



# CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR OPTIMAL LEARNING IN A CONTEXT OF SHARED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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A growing body of scholarship links classroom management to effective teaching and learning. This article looks at the 'what' of classroom management that contributes to optimal learning. A qualitative investigation was undertaken based on individual interviews conducted at three primary schools in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Northwest Province. The findings show that functional arrangements in the classroom brought about by rules of conduct democratically determined engender an environment of consideration. The development of a caring environment and the fostering of a philosophy of respect create a sense of belonging that motivates learning engagement. Teachers who strive to be subject experts and who arrange classroom space and activities in such a way to involve all pupils in active participation contribute to self-realisation. A main limitation to classroom management is the lack of providing sufficiently for the learning needs of gifted pupils. The findings contribute to the discourse on classroom management for the sake of optimal learning.

*Key concepts: shared instructional leadership, functional arrangements, caring environment, philosophy of respect, sense of belonging, professional conduct*

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## Claskamerbestuur vir optimale leer binne 'n konteks van gedeelde onderrigleierskap

'n Groterwordende getal kundiges koppel klaskamerbestuur aan effektiewe onderrig en leer. Hierdie artikel kyk na die 'wat' van klaskamerbestuur wat tot optimale leer bydra. 'n Kwalitatiewe ondersoek gebaseer op individuele onderhoudvoering is by drie laerskole in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal en die Noord-Wes provinsie onderneem. Die bevindings dui daarop dat funksionele reëlins in die klaskamer, wat deur gedragsreëls wat demokraties bepaal is teweeggebring word, 'n konsidererende omgewing tot gevolg het. Die ontwikkeling van 'n omgewing van omgee en die kweek van 'n filosofie van repek lei tot die skep van 'n gevoel van behoort wat leerbetrokkenheid aanmoedig. Onderwysers wat daarna streef om vakspesialiste te wees en wat klaskamerruimte en aktiwiteite op sodanige wyse reël dat alle leerlinge aktief betrokke is, dra tot selfverwesenliking by. 'n Belangrike leemte met klaskamerbestuur is die in gebreke bly om genoegsaam in die leerbehoefte van begaafde leerlinge te voorsien. Die bevindings dra by tot die diskoers oor klaskamerbestuur ter wille van optimale leer.

*Kernbegrippe: gedeelde onderrigleierskap, funksionele reëlins, omgewing van omgee, filosofie van respek, gevoel van behoort, professionele gedrag*





## 1. INTRODUCTION

Optimal learning depends on a classroom environment that is arranged in such a way that the teaching and learning process occurs in a structured but spontaneous manner. The fact that pupil behaviour is often in reaction to factors prevailing within the classroom demands that teachers arrange for this structured spontaneity through constructive approaches that engage pupils optimally (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005; Scarlet, Ponte & Singh, 2009). In this regard teachers are major role players who share accountability for learning achievement together with the school's executive management. This accountability prompts teachers to constantly rethink their own practices to accomplish instructional improvement (Bush, 2013; Hallinger, 2011). One way in which teachers achieve pupil learning is through constructive classroom approaches that promote an environment for optimal development. In this article the focus is on constructive approaches in the classroom that contribute to optimal learning.

Much research has been conducted on classroom practices and the link between classroom practices and pupil achievement (Arthur-Kelly *et al.*, 2007; Veverka, 2011; Wenglinsky, 2002). The refinement of classroom practice within the context of a professional learning community, as is prevalent at effective schools, has also been researched extensively (Bacolod & Tobias, 2006; Brunello & Rocco, 2008; DuFour, 2004; Ertesvag, 2011; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). The focus of these studies is on the 'what' and 'how' of knowledge facilitation and the manner of assessing competency gain. What is less reported is the functional structuring of the classroom ecology to ensure a constructive environment for optimal gain. The focus of this article is, therefore, on the arrangement of the classroom environment to ensure optimal learning. As the core mission of the school is not only to ensure that pupils are taught, but also, especially, that they learn, organising the environment for constructive engagement contributes to the discourse on improved teaching and learning.

