

Principals Upfront Dialogue Series

School Leadership Book Launch

*Shifting Paradigms: Changing Practice – Values-based
instructional leadership in schools*

13 September 2017



A BRIDGE Knowledge Product



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Principals Upfront Dialogue Series



A series of public dialogues addressing the leadership role of school principals

Presented by Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance, Wits School of Governance, Catholic Institute of Education, Sasol Inzalo Foundation and BRIDGE

Principals Upfront provides a platform for school leaders to share working practice and information about different facets of school leadership, and for those involved in supporting school leadership to develop a deeper understanding of the role that principals play. Dialogue 8, which launched the book *Shifting Paradigms: Changing Practice – Values-based instructional leadership in schools* by Dr Allistair Witten was held on 13 September 2017 at Sasol Place, Sandton.

This dialogue overview highlights key aspects of the event and gives readers a taste of the speakers' contributions.

Introduction



Dr Yvonne Muthien,
Chairperson: Sasol Inzalo
Foundation

Chairperson of the Sasol Inzalo Foundation, Dr Yvonne Muthien, opened the proceedings with a timely reminder of the promise that the Constitution makes to provide all learners with a quality of education that would improve their opportunities and life chances and fuel South Africa's economic engine with the critical skills our country needs to prosper. Values-based school leadership, together with effective teaching, was paramount in fulfilling this promise.

“This book is a very special resource that school leaders can use to facilitate their engagement with members of staff, the school community and governing body, in order to deliver that nexus of schooling, teaching and learning outcomes.” Dr Yvonne Muthien

The Sasol Inzalo Foundation aimed to drive excellence in the teaching and learning of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and understood the critical importance of governance and school leadership for educational outcomes.

The Foundation's research and engagement with the education community confirmed the need to develop specific resources and tools to equip school leaders to deal with the contextual challenges they faced, particularly in disadvantaged schools. Dr Witten's book, *Shifting Paradigms: Changing Practice – Values-based instructional leadership in schools*, which focuses on instructional leadership as the key to building a holistic school culture that is conducive to academic performance, responds to that need.



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Together we can make a visible impact in education. This is evident at the [#PrincipalsUpfront](#) hosted by [#SasolInzaloFoundation](#)

Introduction to Principals Upfront Partners



Mrs Vuyiswa
Ncontsa, Chief
Executive Officer:
BRIDGE

Representing the partners that make up the Principals Upfront consortium, Mrs Vuyiswa Ncontsa, CEO of BRIDGE, drew attention to the need for organisations and individuals to uphold and share their own stories.

The Principals Upfront consortium delivered a series of public, quarterly dialogues aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the role that principals play as key agents of success in our schools, and of what their needs might be. Attended by principals, NGOs that work in school leadership, academics and other partners, the dialogues enabled the voices of principals to be heard. The dialogues also served as a platform to initiate action by helping to create a better understanding of the nature of schooling in South Africa and of where change would be most effective.

“What binds us as a consortium and as Principals Upfront, are the values of partnership and collaboration. The sum is bigger than the whole of its parts – and this can be seen through the way we have worked together.” Mrs Vuyiswa Ncontsa

Partners in the Principals Upfront consortium:

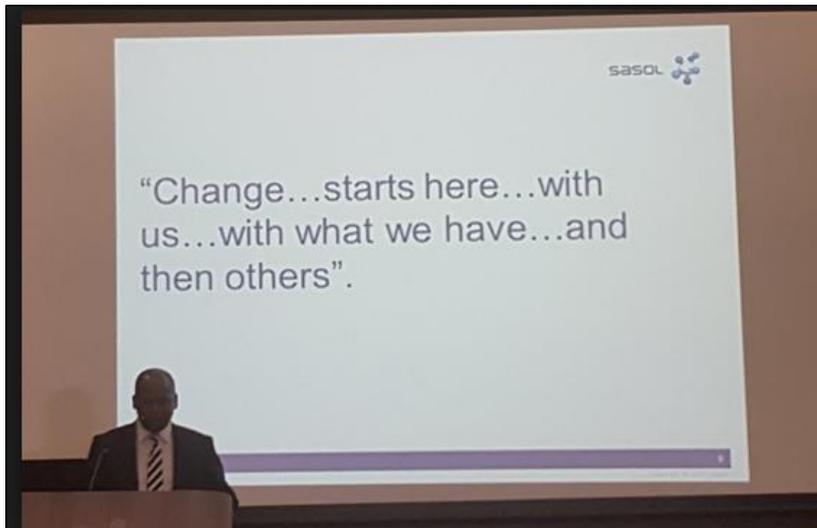
- The **Sasol Inzalo Foundation** focusses on driving excellence in the teaching and learning of science, technology, engineering and mathematics at all levels of the education value chain, and particularly in previously disadvantaged communities. Some significant successes have been the development, together with the Department of Basic Education and other strategic partners, of over 180 mathematics, science and technology textbooks which are used by more than 6 million teachers and learners annually; the provision of mobile science laboratories reaching over 3600 learners in underserved areas every year; the establishment of trade workshops in technical high schools and of chemical and engineering laboratories at universities and universities of technology; and the granting of bursaries to students at universities and universities of technology at both under-graduate and post-graduate levels.
- **Wits School of Governance** (WSG) has been at the forefront of the national movement to restructure public management systems since the early 90s, and consistently plays a supporting role to government at national, provincial and local levels in building capacity for policy development and management across the public sector. WSG has pioneered education leadership programmes in partnership with other NGOs since the early 90s, and continues to provide those programmes.
- The **Catholic Institute of Education** (CIE) – an NGO serving Catholic schools since 1985, the CIE works to maintain values-based quality education in both public and independent schools. It focusses on the professional development of teachers and principals, and on ensuring that its schools are safe and happy places, with a Catholic ethos, for children. Notably, through its *Building Peaceful Catholic Schools* programme, the CIE is assisting schools to move from punitive to restorative disciplinary approaches. This approach could beneficially be shared and replicated throughout the South African education system.
- The **Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance** (MGSLG) – an NPO and an agency of the Gauteng Department of Education, MGSLG was established to research, develop and deliver cutting edge capacity-building programmes in school management and leadership, school governance, and teacher development for public schools in Gauteng. In addition to the important role of capacitating

