

Constructive Classroom Management for Optimal Learning in a Context of Shared Instructional Leadership

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RUNNING HEAD CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR OPTIMAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT 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 and focus group interviews conducted at three primary schools in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Northwest Province. The findings show that order and stability in the classroom brought about by rules of conduct democratically determined engender an environment conducive to learning. The development of positive relationships and the fostering of respect and consideration create a sense of belonging that motivates learning engagement. Teachers as subject experts who arrange classroom space and activities in such a way to involve all pupils in active participation contribute to self-actualisation. 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.

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. Teachers account for this structured spontaneity by ensuring that the support and development of pupils are realised through the implementation of effective classroom practices. Realising that pupil behaviour is often in reaction to factors prevailing within the classroom, effective teachers focus on systematic approaches to support pupils to be academically engaged in constructive and caring classroom environments (Muijs and Reynolds 2005; Scarlet et al. 2009).

In this regard teachers are major role players in a setting of shared instructional leadership where they share accountability for learning achievement with the school's executive management (Du Plessis 2013). Fuelled by the complexities of teaching and learning within a climate of increasing accountability, effective teachers constantly rethink their own practices to implement new classroom strategies to accomplish the goal of instructional improvement. As instructional leaders, teachers influence the learning process within their classrooms, thus contributing to a broadening of the shared instructional leadership concept to include pupil learning (Hallinger 2011; Bush 2013). In that regard teachers ensure that the support and development of their pupils are realised through the implementation of effective classroom approaches to promote an environment conducive to optimal learning.

Much research has been conducted on classroom practices and the link between classroom practices and pupil achievement (Wenglinsky 2002; Arthur-Kelly 2007; Veverka 2011). The refinement of classroom practice within the context of a professional learning community, as is prevalent at effective schools, has also been researched extensively (DuFour 2004; Bacolod and Tobias 2006; Brunello and Rocco 2008; Vescio et al. 2008; Ertesvag 2011). 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 the optimal achievement of knowledge gain. The focus of this article is, therefore, on the arrangement of the classroom environment to ensure conditions conducive to successful 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 to understand classroom management for optimal learning (Hallinger 2001) provides a theoretical framework underlying the qualitative investigation aimed at understanding constructive classroom management approaches. The article concludes with a discussion of the research findings on ‘what works’ in the classroom to prompt optimal pupil engagement. Within the context of this study, optimal learning is equated to self-actualisation relating to assisting pupils holistically to become everything they are capable of becoming.

Instructional leadership to direct teaching and learning

Based on Hallinger’s (2001) conceptualisation, instructional leadership is grounded in three dimensions: defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting a positive school-learning culture. In a shared instructional leadership context, teachers as co-leaders fulfil a major role in promoting the school’s mission through the way they manage teaching and learning in their classrooms to sustain a culture of teaching and learning.

Effective teachers promote their school’s mission by constantly communicating high expectations for pupils (Marks and Printy 2003). In this regard they fulfil teacher leadership by creating a supportive and caring environment which includes arranging the physical environment and organising lessons in such a way to make productive use of time while motivating their pupils to achieve optimal learning (Savage and Savage 2010). While the instructional programme in every classroom has the same elements, following the guidelines of a standards-based education, effective teachers mix their own flavour into the design by structuring their classrooms and lessons in such a way to ensure constructive engagement (Arthur-Kelly et al. 2007; Du Plessis 2013).

Teachers contribute to managing the instructional programme by facilitating curriculum contents through carefully considered teaching methods and sound assessment practices based on the centralised standards required for learning, and the assessments linked to those standards (Hallinger 2001; Jenkins and Pfeifer 2012). As instructional leaders in their classrooms, teachers monitor their pupils’ progress through analysing and acting on pupils’ achievement with formative and summative assessment, and through direct knowledge of teaching practices, learning standards and classroom dynamics (Bush 2013; Du Plessis 2013). Within a shared instructional leadership context relating to a professional learning community, effective teachers share good teaching practice and classroom management which is then generalised throughout the school (Southworth 2004; Bush 2013).

Promoting a positive school-learning culture that fosters and rewards learning relates to having respect for instructional time and ensuring that teaching and learning are achieved in

an environment consciously arranged for optimal performance. In this regard effective teachers pursue constructive practice by arranging their classrooms in such a way to maintain constant high visibility to encourage pupils to engage with a time-on-task approach (Arthur-Kelly et al. 2007). To sustain their constructive practices teachers employ what MacGilchrist et al. (2004) define as 'reflective intelligence', the constant and systematic reflection on practice that serves as a basis for shared leadership and collective and individual development. The effective organising of classroom ecology forms an important part of the three-dimensional instructional leadership construct of aligning school structures and standards with mission statements to maintain a climate that supports teaching and learning.