In this article the literature on managing teaching and learning frames the analysis of the 'what' of classroom management to be conducive for learning. A model for instructional leadership by Hallinger (2001) provides a theoretical framework to interpret the findings of the qualitative investigation. The article concludes with a discussion of the research findings to serve as guidelines for teachers on 'what works' in the classroom to prompt optimal pupil engagement. Within the context of this study, learning is equated with self-realisation relating to assisting pupils holistically to become everything they are capable of becoming based on appropriate knowledge, skills and behaviour.

## 2. AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL TO DIRECT TEACHING AND LEARNING

Based on the model by Hallinger (2001), instructional leadership is grounded in three dimensions, namely the dimension of defining the school's mission, the dimension of managing the instructional programme, and the dimension

of promoting a positive school-learning culture. In a shared instructional leadership context, teachers answer to all three of these dimensions by promoting their school's mission through the way they manage classroom functioning to sustain a culture of teaching and learning.

With regard to the dimension of defining the school's mission, teachers promote their school's mission by communicating high expectations for their pupils (Marks & Printy, 2003; Southworth, 2004). This they do by creating a supportive, caring environment through the arrangement of the physical setting and lesson organisation in such a way that time is used productively and pupils are motivated to engage constantly in learning (Savage & Savage, 2010). It is true that the instructional programme in every classroom has the same elements, following the guidelines of a standards-based education. However, teachers individually mix their own flavour into the design by structuring their classrooms and lessons in such a way so as to ensure motivated engagement.

Teachers' input to the dimension of managing the instructional programme relates to facilitating curriculum contents through carefully considered teaching methods and sound assessment practices (Jenkins & Pfeifer, 2012). These practices are based on the centralised standards for learning and the assessment of that learning. In this regard teachers monitor their pupils' progress by analysing pupils' achievement with formative and summative assessment and by acting on this achievement through their knowledge of teaching methods, learning standards, and classroom dynamics (Bush, 2013; Du Plessis, 2013). Within a shared instructional leadership context relating to a professional learning community, teachers refine their knowledge and skills by sharing good teaching practice and classroom management which is then generalised throughout the school.

With regard to the dimension of promoting a positive school-learning culture that fosters and rewards learning, teachers respect instructional time and they arrange the classroom environment in such a way that the focus is on optimal performance (Arthur-Kelly *et al.*, 2007). One example of a constructive focus is the arrangement of the classroom setting to maintain high visibility which encourages a time-on-task approach. To sustain constructive practices that engender a positive school-learning culture teachers employ what MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed (2004) define as 'reflective intelligence', namely the constant and systematic reflection on practice that serves as a basis for shared leadership and collective and individual development.

In summary, the effective organising of classroom ecology forms an important part of the three-dimensional instructional leadership model constructed by Hallinger (2001). By emphasising high expectations for pupils through reflective teaching practices in a classroom environment where lesson time is respected, a climate that supports teaching and learning is maintained. How this is done through management approaches and settings in the classroom is discussed next.





### 3. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR OPTIMAL ENGAGEMENT

The aim of classroom management is two-fold, namely to ensure order and security, and to establish and maintain the classroom environment in such a way that educational goals can be accomplished optimally (Arthur-Kelly *et al.*, 2007; Palumbo & Sanacore, 2007). Considering these aims classroom management can be interpreted as all the things teachers do to foster pupil involvement based on security which is effected through positive relationships that are enhanced by constructive classroom routines.