school governing bodies, teachers, learner leaders and parents whose children attend Gauteng schools, MGS LG continues to play a leading role in building the capacity of school leaders.

- **BRIDGE** – established in 2009 to link innovations in education, BRIDGE’s massive transformative purpose is connected education: every leader, every teacher, every learner. BRIDGE fulfils its mandate through convening communities of practice, knowledge management, and conducting research in four focus areas – school leadership, teacher development, learner support and early childhood development – and although headquartered in Gauteng, operates in four other provinces.

“Dr Witten has been a key member of the Principals Upfront consortium. He has diligently put together the concept notes that have informed the themes of this dialogues series, and he has done it with gentleness and a willingness that cannot be faulted.” Mrs Vuyiswa Ncontsa

In concluding her presentation, Mrs Ncontsa drew attention to the slogan adopted by the Manyano Network of Community Schools (a group of school leaders in the Eastern Cape who have built networks of support for the holistic development of the learners they serve) and quoted by Dr Witten in *Shifting Paradigms*: **“Change ... starts here ... with us ... with what we have ... and then others”**.



Programme Director,
Dr Rufus Wesj, Sasol
Inzalo Foundation

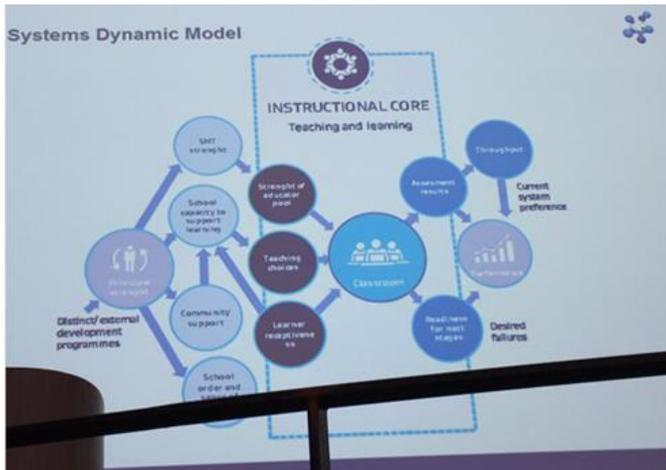
Background to the book’s development

Dr Cynthia Malinga, project manager at the Sasol Inzalo Foundation, provided an overview of the project that led to the book’s development.

The launch was the culmination of work that started in 2011, when the Sasol Inzalo Foundation began a longitudinal study to understand the effects of various leadership development programmes on school principals and the schools they led. The impetus for this study had been the Foundation’s intention to implement a number of STEM intervention programmes, the success of which would depend on the functionality of the schools concerned, which in turn depended on the quality of leadership in those schools.

The Sasol Inzalo Foundation partnered with ten programmes to collect and validate data, and subsequently to hold learning clinics to make sense of that data. This process established that although the programmes all provided value, they also all fell short in preparing principals to deal with the actual problems that took up most

of their time on a daily basis. These were typically of a social nature, and had little to do with the curriculum and the classroom. In addition, most issues were regional and reflected the schools' different contexts.



The project then focussed on finding ways to assist principals to become more effective. Analysis and synthesis of the data led to the identification of areas where principals were able to influence results directly, and areas where principals had to allow others to be involved, while taking no direct action themselves.

These results were expressed as a framework or 'systems dynamic model' and ultimately (because of its complexity) in simplified, accessible form as a board game.

Dr Witten was commissioned to undertake the extensive process of sharing the information and resources with the education community. This involved intensive work at school level and engagement with a wide range of education forums. An important learning to emerge from this process was that throughout the country, the challenges facing principals were fundamentally the same, although contextualised to the circumstances of each particular school – and that it was essential for leadership development programmes to take the context of the school into consideration.

