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Conceptualisation and enactment of instructional leadership in underperforming schools in township settings in South Africa: a case study of two secondary schools in Soweto

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ABSTRACT

This research report explores the significance of instructional leadership in raising learner outcomes in underperforming secondary schools in township settings. Literature suggests that, if principals possess strong instructional leadership skills, then the decline of the culture of teaching and learning may possibly be resolved (Blasé and Blasé, 1999; Elmore and City, 2007). This study was therefore done to investigate how the principals' conceptualisation and enactment of instructional leadership might possibly promote an enhanced culture of teaching and learning in township settings.

Research shows that some progress has been made in understanding relationships between instructional leadership and student achievement, but most of the complexities in instructional leadership have not been researched (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). Additionally, Hallinger (2003) argues that there is still little knowledge about conceptualisation and application of instructional leadership by principals in schools (Spillane, Diamond & Jita, 2003). This research explored the instructional leadership practices that principals engage in as they enact instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning in the two secondary schools.

The study was based on the three fundamental questions which were meant to investigate the conceptualisation and enactment of instructional leadership and the challenges principals face in township settings. It adopted the qualitative research design and it was conducted through the case study approach. Interviews and observations were used to generate relevant data to the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the four participants who were interviewed separately, one principal, one vice principal and two teachers.

The study found out that the vice principal and principal 1 understand the concept of instructional leadership and they apply the concept as they monitor, supervise and assist teachers during their instructional practice in the schools. They also value the need to define the school vision for all members to participate towards achieving the school goals of teaching and learning. However, despite the schools' efforts to raise learner outcomes, the challenges associated with multiple deprivations like lack of resources, educational poverty, political activities and teenage pregnancies tend to hinder their progress.

Based on the findings of the research, the researcher concludes that even though the principals engage in the whole school supervisory roles as they apply different instructional practices, whether what they are doing is correct or not, this is beyond the scope of this study. The researcher therefore recommends for the need of ongoing professional development for school leaders on the issues of instructional leadership especially in township settings.

Key words: instructional leadership, underperforming schools, multiple deprivation, educational poverty, township settings, challenges, teaching and learning.