Classroom management is realised through an integrated approach of prevention and intervention strategies (Belvel, 2010). Crucial to prevention strategies is the constant reflection on the learning environment to determine whether the environment engages all pupils meaningfully. Teachers pursue prevention strategies by sharing professional reflections with their colleagues and by ascertaining the spectrum to be covered in order to engage pupils at their appropriate levels of ability (DuFour, 2004; Ertesvag, 2011; Veverka, 2011). Positive relationships that engender security create the foundation for interventions in pursuit of active pupil participation. These relationships are established through verbal and non-verbal communication by means of which messages are channelled and feedback received. With regard to non-verbal communication, facial expressions, eye and body movements, body positioning, voice quality, and aspects of proximity, touch and gesture account for the meanings pupils construct from messages (Stanulis & Manning, 2002). Message reception is also influenced by a child's emotional state, past experience, and level of interest (Arthur-Kelly *et al.*, 2007). As instructional leaders teachers consider all these contingencies in their arranging of a constructive and caring classroom environment.

Classroom management implies a management of content, conduct and covenant (Muijs & Reynold, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Managing content encapsulates space, materials, equipment and pupil positioning in order to conduct lessons constructively. Managing conduct pertains to procedural skills which teachers employ to ensure order and stability in the classroom. Covenant management focuses on the group of pupils as a social system with unique features that prompt the management of interpersonal relationships in a particular way to ensure active participation for optimal learning (Belvel, 2010; Taylor, 2009). With reference to content, conduct and covenant, teachers as classroom managers are accountable for a climate of interpersonal care in which time and space are organised in such a way that all pupils are happily and constructively engaged.

### 4. CONSTRUCTIVE CLASSROOM SETTINGS

The management of classroom ecology represents routines and procedures that promote task involvement, peer interactions and attentive behaviour (Pickett & Fraser, 2010; Simonsen *et al.*, 2008; Taylor, 2009). One important aspect of classroom ecology is functional seating arrangements that promote

scanning and teachers having access to the desks of all pupils. Seating arrangements determine, for example, the kind of interaction and the kind of activity approach, so a circular seating pattern encourages interactive participation whereas row seating promotes independent task completion (Simonsen *et al.*, 2008). A subtle aspect of classroom design which impacts on academic achievement is the overall aesthetic appearance of the setting which subconsciously contributes to aspiring to high ideals (Moore, 2009).

Linked to a functional physical environment is classroom ethics that engender value-based engagement. Teachers are accountable for the holistic development of their pupils through clear and meaningful routines and procedures to prompt productivity and consideration (Savage & Savage, 2010). These routines are introduced according to pupils' level of understanding and with regular reminders for proper reinforcement. Practising ethics-based routines and procedures fosters polite and diligent behaviour resulting in an orderly and content classroom environment (Arthur-Kelly *et al.*, 2007; Veverka, 2011). Pupils exposed to these value-based engagements experience a sense of inner balance and wholeness with others resulting in them being more responsibly independent and socially competent (Moore, 2009; Roscoe & Orr, 2010).

The consulted literature on teachers sharing instructional leadership responsibilities to account for pupil development was considered with the empirical investigation into classroom management for optimal learning.

### 5. RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

To understand the 'what' of classroom approaches to be conducive for learning, I proceeded from an interpretive paradigm using individual interviewing. Concurring with Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011), I selected the qualitative case study genre for an in-depth understanding of the situation of those involved, as well as of the meaning they derived from their situation. Since my interest was in process as this process related to arrangements in the classroom, my study entailed a rich description of the context and operation of the case (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), namely classroom management for optimal learning.

Based on convenience in terms of accessibility (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) and purposive sampling (Toma, 2011), three public primary schools were selected, one each from Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Northwest Province. Purposive selection was based on the fact that all three selected schools scored a minimum of 75% for the 2013 Annual National Assessment (ANA) carried out by the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) to determine literacy and numeracy levels in Grades 1 to 6 and 9. I acknowledge that regardless of ANA's aim to increase accountability at school level and provide support with classroom practice, no statistical or methodological foundation exists for comparison of ANA results over time or across grades (Spaull, 2015). In fact, the ANA endeavour lacks an independent





quality assurance body because the tests are set, marked and reported on by the DoBE; there is continuous evidence of cheating with the administering of the ANA tests at school level; and a character of politics-tainted-sentiment is implied with the reporting on the ANA test results (Chisholm & Wildeman, 2013; Spaul, 2015; Van der Berg, 2016). Because of these reasons, the ANA test scores cannot be considered to compare performance with regard to claims about improvements or deteriorations across grades or over time. The ANA test scores can, however, be regarded as a relative indication of children's performance compared to others within a specific class, a specific school, and a specific province, for the specific test (Spaul, 2015; Van der Berg, 2016). Therefore, taking cognisance of the ANA test score limitations, and by acknowledging pupils' innate abilities and the influence of parents on their children's performance, ANA test scores were considered as a relative, but fairly feasible indication of teaching quality with related quality of classroom management approaches.

