circumstances of each school. Subject heads who may be level one teachers "... act independent, equal to the role of the head of department ... In this sense it is also recognition that is given that I think contributes to the sense of positiveness." The subject heads are responsible for the management of all aspects of the particular subject, including work allocation, time tabling and supervision.

According to a teacher in School A who is also a subject head the subject heads are responsible for aspects such as setting the subject policy, planning for the subject in the school and the implementation of any new techniques or approaches. "All new information is discussed in the subject meetings and how we should implement them ..."

Both principals indicated that they are only involved in supervision when and if they are invited by the subject heads or when they may identify certain problems. The practice of teachers being responsible for instructional management coincides with the findings of Dimmock and Wildy (1995:319):

... curriculum management is the responsibility of senior teachers and there is a tight linkage between both senior teachers and teachers and high quality teaching and learning.

##### *Learner assessment*

Academic excellence is one of the cornerstones of the success of both schools. In this area of instructional leadership both the principals play a major role. The principal of School B explained it as follows: "... with the examination results my intervention [in instructional leadership] is usually very strong ..." According to Licata and Harper (1999:473), academic emphasis is a significant characteristic of effective schools. The emphasis on academic achievements provides a shared meaning about purposes and the vehicle for integrating the behaviour of teachers and learners. Productive work takes place when the goals of the school are understood by all stakeholders (Karpicke & Murphy, 1996:27). Both principals monitored the performance of the learners through a comprehensive analysis of the examination results especially the final matriculation results. These data are used to motivate teachers to achieve according to their expressed expectations and the abilities of the learners. School A's principal explained his monitoring process as follows:

I keep record of the performance of every teacher and every group appointed to him via symbol spreadsheets, learner averages and subject averages. From Grade 6 up to Grade 12.

This principal also stressed the emphasis on academic excellence as follows:

... the priority of the school's budget should be in the interest of the child ... (the budget) should have a direct influence on the bulk of the children, in other words their [the learner's] academic work is the priority.

##### *Supervising teaching*

The direct supervision of teaching in both schools is delegated to the various subject heads. Both principals will involve themselves with direct supervision only when the need therefore arises. As the principal of School A explains:

... I do clinical supervision when required by the staff ... and when I require it ... when I get a feeling that I need to visit a specific class because the teacher cannot cope with the class or a specific learner. Classroom visits focusing on a specific problem area will be followed by a discussion between the principal and teacher.

Both principals indicated that they prefer to visit classes and provide support in an informal rather than a formal way. One of the teachers in School B expressed herself in this regard as follows:

... on an informal way ... it is more of an informal visit. He will for example merely walk past a class and decide to go in for a visit.

This coincides with the findings of Haughey and MacElwain (1992: 117) which indicated that most principals "popped in" to classrooms for brief periods which have an influence on the culture of the school. Blase and Blase (1999:361) found in their research on instructional leadership that even "walk-through" visits without dialogue and feedback by the principals have a positive impact on the teachers and encourage motivation, better planning/preparation, focus and innovation.

##### *Resource management*

For the effective management of the instructional programme of a school, time, physical and human resources must be available. Physical resources such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, infrastructure, stationery and instructional aids are important for the culture of teaching and learning and the achievement of instructional objectives (Andrews, Basom & Basom, 1991:98, Chisholm & Vally, 1996:13). Both schools have ample physical resources which are well cared for. The buildings and school grounds are neat and clean. Both principals indicated that more or less 30 % of the school's budget is allocated for the instructional programme. The budget allocations reflect the principal's interest in education and influence the culture of the school.

In both schools the instructional time is protected and managed properly. The teachers of both schools are involved in the allocation

of work and the design of their personal time tables. The principal of School A stated:

... every teacher has an input into the academic allocation of work and therefore we do not have unhappiness at the beginning of the year — they know what they will be teaching.

A teacher in School B commented: "... as a department we (teachers) sit together and decide which grades you will teach the following year, so we are involved ..."

The involvement of the teachers in decision making about the allocation of work stimulates their professional growth and influences the organisational culture of the school positively. One of the teachers commented: "... if you are happy in your subject, you give your best".

Both principals also set a high value on promoting the professional growth of the teachers. Teachers are motivated to attend workshops arranged by the department at the different teacher centres and to share these ideas with their colleagues.

#### Informal methods related to establishing a productive school climate

In both schools the principals commented that they share the instructional leadership role and that much of the formal aspects thereof are delegated to subject heads with the result that their own influence is more indirect and informal. Principals play an important role in creating and maintaining a sound and positive school climate in which learning is exciting, educators and learners are supported for their achievements and there is a shared sense of purpose — in such a climate learning will not be difficult (Krug, 1992:433). The following aspects of instructional leadership identified in the interviews can be related to the establishment of a positive school climate and contribute to establishing a sound culture of teaching and learning:

##### *Empowerment and support to teachers*

According to Heaton (in Steyn, 2000:273) empowerment is the respect for individuals and the willingness to train them, to set reasonable and clear expectations for them and to grant them autonomy to contribute meaningfully and directly to their work. The structures and methods of instructional management in both schools rely on the involvement and leadership of a number of staff members including heads of departments and teachers acting as subject heads. This system empowers teachers to work together in teams and to take the responsibility of achieving the goals of the school. The principal of School B stated:

Once again because the subject heads are so experienced it is almost possible for me to keep aloof from it (instructional leadership).