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 and Sanacore 2007). Classroom management includes, then, all the things teachers do relating to classroom ecology to foster pupil involvement based on security that relates to positive relationships enhanced by constructive classroom routines.

Classroom management is realised through an integrated approach of prevention and intervention strategies (Belvel 2010). Crucial to prevention strategies are teachers who constantly reflect on the learning environment they create in order to determine whether the environment engages all pupils meaningfully. This they do by sharing professional reflections and by engaging collaboratively with colleagues (DuFour 2004; Ertesvag 2011). In order to ensure that pupils obtain the required knowledge, skills and behaviour, competent teachers ascertain that they have a clear vision of the spectrum to be covered in order to engage pupils at their appropriate levels of ability (Veverka 2011).

Positive relationships in the classroom that engender security create the foundation for interventions in pursuit of active pupil participation for optimal learning. These relationships are established through verbal and non-verbal communication, channelling messages and receiving feedback (Arthur-Kelly et al. 2007). With regard to non-verbal communication competent teachers are sensitised to the fact that 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 and Manning 2002; Arthur-Kelly et al. 2007). Teachers also know that message reception is influenced by a child's emotional state, past experience, and level of interest (Arthur-Kelly et al. 2007). As

instructional leaders effective teachers consider all of these contingencies in their arranging of a caring classroom environment.

Considered together with prevention and intervention strategies, classroom management is also understood as a management of content, conduct and covenant (Muijs and 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 (Taylor 2009; Belvel 2010). With reference to content, conduct and covenant, teachers as classroom managers are accountable for a climate of interpersonal care and the organising of time and space in such a way as to ensure that all pupils are happily and constructively engaged.

Constructive classroom settings

Content management as the management of the classroom ecology in terms of physical arrangement and behavioural standards relating to routines and procedures promote task involvement, peer interactions and attentive behaviour (Simonsen et al. 2008; Taylor 2009; Pickett and Fraser 2010). With regard to the physical environment, functional seating arrangements promote scanning, smooth transitions and teachers having access to the desks of all pupils. As seating arrangements contribute to the shaping of teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions, periodical changes in seating arrangements promote an increased network of interactive learning possibilities (Taylor 2004). Further, circular pattern seating promotes interactive participation whereas row seating contributes to independent task completion (Simonsen et al. 2008). Classroom design entailing the overall aesthetic appearance of the setting subconsciously motivates pupils to aspire to high ideals (Moore 2009).

Linked to a functional physical environment is classroom ethics contributing to a value-based engagement. Teachers are accountable to facilitate the holistic development of the child through clear and meaningful routines and procedures that are conducive to productivity and being considered (Savage and Savage 2010). By practising crucial routines and procedures during the first few days of the new school year, polite and diligent behaviour is fostered which prompts a civilised classroom environment (Arthur-Kelly et al. 2007; Veverka 2011). These routines and procedures are introduced according to pupils' level of understanding and with regular reminders for proper reinforcement. Apart from contributing to effective classroom functioning, pupils exposed to meaningful routines and procedures experience a

sense of inner balance and wholeness with others resulting in being more responsibly independent and socially competent (Moore 2009; Roscoe and Orr 2010).

All of this literature relating to teachers as instructional leaders accountable for teaching and learning in their classrooms was taken into consideration with the empirical investigation into classroom management for optimal learning in the study described below.

Research design for the empirical investigation

To understand the ‘what’ of classroom arrangements to be conducive for learning, I proceeded from an interpretive paradigm using individual in-depth and focus group interviewing. Concurring with Henning et al. (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 is in process rather than outcomes, my study entailed a rich description of the context and operation of the case (Johnson and Christensen 2004).

Based on convenience in terms of accessibility (Cohen et al. 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 carried out by the Department of Basic Education to determine the literacy and numeracy levels of the grade 1 to 6 learners. Acceptable academic scores were considered indicative of successful teaching implying effective classroom management. The three research sites had, on average, 500 pupils and 15 teachers with the parent community characterised mainly as working class.

The participants were comprised of 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. It was 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 grade 3 to 7 were purposefully selected for focus group 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. Schools with higher Annual National Assessment results would probably reveal different

classroom management approaches; however, it does not diminish the validity of this investigation which acknowledges the distinctiveness of a specific school context to arrange for constructive classroom management practices conducive to optimal learning.