The three research sites had, on average, 500 pupils and 15 teachers with the parent community characterised mainly as working class. The participants comprised Heads of Department and teachers. The Heads of Department were selected for individual interviewing as they were the chief instructional leaders accountable for teaching and learning in their specific learning phases. I anticipated that they would be in a position to reflect meaningfully on the 'what' and 'why' of classroom management approaches applied by teachers under their jurisdiction. Five teachers from each school teaching Grades 3 to 7 were purposefully selected for individual interviewing. Selection of teacher participants was based on the indicators of years of teaching experience which also related to seniority in their teaching position. I regarded five years of teaching experience at the same school as a minimum criterion to have become competent in managing classroom ecology in such a way to ensure successful teaching and learning. The total number of participants who took part in the empirical investigation was 18.

All the participants shared a common indicator for selection, namely that of being concerned teachers reflectively pursuing classroom management practices conducive to effective teaching and learning. In line with the suggestions by Toma (2011) on rigour in the research approach, I triangulated the judgement claims of the different participants in terms of participant response to the same question asked. With follow-up prompts for increased clarity arranged through intensive engagement (each interview lasted at least one hour), I was able to distinguish between specific and vague statements. This enabled me to eliminate inconsistencies in seeking to determine the participants' objective opinions of what they observed, on a prolonged basis, as good classroom management in pursuit of optimal learning. On comparing the data from the 18 individual interviews that represented different participants from different situations and with different interpretations of reality, I found regularities and recurring patterns. This rigour produced a comprehensive and context-rich set of findings relevantly linked to theory. All 18 interviews were guided by the same question formulated as follows: What do you consider as important classroom

management approaches to contribute to optimal learning?

I used qualitative content analysis based on Tesch's model (De Vos, 2005) to ensure that all the perspectives and issues that arose from the data were included in the report. I referred to Guba's trustworthiness model as explained by Toma (2011) to ensure the authenticity of my findings in terms of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. I triangulated the research findings from the empirical investigation with the research findings from the literature. I guaranteed the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their disclosures at all times during the research.

## 6. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Classroom management is discussed under six themes. These themes, relating to the question posed during the interviews and concurring with consulted literature, pertain to the aspects understood as forming an important part of classroom management to promote successful learning. The themes relate to the importance of functional arrangements, a shared sense of constructive behaviour, a caring environment, a philosophy of respect, belonging and self-realisation, and the value of professional conduct. My discussion of these themes is substantiated by verbatim excerpts from the interviews. For the sake of confidentiality and authenticity, I distinguish the fifteen teachers as T1, T2 and so on and the three Heads of Department as H1, H2 and H3.

### 6.1 Functional arrangements

In line with the dimension of promoting a positive school-learning culture (Hallinger, 2001) participants identified structure and boundaries as functional arrangements that engender learning responsiveness. Participants explained that where there is structure there are boundaries, and functional arrangements *'are emphasising logical structure and knowing one's boundaries'* (T9). Pupils understand structure as *'lessons have a logical flow'* (H3), and there is *'productive use of time'* (T9). Boundaries promote clarity and reassurance. As classroom activities mostly fall within the three broad categories of direct instruction, working time, and individual silent time, reassurance is arranged by pointing out to pupils the type of behaviour that the activity requires. Knowing what the required behaviour is and having clarity on the demarcated activity boundaries, pupils *'understand where they should be, where to direct their attention, how to participate, with whom they can work together'* (H2), all for the sake of an increased responsiveness to learning opportunities.

