

LEARNING UNIT 1

Instructional studies in context

1.1 INTRODUCTION

After studying this Learning unit, you should be able to explain the nature of and concepts associated with instruction. You should be able to explain the place, importance and value of instruction; formulate and elucidate concepts related to instruction in understandable ways, and develop and demonstrate an understanding of your role and responsibilities in the context of instruction. You should also have developed an appreciation for and give due consideration to African perspectives on education and instruction that have been neglected and suppressed. We will deal with:

- What is instruction?
- The nature of and concepts related to instruction
- The place, importance and value of instruction
- The roles and responsibilities of teachers in the context of instruction
- African teaching philosophies and perspectives

1.2 WHAT IS INSTRUCTION?

Instruction can relate to being told or being informed about something, and also to communicating how something should be done. Practitioners in the fields of education, teaching and training use the term extensively. In this module, we will consider instruction in its role in formal education. Instruction can also entail being told what to do *without* another person doing the instructing (e.g. following a written method or computer program). However, in the context of education, we talk about instruction that involves people. A teacher is involved with the theory of instruction. Teaching is how instruction manifests itself within a school or a classroom. In this module I will use the terms “teaching” and “instruction” interchangeably, even though instruction often relates to getting people to the point where they are able to *do* something, while teaching can be considered as stimulating their *thinking*. Instruction therefore relates to that aspect of teaching that is *planned and purposeful*. Teaching is often more holistic, in that it involves more than just the instructional component.

Stop for a few minutes to consider the following question. Speak to other people (this could include other students) and write down some ideas.



Activity 1.1

What is teaching?

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Did you notice that different people have different interpretations of the concept “teaching”?



Please share your own definitions by participating in the myUnisa discussion for this module. Did you notice that some definitions relate to teaching as knowledge, teaching as a skill, or even teaching as an art form? All of these would be correct. Teaching is a very complex endeavour.

In the next section, I would like you to form an overview of the concept of teaching.

The information in the text box below is taken from an OER by Bak, Behardien, Morrow and Pendleberry (2010).

Teaching as an activity

You already know quite a lot about teaching. You would not be here, reading this module, if you did not. You have been a student for many years in school, and perhaps also in college, and you have probably also done some teaching. Let’s find some examples of teaching to help us to think about teaching as an activity. For a start, recall three examples of teaching from your own experience.



Activity 1.2

- (1) In your workbook, briefly describe three examples of teaching that you have experienced. Try to think of three examples that are as different as possible from each other. Identify each example with a few words, or a sentence or two. Label your examples (a), (b), and (c) to make it easier to refer to them later.
- (2) Think about your three examples by answering the following eight questions:
 - (a) Are all three of your examples cases of teaching taking place in schools?
 - (b) Are all the ‘teachers’ in your examples people employed as teachers in schools?
 - (c) Are you the ‘teacher’ in any of your examples?
 - (d) Are any of your examples cases in which more than one teacher was involved?
 - (e) Are any of your examples cases of teaching in which the ‘teacher’ was younger than the ‘learners’?
 - (f) Are any of your examples cases in which the learners were not school or college students?
 - (g) Are any of your examples cases in which only one learner was involved?
 - (h) Are any of your examples cases of teaching that took place over a long time (more than the length of a school lesson)?

The point of the questions in activity 1.2 is to try to break the hold of the common idea that teaching takes place only in classrooms in schools and colleges and other formal

institutions of learning. Your three examples, (a), (b), and (c), are probably examples of this specialized kind of teaching.

The common picture of teaching is too narrow

From your own experience, you know that teaching is found not only in classrooms in formal institutions of learning. You know that in everyday life mothers teach their children how to eat their food properly, grandfathers teach their grandchildren how to grow vegetables, older brothers and sisters teach their younger brothers and sisters how to dress themselves or clean their teeth, and school-going children might teach an older relative how to speak English, or to read. When we think carefully about teaching we are reminded that teaching is an activity, which is constantly present in the everyday lives of normal human communities. In fact, most teaching takes place outside of the walls and timetables of schools and colleges, and most teaching is done by anyone who knows something that someone else does not and not only by people called 'teachers' or 'lecturers'.