All the participants shared a common indicator for selection, namely that of being dedicated 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 individual and focus group 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 continuous and prolonged basis, as good classroom management in pursuit of optimal learning. On comparing the data from the three individual and three focus group 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 six interviews (three individual and three focus group interviews) were guided by the same open question regarding what aspects participants considered ensured effective classroom management contributing 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.

Presentation of findings

Classroom management is discussed under five themes. These themes, relating to the question posed during the interviews and concurring with what was identified in the literature, pertain to the aspects understood as forming an important part of classroom management ensuring successful learning. The themes relate to the importance of order and stability, rules of conduct democratically determined, positive relationships, living with respect and consideration, a sense of belonging, and the crucial importance of teacher expertise. 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.

Order and stability

What was clear from the interviews was that order is considered as adhering to functional procedures for the sake of well-being and productivity. Where there is structure there are boundaries, and order *'is emphasising logical structure and knowing one's boundaries'* (T9). Pupils understand meaningful boundaries that are clearly communicated and, as a result, are able to manage their time and tasks which contribute to qualitative living. Establishing order in the classroom pertained to teacher leadership managing the general classroom environment in such a way that *'lessons have a logical flow'* (H3), there is constant *'productive use of time'* (T9), and *'learners are motivated to work hard'* (T11). Order in the classroom also contributed to pupils experiencing security. As classroom activities mostly fall within the three broad categories of direct instruction, working time, and individual silent time, security is arranged by pointing out to pupils the type of behaviour that the activity requires. Know-how of the expected behaviour together with clear knowledge of demarcated activity boundaries in the classroom enable pupils to *'understand where they should be, where to direct their attention, how to participate, with whom they can work together'* (H2).

An important aspect of order in the classroom pertains to desk arrangements. Participants agreed that physical settings influence pupils' behaviour and expectations because, if the classroom is disorganised and untidy, *'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 depict the seriousness of education ... must be a classroom full of knowledge'* (H1). The classroom needs, therefore, to be clean and ventilated with the *'windows open, lights on'* (T2) and *'learners occupied with applicable resources for the day'* (T6). Participants found the arranging of desks in rows to be most conducive for constructive control over the classroom as *'learner-to-learner interaction is limited [and] independent on-task activity is improved'* (T7). However, subject to the specific activity, clustered arrangements are used for cooperative learning in a teamwork approach. Positioning the teacher's desk in the front left or right of the classroom enables the teacher *'to reach a learner's desk in a matter of seconds'* (H1) to provide the necessary assistance with learning. A crucial part of order and stability in the classroom is the constructive management of problematic pupil behaviour because *'learners need a peaceful and quiet space in which to learn'* (T12). Warnings, demerits, and detention are followed by intervention by the Head of Department and consultations with parents. Although the majority of parents at the research

sites are poor and illiterate, constructive parent involvement is maintained in that parents' position as primary educators of morality is acknowledged and called upon. Parents know that they are called only when an investigation was done and *'behaviour must be corrected'* (H3). Teachers concurred 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, participants agreed that in the majority of cases honest discussions with parents about their children's misbehaviour and ways to support their children to engage in proper conduct result in improvement and a sustaining of order and stability in the classroom conducive to optimal learning.

Rules of conduct democratically determined

Participants were in agreement that organising the classroom environment entails the application of 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 for breaking these limits. With reference to classroom etiquette, *'head and hand knowledge becomes heart knowledge'* (T15) when teachers as democratic classroom leaders involve pupils in discussions on what needs to be done and under what conditions. Participants acknowledged that *'when the teacher listens, learners listen too'* (T12), with the result that classroom functioning is harmoniously based on *'rights with responsibilities'* (T15) and with *'consequences for actions'* (T10). Rules that are democratically decided are linked to the whole school discipline plan.

Participant teachers implemented procedures which pertained to aspects such as entering and exiting the classroom, making transitions, turning 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, 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). When dismissed for break, pupils leave the classroom *'row by row, form their lines and move towards the playgrounds'* (T6). Further, to leave the classroom during lesson time, a pupil must have *'a permission card'* (T3) from the teacher, or else the pupil is sent back without completing the mission.