The functionality of the physical classroom setting reinforces a positive culture of teaching and learning. Participants emphasised that physical settings influence pupils' behaviour and expectations because, if the classroom is chaotic, *'learners tend to behave in the same disorganised manner'* (T4). As the classroom is set up to accommodate pupils to learn, the classroom environment must convey a learning culture of being comfortably focused on *'the seriousness of education'* (H1). The classroom needs, therefore, to be clean and ventilated and *'learners occupied with applicable resources for the day'* (T6).







Participants agreed that the traditional arranging of desks in rows remains most conducive to reinforcing accountability because *'learner-to-learner interaction is limited [and] independent on-task activity is improved'* (T7). Linking desks in rows with the teacher's desk positioned in the front left or right of the classroom sustains a positive learning culture enabling the teacher *'to reach a learner's desk in a matter of seconds'* (H1) for the necessary assistance with learning.

A crucial part of classroom functionality contributing to a positive school-learning culture is constructive discipline to counter problematic pupil behaviour because *'learners need a peaceful and quiet space in which to learn'* (T12). Warnings and demerits are followed by intervention by the Head of Department and consultations with parents. Constructive parent involvement is maintained in that parents' position as primary educators of morality is acknowledged and called upon. Teachers explained that although the parent corps is *'not literate'* (T1), they get *'parents' moral support'* (T2) and *'more often than not the intervention is very short'* (T4). In serious cases which are *'often linked to dysfunctional families ... the only outlet for a learner is to misbehave'* (T1), recommendations are made for support from the Psychological Guidance and Special Education Services. However, in the majority of cases honest discussions with parents about their children's misbehaviour and ways to support their children to engage in appropriate conduct resulted in sustaining functionality in the classroom for optimal learning.

## 6.2 A shared sense of constructive behaviour

Related to the dimension of managing the instructional programme (Hallinger, 2001), participants emphasised that the classroom environment must consist of constructive actions based on logical rules and procedures mutually negotiated. These negotiations represent discussions on classroom limits which specify the expected and forbidden actions in the classroom as well as the consequences of breaking these limits. With reference to classroom etiquette, *'head and hand knowledge becomes heart knowledge'* (T15) when teachers involve pupils in discussions on what needs to be done and under what conditions. Participants acknowledged the importance of showing rather than telling the way because *'when the teacher listens, learners listen too'* (T12), with the result that classroom conduct is harmoniously based on *'rights with responsibilities'* (T15) and with *'consequences for actions'* (T10).

Participant teachers implemented procedures that enhance constant focus. These procedures involve aspects such as entering and exiting the classroom, making transitions, handing in homework, going to the sickroom, late coming, distribution of books, office referrals and going to the restroom. The approach with these routines is to *'regularly reinforce what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, how it needs to be done, and what are the repercussions'* (T12). With regard to entering the classroom, for example, *'learners cannot enter their classroom without being organised, they have to wait in two straight lines... the girls enter the classroom first and then the boys'* (T8). Entering the classroom in this structured way prompts focus and the condition of being instantly tuned-in to the learning that lies

ahead. The same procedure applies to being dismissed for break, when pupils leave the classroom *'row by row, form their lines and move towards the playgrounds'* (T6) instilling an orderly approach to enjoying one's right to relaxation. Further, leaving the classroom during lesson time needs to be motivated with *'a permission card'* (T3) from the teacher fostering an alertness to be answerable for one's deeds.

Part of classroom routine that contributes to constructive teaching and learning is classroom comfort, neatness and safety. Pupils are responsible to *'clean the classroom'* (T2), *'open and close windows'* (T14), and *'switch lights on and off'* (T11) which underwrites an environment optimally conducive to learning. With regard to safety protocol, pupils are coached not to *'shout or run'* (T7) while evacuating their classrooms because such behaviour *'jeopardises efficiency'* (T7). Practising all these classroom routines and procedures represents concerted efforts to foster focused behaviour and accountability, thereby contributing to efficiency and symbiosis as a basis for effective teaching and learning.