The common picture of teaching is too narrow. It covers only a restricted range of examples of teaching, and this is why it is misleading if we are trying to find out what is distinctive of the activity of teaching in order to think clearly about the appropriate shaping of its internal time and space. In introducing Activity 1.2 one of the things we suggested is that you already know a lot about teaching because 'you have been a student for many years in school'. We can now see that this might have taken you off on too narrow a path. To say that you have been a 'student' for many years is different from saying that you have been a 'learner' for many years. You have been a learner for many more years than you have been a student and many of the things you have learnt you learnt outside of schools and colleges. And a lot of what you have learnt you were taught by people who were not officially teachers. In the first five or six years of your life, before you ever went to school, you learnt some of the most important things you will ever learn, such as how to speak a language and be a human being. Throughout your life, many different people with whom you have come into contact have taught you many different things.

In addition, in introducing Activity 1.2, we suggested that you 'have probably done some teaching'. Perhaps you took this to mean that you have probably already taught in a school, or some other formal institution of learning. However, thinking in terms of the general activity of teaching, it is extremely unlikely that you have done no teaching at all. Think of examples such as mothers teaching children how to use a spoon to eat their food, uncles teaching their nephews how to restart a car which has stopped, sisters or brothers, teaching each other or their friends, how to dress fashionably or how to play some game, or of a grandmother teaching a grandchild how to thread a needle. As a normal member of a human community, you must be able to think of many examples of teaching that you have done, although they might not have come to mind when you were thinking of examples for Activity 1.2.

Think, also, of how teaching some kinds of things can take extended periods, perhaps even years. Think, for example of the time it takes to teach a person how to read or write, and the time it takes to teach a person how to speak another language fluently. These examples also help us think about another way in which the common picture of teaching can be very misleading. That picture suggests that in all cases of teaching only a single teacher is involved. However, we know that we were taught how to read or write by a series of teachers, over a number of years. We can also think of other examples in which a number of teachers are involved – a novice motorcar mechanic might be taught his skills by the half a dozen experienced mechanics already working in the garage.

Now think of some additional examples of teaching, examples that break free of the common picture.

What have we learnt so far?

Here are the main points of our discussion about how we can tell whether someone is teaching:

- (1) A person who is teaching must be engaging in some appropriate action and must be engaging in that action with appropriate intentions.
- (2) We can tell what the appropriate actions and intentions are only in terms of the formal purpose that defines the activity of teaching.
- (3) The formal purpose of an activity is a concept that is shared in a community; it is neither personal nor subjective.

Characteristics of practices

We shall here briefly introduce five characteristics of practices:

- (1) Practices are necessarily social.
- (2) Practices have histories and traditions.
- (3) Practices are flexible in relation to changing conditions.
- (4) A practice can change, but only within the boundaries of our understanding of what makes it a distinctive practice.
- (5) Practices have their own internal standards of success and excellence.

1. Practices are necessarily social

In a stronger way than in the case of some other activities, practices are shared and sustained in *communities of practitioners*. To see something as a practice places much more emphasis on the way in which it is necessary that it is social. This is not merely a point about how some activities – such as, for example, playing a team game or having a discussion – necessarily involve a number of participants acting in co-ordination with each other (a person cannot play hockey or chess, or teach, by themselves.) However, it is a point about how what could even count as an example of participating in the activity cannot be a matter of personal intentions or individual decision. There are some practices, such as writing a novel, which might be done by a single person working on their own, nevertheless, what counts as writing a novel cannot be a matter of individual decision.

We have already considered examples of this kind in relation to Pat doing housework and Martha doing gardening. Our shared understanding of housework and gardening draws a boundary around what could count as an example of participating in the practices of housework or gardening. This boundary might not be very sharp but we know that there is a boundary because we know, for example, that dozing in front of the TV cannot be a kind of housework or gardening. This boundary was established by something like agreement amongst those who participate in the activity and people who talk and think about these things. The origins of this understanding are unlikely to have been an explicit agreement at a particular moment – like agreeing to name a new child 'Thandi'. However, there is implicit agreement about the concepts in terms of which we understand this part of our world. Because this understanding is shared and communal, rather than individual or personal, we can say that it is based on inter-personal agreement. And in this way practices are essentially social.

2. Practices have histories and traditions

Unlike some other activities, practices have histories and traditions. The practices of cooking, building shelters, playing soccer or thinking scientifically, and, of course, school

teaching, all have histories during which particular traditions have developed of how to participate in the practice, and of what counts as good or excellent participation. To become a participant in a practice involves critically appropriating its history and traditions, and anyone who imagines themselves as having invented a practice without having taken account of its history and traditions is simply naïve or ignorant.