Part of classroom routine 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). With regard to safety protocol with emergencies that may arise, pupils are coached not to *'scream, shout or run'* (T7) while evacuating their classrooms to move to the school grounds or to move under their desks for cover. It was clear that by practising all of these classroom routines and procedures, concerted efforts are made to foster appropriate pupil behaviour relating to being polite, acting considerately and taking responsibility for their own actions. Such appropriate behaviour contributes to symbiosis in a civilised micro-society which, in turn, is basic to conditions conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Positive relationships

It was clear from the interviews that developing positive relationships in the classroom pertains to using connecting behaviour such as listening, supporting, encouraging and trusting while avoiding disconnecting behaviour such as criticising, blaming, complaining, and threatening. A critical component of developing positive relationships is *'knowing the learner [in order] to understand the learner'* (T13). For that reason it is important to learn every pupil's name and *'something about each learner'* (T13) as quickly as possible. When *'chatting to learners about their pets, brothers and sisters'* (T10) it shows genuine interest while simultaneously providing the teacher with more knowledge of each pupil's home background. Part of constructive relationship building which depicts the teacher as a fellow human who can be approached, is to *'tell learners about yourself'* (H1).

Positive classroom relationships are enhanced by an attractive, enriched environment which involves using learner work and resources which learners 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 the relationship 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 positive relationships, 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.

It was emphasised that part of positive classroom relationships 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 crucial part of developing and sustaining positive relationships is to praise 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). As an extension of the classroom and an indispensable factor for teaching and learning, the sustaining of positive relationships with parents as primary educators of their children is very important as these relationships *'dictate how successful learning is'* (H2). Positive relationships with parents are developed and sustained mainly through messages in pupils' homework books which are followed up by telephone and SMS, and through regular parents' evenings where pupil progress and ways of assisting children with their scholastic development is discussed.

Living with respect and consideration

Respect for one self, for all living things and for the environment at large were phrases reiterated by all participants. This respect is prompted by teachers who put a high premium on the practising and fostering of a value system of diligence, courtesy, honesty and of conserving what one has. The social capital connotation of living with respect was explained as follows: *'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); *'I use my please and my thank you and you use yours'* (T5). Based on the fact that *'learners are taught to look after what they have'* (H1), their achievement is evident in their conserving of the classroom and school premises because *'we know when a window pane breaks, it was by accident'* (T3). Further, respect for community well-being was realised through encouraging pupils to participate in community care projects as a classroom effort. This was done by fostering the value that *'it is not always for take, you have to consider the next person'* (T4).

Respect for everyone and everything included respect for time. 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 were in agreement that they are preparing pupils *'for the world of work where time is money'* (T15) and they therefore need to instil proper values in their pupils relating to punctuality. In addition, respect in the classroom is also understood as addressing each pupil's distinct

problems in a professional way to ensure that each learner *'is being moulded into a happy citizen that is fitting for the country'* (T11).

A sense of belonging

The words *'one happy family'* (T4) captures the gist of functioning in classrooms at the different research sites. A first step in arranging this sense of being part of the group is to ensure that pupils' names appear on their desks, books, artwork, and didactic supplies. The approach of personalising the individual's existence in the classroom reassures belonging and creates conditions for self-realisation. Linked to the 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 pertain to classroom maintenance tasks such as opening and closing windows, putting up charts, overseeing individual responsibility for daily litter clean-up, and general classroom neatness. Classroom duties also entail lesson-related tasks such as distributing and collecting books and supplies, overseeing smooth transmissions within the classroom, and managing orderly line formation for movement to next locations. *'Errand duty'* (T11) is considered a prestigious task amongst pupils indicating potential leadership within the group.

Apart from developing a sense of belonging, the carrying out of classroom duties also provides opportunities for character building. Accordingly, the *'very reserved show their steel with task performance'* (T7) which boosts their self-esteem 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 character building 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 with the modus operandi to create opportunities for optimal development.

Teacher expertise

Participants emphasised that pivotal to classroom management for optimal learning is teachers' knowledge of their subjects and preparedness for each lesson. When teachers are subject experts, they are able to plan the logical facilitation of that content in the most effective way. Participants agreed that there is *'a direct correlation between being well prepared and managing one's class well, the one complements the other'* (H3). Being a subject expert who is well-prepared for every lesson, *'learners respect you for that'* (T3), but due to pupils' well-developed judgemental abilities, *'they can size you up in a minute ... this teacher is going to be messing around'* (T5). Closely related to learners' accurate judgements

on subject expertise are their competencies in using the internet to acquire subject-related information. Participants agreed that the fact that *'learners are technologically minded'* (H3) creativity with regard to incorporating technology into the lesson enhances pupil engagement. Knowledge facilitation must, therefore, be structured to *'build on what learners know'* (T9). Other important factors to consider with instruction are *'the demographics, where does the child come from'* (T7), and pupils' socio-economic status, such as that *'this learner comes to school without eating or bringing lunch'* (T12).