## 6.3 A caring environment

Aligned with the dimension of defining the school's mission (Hallinger, 2001), it was clear from the interviews that a caring environment is created in which high expectations are communicated. This is done through connecting behaviour which relates to listening, supporting, encouraging and trusting while disconnecting behaviour is negated such as criticising, blaming, complaining, and threatening. A caring environment in which high expectations are communicated demands *'knowing the learner [in order] to understand the learner'* (T13). For that reason it is important to know every pupil's name and *'something about each learner'* (T13). When *'chatting to learners about their pets, brothers and sisters'* (T10), it shows genuine interest while simultaneously obtaining knowledge about pupils' home background to fuel the conveying of realistic expectations. Another functional component of a caring environment is depicting the teacher as a fellow human who can be approached. This is realised when teachers applicably *'tell learners about [themselves] yourself'* (H1).

A caring environment in which realistic ideals are communicated also relates to acknowledgement by using learners' work and the resources they brought from home reflecting their background and interests. Further, when teachers *'relate lesson content to the learners' lives'* (H1), pupils experience the situation as familiar and are then able to relate the content to their own situations so as to construct their own meanings within a context of mutual rapport. A constructive way of non-verbally communicating care and high ideals in the sense of *'we are here, now, together, to work and learn'* (T1) without threat or impossible challenges, is to *'smile or wink'* (T1) at pupils during the lesson. Participants pointed out that to sustain a sense of care and encouragement it is important to make time to talk to pupils about topics that interest them, for no reason other than to make the classroom situation and general school day interesting and exciting.





Participants explained that part of a caring and motivating environment is the association with the classroom itself in terms of understanding the functionality of all aspects pertaining to the learning environment. As many pupils enter school from a totally different environment than the one they are familiar with at home, pupils need explanations on aspects such as *'why desks are set in a certain way, why certain charts are on the wall, why windows must be open, why sufficient light, why a desk for each learner'* (T8). A further aspect pointed out as important in sustaining high expectations is to encourage and reward pupils consistently for good work. Positive reinforcement takes the form of *'a thank you, a hug, a bit of extra time for reading, or painting in the art class'* (T3). Recognition must also be given for behaviour that improved because *'if it is not recognised it will change to bad behaviour again'* (T14). An important extension of the classroom as a caring environment in which high expectations are communicated is the sustaining of good relationships with parents, because parents *'dictate how successful learning is'* (H2). Positive relationships with parents are developed and sustained through messages in pupils' homework books and through SMS. Regular parents' evenings provide the opportunity to discuss pupil progress and ways of empowering parents to assist their children with their scholastic development.

#### 6.4 A philosophy of respect

With reference to the dimensions of defining the school's mission and promoting a positive school-learning culture (Hallinger, 2001) participants agreed on the importance of fostering a philosophy of respect through classroom functioning. It was clear from the interviews that the striving for high ideals related to having respect for oneself, for all living things and for the environment at large. This was engendered by placing a high premium on the practising of a value system of diligence, courtesy, honesty and of conserving of the own. Encouraging pupils to live with respect was motivated by generativity: *'We were taught that respect, to value certain things, to work hard, and we are trying to teach the same thing to our learners'* (H1). This is done through a practise-what-one-preaches approach of *'I respect you, you respect me'* (T1). Respect interpreted as conservation which prompted that *'learners are taught to look after what they have'* (H1), manifested in a school-learning culture of reassurance that *'when a window pane breaks, it was by accident'* (T3). Respect was also fostered for community well-being by encouraging pupils to participate in community care projects as a classroom effort. In line with striving for high ideals community care participation was encouraged by motivating the value that *'it is not always for take, you have to consider the next person'* (T4).