3. Practices are flexible in relation to changing conditions

The traditions that are embedded in a practice, and that serve, partly, to define it, are not rigid or static. Practices can be thought of as open and ongoing projects that stop changing only when they cease to have vitality and significance in our communal lives. Over time practices change, sometimes gradually, but sometimes quite rapidly. What brings such changes about is changes in our knowledge of the practice and how its definitive goals can be better served, changes in relevant technologies, and circumstances, and creative innovations from some of its participants. In these ways, practices remain open to revision and improvement.

4. A practice can change, but only within the boundaries of our understanding of what makes it a distinctive practice

Although practices are open to revision, those revisions and improvements remain within the broad boundaries that mark out the scope of the practice. There is an important difference between improving a practice and either abandoning the practice or substituting a different practice for it. Over time a practice like playing cricket changes, although the question of whether such changes count as improvements is always a matter of controversy. The practice of playing cricket doesn't change by everyone simply ceasing to play cricket, or by substituting another game, such as baseball, for cricket. There is something essential to the practice of playing cricket, and changes take place within, as we might put it, the framework of that essence – otherwise the changes in question are not changes in the practice of cricket at all.

If we think back to what we have discovered in the formal purpose of the activity of teaching we can see how this might work. That formal purpose, now being seen as a formal purpose of the practice of teaching, makes a conceptual and practical boundary to what we are prepared to accept as an example of teaching. The formal purpose of teaching is to bring it about that someone tries to learn something. How this might be done is not specified for this purpose, and we know that there are many ways of doing this. Improvements in the practice of teaching might arise from changes in relevant technology, changes in our knowledge of the conditions for learning, or even from a practitioner discovering a way of accomplishing this purpose that had previously not been thought of.

5. Practices have their own internal standards of success and excellence

A very important fifth characteristic of practices is that they have internal standards of success and excellence. Someone can participate well or poorly in the practice of, for example, cooking. Some participants are much more successful than others are and some even achieve excellence in this practice. The criteria for success or excellence are internal to the practice – one cannot judge the excellence of choir singing in terms of the criteria appropriate for judging the excellence of participating in the practice of gymnastics – and such judgments are not subjective or personal opinion. We can add here that when the standards of success and excellence of one practice are used in judging success or excellence in another practice, that practice can be corrupted or distorted.

Reading 1.1



Activity 1.3

Write up some notes under each of the five headings about practices related to teaching as a practice. Can you think of practical examples from your own experience? How does teaching manifest itself as a social, flexible, historically rich, changing-within-boundaries and standards-based practice?

Are you beginning to see that teaching and instruction is a very complex endeavour, and that even after a number of years' studying to be a teacher, as a teacher you will be involved in 'life-long learning'?

There are many forms of teaching, and teaching is often defined in different ways. Let's look at some definitions of this concept.

1.3 SOME DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

Fraser, Loubser and Van Rooy (1990:3) state that "teaching is an activity which aims at presenting certain (learning) content to somebody else in such a way that that person learns something from it". They add that teaching is "intentional, dynamic, systematic and well founded": teaching is intentional because it has an educational aim, it is dynamic because it should yield learning results, it is systematic because it is deliberately planned and it is well founded because it is based on definite guidelines (e.g. a curriculum document) and it is evaluated continuously.

Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan and Brown (2010) explain that teaching is both a science and an art: an art because it requires a teacher to make decisions, and a science because it requires knowledge of techniques.

You will notice that it is very difficult to separate "teaching" from "learning". The science of teaching is called didactics, while the word "pedagogy" refers to a more holistic study of the educational process involving not-yet-adult learners.

Are there other words that are similar in meaning to "teaching"? How many similar words can you find?



Please share your list by participating in the myUnisa discussion for this module.



Activity 1.4

Words similar to "teaching":

instructing, educating ...

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Your textbook takes this one step further, and asks the question, “What is good teaching?” Summarise this section in your notebook.

Textbook chapter 1

We now turn to a few concepts and definitions often associated with instruction.

1.4 SOME CONCEPTS RELATING TO INSTRUCTION

Let’s take a look at some of the concepts commonly association with instruction. These definitions are not exhaustive, but they do provide you with a starting point from which to formulate your own understanding and formulation of these concepts.

Teaching: The goal of teaching is to ensure that meaningful learning takes place. This means that teaching is more than instructing, and more than presenting lessons – teaching involves all the teacher’s activities before, during and after lessons. Smith and Ragan (1999) make the following distinction between teaching and instruction: teaching is a learning experience facilitated by a person, whereas instruction does not always involve human interaction – for instance, you could receive instructions on your phone or via a computer app. Definitions of teaching are varied and complex. If we look at the roles you are expected to fulfill as a teacher, you will understand why teaching is a multi-faceted and complex endeavour.

