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Instructional leadership practice in the context of managerialism: The case of four primary schools in Gauteng Province

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Abstract

The principal's roles as manager and instructional leader are complementary terms for explaining what s/he does daily in the school to direct the mission towards its fulfilment. However, these roles are often in tension, especially in the context of school self-management. This scenario has led to an overemphasis on routine (administrative) tasks by school managers, leaving them over-worked and with little time to devote their efforts to the core technology of schooling, the most critical and essential responsibility of school management namely, instructional leadership.

Employing a qualitative case study approach, this report explored the day-to-day instructional tasks of leaders in two primary schools in the Johannesburg East District in the Gauteng Province. It is argued, in the study, that it is necessary for school principals to distribute, collaborate and involve other SMT members in executing their instructional leadership responsibilities to enhance quality delivery of C2005. The deputy principal and school level HoDs, it is argued, should be the immediate arbiters of the tension between the principal's functions as manager and instructional leader. They should be enabled and encouraged to create a balance between meeting the school's educative goals and sharing in the instructional duties of principals. The lack of time and commitment to instructional improvement on the part of principals seriously hampers and compromises their effectiveness, teaching and learning, and student achievement.

Consistent with the Department of Education's policy framework on instructional leadership practices in schools (DoE, 2000), the findings in this study reveal that the effective implementation and reaping the benefits of Curriculum 2005 (C2005) requires collaborative practices among the SMT members (the principal, deputy principal and the heads of departments).

This study also found that instructional improvement should be regarded as core to everybody's job and not as a specialised function for an individual, the principal. This is consistent with Alvarado (in Elmore & Burney, 1997), who asserts that anyone with staff responsibility has the duty to support others directly involved in staff development. The deputy principal, the heads of department and subject heads in primary schools as formal leaders, all have an instructional responsibility to assist the principal in meeting the school's instructional goals.

KEY WORDS
Instructional Leadership, Managerial leadership, Distributed leadership, supportive school climate, professional development, parental involvement