The philosophy of respect for everyone and everything included respect for time as a major component of managing the instructional programme in such a way to sustain a positive school-learning culture. As late-coming affects the time spent on teaching and learning, thus hampering the quality of engagement, punctuality in order to have sufficient time for the learning process is treated as non-negotiable. Participants agreed that they were preparing pupils *'for the world of work'*

(T15) and they therefore needed to instil constructive values in their pupils relating to focus and punctuality. In addition, and as part of every school's mission statement, respect in the classroom is also understood as respect for dignity which prompts the notion of addressing each pupil's distinct needs in a professional way to ensure that each learner *'is being moulded into a happy citizen that is fitting for the country'* (T11).

#### 6.5 Belonging and self-realisation

Alignment to the dimension of promoting a positive school-learning culture (Hallinger, 2001) included that pupils should experience a sense of belonging and being part of *'one happy family'* (T4) with their names appearing on their desks and didactic supplies. Linked to this affirmation of existence is the assigning of classroom-related duties because, to sustain that sense of belonging, *'every member of the group must be involved, must have something to do'* (T9). Classroom duties involve classroom maintenance tasks such as opening and closing windows, overseeing individual responsibility for daily litter clean-up, and general classroom neatness. Classroom duties also involve lesson-related tasks such as distributing and collecting books and supplies, overseeing smooth transitions within the classroom, and managing orderly line formation for movements to next locations. *'Errand duty'* (T11) is rated prestigious amongst pupils indicating potential leadership within the group.

Carrying out these classroom duties prompts self-realisation and character building to affirm a positive school-learning culture. Participants pointed out that the *'very reserved show their steel with task performance'* (T7) whereas poorly behaved learners who are tasked with monitoring responsibilities are then *'so excited they become better behaved learners'* (T7). To sustain these opportunities for self-realisation within a context of belonging, *'cooperation between teachers, as learners move from year to year'* (T13), is important. By briefing the next year's teacher on the circumstances of each individual pupil, continuity is facilitated and opportunities created for optimal development which reinforces a positive school-learning culture.

#### 6.6 Professional conduct

Crucial to the dimension of managing the instructional programme (Hallinger, 2001) is teachers' knowledge of their subjects and their well-preparedness for each lesson. Participants agreed that there is *'a direct correlation between being well prepared and managing one's class well, the one complements the other'* (H3). When teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and are well-prepared for every lesson, *'learners respect [them] for that'* (T3). The opposite, however, also applies. Because of pupils' well-developed judgemental abilities *'they can size you up in a minute ... this teacher is going to be messing around'* (T5). Related to learners' accurate judgements on teacher preparedness are their competencies in using the internet to acquire subject-related information. As *'learners are technologically minded'* (H3), the incorporation of technology into lessons encourages pupil engagement. Knowledge facilitation, and to *'build on what learners know'* (T9), therefore





needs to incorporate technology and the use of electronic equipment as didactical resources.

An important part of professional conduct and the successful management of the instructional programme is teachers' passion for their vocational calling because *'if the teacher is excited about the subject matter, the learners are engaged with the teacher and the content'* (T1). This engagement is enhanced with the teacher moving around in the classroom to teach from various areas which sends the message of being interested and available to provide equal access to all pupils. Constructive feedback on pupils' responses includes acknowledging positive inputs while maintaining a focus on attaining specified goals to solidify learners' accurate understanding of the subject content. However, participants were concerned that the additional time spent on pupils who needed extra assistance happened to the detriment of gifted learners. Participants were in agreement that *'not much has been done to motivate learners that are gifted ... these learners need specialised education in the different learning areas'* (T7). Classroom management for optimal learning must include self-realisation opportunities for every child, including the gifted.

## 7. DISCUSSION

The following discussion of the empirical research findings, as interpreted using Hallinger's (2001) model for instructional leadership, represents guidelines for teachers on constructive classroom management approaches to arrange for optimal learning.