To sustain pupil engagement with instruction, a variety of activities and varying teaching styles are needed because *'if you perform the same thing every day, it is not going to work'* (H2). Related to variation is the fact that *'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. Proper feedback in the sense of monitoring pupils' responses while maintaining a focus on attaining specified goals provides reinforcement to solidify learners' accurate understanding of the subject content. Although *'tests are set according to the learners abilities'* (T7), a matter of concern raised in the interviews was that the additional time spent on pupils who needed extra assistance happened to the detriment of gifted learners. It was pointed out 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 the sake of optimal learning must imply self-realisation opportunities for every child, including the gifted.

Discussion

Within a shared instructional leadership context teachers take the lead in their classrooms to direct their pupils to optimal performance relating to the obtaining of appropriate knowledge, skills and behaviour. In line with Hallinger's (2001) conceptualisation of instructional leadership as defining the school's mission, effective teachers enact the school's mission in their classrooms by communicating high expectations for their pupils based on a caring environment in which learning engagement thrives.

The context of caring develops through the pursuing of rules of conduct mutually agreed upon to sustain a civilised micro-environment based on responsible rights and consequence-considered actions. Proper behaviour that is constantly reinforced pertains to actions relating to daily classroom functioning such as greeting, entering and leaving the classroom, and the distribution and gathering of didactic materials. Combined with these actions are the efforts

to sustain classroom comfort, neatness and safety to contribute to harmony and what Moore (2009) explains as a sense of inner balance and wholeness with others in the same environment. Successful teachers also portray their school's mission by pursuing positive relationships within their classrooms that is arranged through knowing their pupils' names and family backgrounds and through being alert to their pupils' interests. In line with the work by Arthur-Kelly et al. (2007), competent teachers ensure sound home-school relationships and pupils having a positive association with the classroom as physical environment which then promotes task involvement and attentive behaviour.

In well-functioning schools instructional leadership as managing the instructional programme (Hallinger 2001) is manifested in teachers ensuring order and stability in their classrooms. Through knowledge of functional procedures and demarcated activity boundaries in the classroom, pupils are empowered to manage their time and tasks in a constructive manner. A sense of safety is ensured by dealing with improper behaviour in a structured manner which involves the moral support of parents as primary educators. Following a strategy of prevention (Belvel 2010), effective teachers arrange desk positioning in such a way that pupils are encouraged to develop a time-on-task attitude. Lessons are made interesting by well-prepared teachers who are experts in their subjects and who facilitate knowledge through functional verbal and non-verbal communication to ensure that every pupil is engaged. Acknowledging the importance of feedback to assessment (Veverka 2011), experienced teachers monitor their pupils' progress by providing constructive feedback on outcomes not yet met and by praising successes achieved. Although teaching and assessment should be arranged to cater for differentiated abilities, a void still appears to exist with regard to challenging the competencies of gifted pupils. More effort is needed in the classroom to accommodate the developmental needs of gifted pupils.

As part of promoting a learning culture within the context of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger 2001), dedicated teachers foster an ethos of living with respect in their classrooms which pertains to living considerately and valuing time as a commodity to be spent constructively. Punctuality is rated as non-negotiable. Accommodating each pupil as a unique person who contributes to the well-functioning of the classroom promotes a sense of belonging where responsibility is practised and character is built. Realising the importance of continuity with education (Savage and Savage 2010), character building is sustained by briefing the teachers of following years on the individual pupil's circumstances which ripples through to each child experiencing a sense of belonging in the school.

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 order and stability in the classroom by following rules of conduct democratically determined. The approaches of effecting positive relationships and living with respect and consideration engender a sense of belonging which serves as a stimulus for classroom participation. Teachers, as subject experts who are well-prepared for every lesson, represent a pivotal component of and an important approach to classroom management to engage pupils optimally in their pursuit of self-actualisation. Challenges exist, however, to provide optimally for the learning needs of gifted pupils.

The findings contribute to classroom management in the sense of re-ascertaining what the important features are 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. It is also recommended that research be conducted in other geographical areas to compare findings on the ‘what’ in different contexts in pursuit of global improved classroom management for optimal learning.

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