Hearing from the author

Dr Witten thanked the many organisations and individuals who had played a role in the development of the book. These included the Sasol Inzalo Foundation; the research partners whose contributions to the sense-making learning clinics had enabled him to think more deeply about the issues; Mr Justice Magagula (Vice President: Enterprise and Supplier Development & Corporate Social Investment at Sasol) who raised the idea of the book and suggested its title; and Professor Mary Metcalfe of the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO).

In paying tribute to Professor Metcalfe, Dr Witten highlighted her role-modelling of the principles of school leadership, and the wonderful opportunities for learning this presented to those who worked with her.

The guiding principles in the development of this book were that it should be simple to engage with so that anyone with an interest in education would be able to take from it key lessons to share, or use to develop themselves; it should be relevant and responsive to the contextual realities and the practice of leadership in South African schools; and it should be readily available to everyone who wanted to use it, especially to those in public schools.

In concluding, Dr Witten described how in his own life he had become increasingly mindful of the practice of leadership, and urged others to do the same.



Dr Allistair Witten

“Leadership is a practice – and when we get involved in actions, we must remember that a part of that is about leadership and our role as a leader. We are all leaders, just as we are all followers - and I want to encourage us all to lead well.” Dr Allistair Witten

Keynote address



Professor Mary Metcalfe

Professor Metcalfe set the tone for her address by noting that she saw herself essentially as a teacher, and viewed the occasion as an opportunity to celebrate the work of an exceptional educator who had contributed to her own understanding by sharing ideas and helping her to reflect.

Professor Metcalfe explained that she and Dr Witten shared a belief in humanity as rational beings with the ability to interact with institutions, hierarchy and power, and collectively through their own and social action, to bring about change. This 'deep humanism' underlay the transformative approach within education that defined this book: it recognised principals and teachers as rational beings with agency who were seeking to do good for their learners, and respected and built on that agency.

The development of the book had also been enriched by the synergy between Dr Witten's work with the Sasol school leadership project and with PILO. This interaction had enabled a remarkable merging of ideas and information, and had contributed significantly to current thinking on change in education.

Shifting Paradigms was essentially a response to South Africa's key education challenge: learner performance. Despite having the potential to learn, children growing up in poorer areas were already behind their wealthier counterparts by Grade 4, and the gap between them steadily increased. This challenge incorporated, as Professor Metcalfe demonstrated, complex issues of accountability, context and values.

Professor Metcalfe described how Dr Witten approached the challenge of improving learner performance within certain key centres of influence, and highlighted several of these:

- Values-based leadership went to the heart of the book's central commitment to humanism. Values shaped the school's culture, supported the attitudes and behaviours that permeated throughout the institution, and built the sense of 'moral purpose' that spurred teachers on to make a positive change in the lives of the children they taught.
- The SMT was the primary site of leadership in the school, from where learners were supported. Its primary purpose was to support the processes of teaching and learning that formed the instructional core of the school.
- The principal functioned as part of the leadership team. Instructional leadership was central not only to the work of the principal, but also to that of the deputy principal and the HoDs (whose role it was to supervise and to build the strength and capacity of teachers to be more effective in the classroom).

"Values form the glue that holds the school together and allows it to function effectively."

Another important leadership role was the management of change and complexity. Professor Metcalfe noted that schools were the recipients of multiple, contradictory, ever-changing instructions that they lacked the capacity to deliver on. How could a principal take a humanist approach to leading a school in the face of these demands? Dr Witten took a positive view of the way forward, with the school defining its desired future and working incrementally towards each goal, while ensuring that it kept an instructional focus.

The book also emphasised the concept of 'reciprocal accountability'. This was the principle that if teachers were required to perform better, their school leaders had the prior responsibility to capacitate and support them to improve their performance.

Professor Metcalfe highlighted a set of principles expressing profound points of leadership. Two examples were:

- Practice was based on power with, not power over – if one wanted to lead, one had to understand that one’s power was a gift given to one by those one led.
- Leadership was not about providing the answers, but asking the questions – in order to lead, one had to be confident enough to be uncertain, and not to know the answers.

The chapter on creating networks of support for learners emphasised that learner performance was not only a function of SMTs and the school, but also of the community. However, the disjuncture between school and community had grown enormously, with few teachers living in the communities they taught in. Dr Witten provided a number of inspiring ideas for establishing and maintaining school/community partnerships.

Finally, the book was not a substitute for what school leaders should know and do in terms of policy. Instead, the book aimed to support and enhance these requirements, and to complement professional development initiatives relating to policy.



The keynote address was followed by the **unveiling of the book**

Vote of Thanks

In proposing a vote of thanks, Mr Justice Magagula (Vice President: Enterprise and Supplier Development & Corporate Social Investment at Sasol), expressed the hope that the book would assist school leaders to effectively manage the complex organisations that South Africa’s public schools had become.

Sasol and the Foundation believed that no single organisation could hope to make a sustainable impact in addressing the social challenges facing our society, and that a collaborative approach was essential. Dr Witten’s book, *Shifting Paradigms: Changing Practice – Values-based instructional leadership in schools*, would enrich the South African public education system – and it was through collaborative work with Sasol’s partners and stakeholders that this had been achieved.