Within a shared instructional leadership context, teachers must take the lead in their classrooms to direct their pupils to optimal performance. This teachers must do by enacting the school's mission (first dimension of Hallinger's (2001) instructional leadership model) through acknowledging each pupil and communicating high expectations in a caring environment that encourages learning engagement. To ensure a context of caring, teachers must pursue functional rules which they and their pupils should mutually agree upon to sustain an orderly micro-environment based on responsible rights and consequence-considered actions. These rules, that prompt courteous behaviour, should relate to consideration and politeness with, amongst others, greeting, entering and leaving the classroom, and distributing and gathering didactic materials. Teachers must also apply functional rules that sustain classroom comfort, neatness and safety. The application of these two sets of rules contribute to harmony in the classroom and what Moore (2009) explains as a sense of inner balance and wholeness with others that prompts responsiveness and a striving for high ideals. The school's mission must also be portrayed through a caring classroom environment where teachers know the names and family backgrounds of their pupils and where they are alert to their pupils' interests. In line with the work by Arthur-Kelly *et al.* (2007), teachers must ensure sound relationships with their pupils to prompt positive associations with the classroom as a 'home' environment which promotes spontaneity and courage for optimal learning.

Managing the instructional programme (the second dimension of Hallinger's (2001) instructional leadership model) requires teachers to arrange purposeful learning opportunities in their classrooms. These opportunities must empower pupils to manage their own time and tasks in a constructive manner. Purposeful learning opportunities are dependent on a sense of safety in the classroom which teachers must maintain by dealing with improper behaviour in a structured manner involving the moral support of parents as primary educators. Following a strategy of prevention (Belvel, 2010), teachers must arrange desk positioning in such a way that pupils are encouraged to adopt a time-on-task attitude. This attitude thrives on interesting lessons which teachers must arrange by being well-prepared and being subject experts through lifelong learning endeavours. To facilitate expert-based content effectively teachers must be familiar with the nuances of verbal and non-verbal communication and the importance of incorporating technology for today's technologically minded learners. Acknowledging the importance of feedback on assessment for sustained development (Veverka, 2011), teachers must provide constructive feedback on outcomes not met and praise for outcomes successfully achieved. Arranging purposeful learning opportunities includes catering for differentiated needs. This includes that teachers must challenge the competencies of gifted pupils because the developmental needs of gifted pupils are as important as supporting low achievers to satisfactory progress.

In order to promote a positive school-learning culture (the third dimension of Hallinger's (2001) instructional leadership model), teachers must foster an ethos of respect in their classrooms which pertains to living considerately and valuing time as a commodity to be spent constructively. Punctuality must therefore be rated as non-negotiable. Accommodating each pupil as a unique person who contributes to the well-functioning of the classroom must be pursued unconditionally. By fostering the virtues of punctuality, dignity and consideration teachers must promote a sense of belonging where responsibility is practised and self-realisation is achieved. Ensuring continuity with education (Savage & Savage, 2010), pupils' self-realisation must be sustained by current year teachers briefing the teachers of the following year on each individual pupil's circumstances. This will ripple through to each child experiencing a sense of belonging in each following classroom and in the school at large to sustain optimal learning for satisfactory progress.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Based on the part teachers as classroom leaders play in a context of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2001), opportunities for optimal learning are promoted by constructive classroom management approaches. These approaches pertain to maintaining functional procedures in a caring classroom environment in which respect and courteous behaviour engender a sense of belonging to serve as a stimulus for classroom participation. Teachers that strive to have thorough knowledge of their subject content and to be well-prepared for every lesson engage pupils optimally resulting in self-actualisation. Challenges exist, however, to provide sufficiently for the learning needs of gifted pupils.





The findings contribute to classroom management as a shared instructional leadership endeavour in the sense of providing guidelines to teachers on what features to consider when arranging for classroom ecology that is conducive to optimal learning. To ensure that optimal learning implies opportunities for all pupils, it is recommended that further research be conducted on ways to accommodate the specific learning needs of gifted pupils within the classroom. Further, the research was conducted at three schools only. It is recommended that the research be extended to include a cross-section of teachers and a cross-section of schools for a more holistic understanding of classroom functioning for optimal learning as this functioning pertains to differing contexts.

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