A teacher in School A commented: "... many times I have ideas and then we discuss it during a subject meeting ... I have the freedom to suggest ways in which work may be done."

According to Reitzug (1997:342), providing teachers with greater autonomy and creating opportunities for teachers to engage in professional dialogue develop a supportive environment and create a culture of commitment. A teacher in School B reported as follows:

... every opportunity that was there for me, or which he [the principal] saw or felt as an opportunity for me to grow, he provided me.

Both principals support the teachers by protecting them from pressures that may influence their instructional activities. They handle difficult discipline problems, ensure an appropriate standard of discipline in the school and take the responsibility to protect teachers from external pressures as a result of system or departmental innovations in order to sustain settings in which teachers feel safe to teach. The principal of School A explained his support in this regard as follows: "Give your problems to me. I will try and solve them while you can carry on with your work."

This view coincides with the findings of Heck (1992:29) and Fidler (1997:32) that principals can play an important role in dealing with external constituents and protecting teachers from external interference.

Apart from these two important aspects the support of teachers took on a variety of forms such as: providing resources, listening to their views, showing appreciation, providing incentives, and sharing their ideas.

##### *The example of the principal*

The personal example of the principal and the demonstration of a positive attitude are always ways in which principals influence teachers and this indirectly affects the instructional programme (Keller, 1998: 4). According to Budhal (2000: 95) principals as instructional leaders need to be role-models in every aspect of their day-to-day interactions. The teachers of both schools emphasised the positive examples of the principals. A teacher at School A commented that the principal "always has something positive to say during the daily staff meetings". Both principals also set the example of attending departmental training sessions, such as the recent sessions on the introduction of OBE, together with the staff members.

##### *Setting expectations and recognition of achievements*

Developing a school vision is an essential foundation from which the instructional activities of the school evolve (Haughey & MacElwain, 1992:108). In almost all the studies dealing with instructional leadership, defining and communicating a clear mission, goals and objectives for the school forms an important aspect of instructional leadership. As Keller (1998:7) puts it:

If there is one broad area of agreement among researchers, consultants, those who teach prospective principals, and the principals themselves, it is that schools must have a clear idea of what they are about.

Understanding the purposes and goals of the school by all stakeholders contributes to a healthy organisational culture (Karpicke & Murphy, 1996:27). The principals and teachers of both schools indicated that effective year and term planning and the setting of clear objectives form important activities in the beginning of the year. The recognition of achievements forms an ongoing activity in both schools. The principal of School B commented as follows: "During the weekly meetings in the school hall I make an issue of the importance of academic achievements." Both schools also identify the top ten academic achievers during each term and these learners receive bars during the weekly meetings in the school hall. The principal of School A commented on the academic expectations as follows:

It is a total learning culture — where one can, during the weekly meetings in the hall, during class visits, informally with the staff it [academic expectations] forms the discourse of the day.

##### *Visibility*

The teachers in School A commented on the principal's visibility as follows: "... although he is not a closed door principal he could be more on the grounds". The principal of School B stated the following in this regard:

In the course of the day I make a point of it to walk through the school building ... and to pop in, in one or two classes for a short informal visit.

The teachers of both schools did not feel threatened by the principal's "walk throughs" and "pop in" visits. To them it reflected the principal's interest and support: "... No it does not bother me, he does not walk around to check on you ..." comments a teacher in School B. A teacher in School A put it as follows: "... it [his visibility] strengthened our hand and the children liked it".

Similarly Blase and Blase (1998:119) concluded that the example of principals who walk around the school supporting the teachers' instructional efforts surpasses that of principals who abandon teachers. Walking around the school reinforces good teaching behaviour. On the issue of visible presence Andrews *et al.* (1991: 99) wrote:

Face-to-face verbal exchanges are preferred by effective principals as a way to advance the vision, mission, and ultimately the culture of the school.

## Conclusion

In this study data obtained from a literature review, interviews, observation, and the study of school documents are reported. A postulate of the study was that schools that had experienced good matriculation examination results for a number of years would be characterised by a sound culture of teaching and learning, resulting from effective instructional leadership.

The traditional perspective on instructional leadership focuses on the role of principals as leaders of hierarchical structures that may have isolated teachers from making decisions in this regard. The two thrusts of reform in the education practice in South Africa today have, however, influenced the nature of principals' work in such a way that they have to devise new and innovative practices to provide instructional leadership. The following are some of the important findings with regard to the practice of instructional leadership in the two schools that were investigated:

- In both schools there is an apparent emphasis on academic aspects by both educators and principals.
- The principals' direct involvement in instructional matters are very limited, virtually non-existent, and they influence the culture of teaching and learning in a more informal way.
- As a result of increasing responsibilities, the principals' instructional leadership task is being shared with the teachers.
- The requirements of the new curricula have also contributed to new initiatives of instructional leadership where senior teachers bear the main responsibility for instructional leadership and curriculum management.
- Subject departments are the main structural elements of instructional leadership and management.

The findings illustrate a move away from the traditional authoritarian methods of instructional leadership towards a more collaborative approach. In order for these initiatives to be effective principals need to empower teachers to be able to fulfill these roles. The approach to establishing and maintaining a sound culture of teaching and learning through the sharing of the instructional leadership responsibilities may not be applicable to all schools. However, this approach applies principles of management that have the capacity to enhance the culture of teaching and learning in other educational settings as well. The different roles carried out by the subject heads and educators in providing instructional leadership may need further inquiry.

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