These roles should be understood as everyday functions of the collective of all educators at a school. They seldom have to be carried out completely, in all their detail or all of the time, by individual teachers. However, teachers will carry out the roles appropriate to their specific position in the school. All classroom teachers will develop in the seven roles as appropriate to their practice. These roles are specified in the Revised Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications, which appears in *Government Gazette* no. 38487 (Department of Higher Education and Training 2015).

Before we continue, let us look at some definitions of terms that we will use throughout this module:

Teacher: A professionally qualified person who undertakes to teach in a formal environment such as a school or college. In informal contexts, it could refer to anyone who teaches something to someone else.

Instruction: The teaching and learning activities that are planned and executed during a lesson. Instruction is designed with a specific purpose in mind and to achieve certain goals. The ultimate decision a teacher makes regarding instructional choices must

contribute to learning and be of educational value to learners. The term “instruction” can include various forms such as training, teaching, facilitating, mentoring and tutoring. Smith and Ragan (1999:3) consider instruction to be the delivery of a focused educational experience.

Training: Smith and Ragan (1999) describe training as a form of instruction where very specific job-related skills are taught. Often the skills will be used almost immediately. Training is also used in terms of sporting activities or military exercises, so repetition is involved.

Mentoring: English Oxford Living Dictionaries defines a mentor as an experienced person in a company or educational institution who trains and counsels new employees or students (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mentor>). Mentoring can involve two adults, one of whom advises and trains the other. Lancer, Clutterbuck and Megginson (2016:6) state that “the mentor has wisdom and experience, but uses them to help the mentee become courageous and develop their own wisdom rather than to impart knowledge.” Brecht (2010) explains that cognitive mentorship is about bringing thinking to the surface. The thinking of both the mentor and the mentee is made clear to the other person.

Facilitating: A facilitator normally works with a group. The role of a facilitator is to make things easier for the group, but not to tell them what to do or give them the solution. The group normally has a problem to solve, and the facilitator enables them to reach their solution collectively. The facilitator also assists with group dynamics. Hogan (2002) explains that facilitators may direct learning by making planning decisions for the group. The facilitator may act as negotiator by helping learners share ideas, or may delegate roles to group members so that they can become more independent.

Tutoring: English Oxford Living Dictionaries tells us that this word stems from the Latin meaning to guard or to watch (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tutor>). Tutoring entails one person assisting an individual or small group. A tutor is in many instances a personal teacher who assists a learner with a particular subject. Sometimes tutors have less experience or qualification than a professional teacher or lecturer. Gagne (1987:319) states that cross-age and peer tutoring can take place. The tutor also adapts instruction to the learner.

Learners/pupils/students: These terms are sometimes used synonymously (in other words, to mean the same thing). Generally, any person who is learning can be considered a learner. In the South African school context we often use the term “pupil”, and in South Africa we refer to post-school learners as “students”. Internationally, the term “students” is also used to refer to learners of school-going age.

Learning: This is the goal of teaching and instruction. Broadly, it refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It also refers to an understanding of concepts that could not be understood or an ability to do something that could not be done before the teaching or instruction took place.

Teaching methods are those specific teacher and learner activities that you plan and execute during a lesson. The methods depend on your learners, the content and the aims of your lesson. A teacher needs to consider how to optimise learning through the choice of teaching methods. Westwood (2008:v) tells us:

A teaching method is characterised by a set of principles, procedures or strategies to be implemented by teachers to achieve desired learning in students (Liu & Shi, 2007).

These principles and procedures are determined partly by the nature of the subject matter to be taught, and partly by our beliefs or theories about how students learn

So, defining a teaching method is not as simple as one might first think. Carl (2015:95) explains that there is a “close connection between learning experiences, learning opportunities and teaching methods.” He further describes the connection as arising from the fact that the teacher’s actions and the learner’s actions result in a learning opportunity where the learner could be actively involved and a meaningful experience could result from this involvement. Carl defines a teaching method as the “ways or means, which will acquaint the learners with the content in a manner that will lead to learning.”



Activity 1.5

- 1.1. How many synonyms (words with the same meaning) can you find for the word “teaching”? Create a list here:

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- 1.2. Can the synonyms in your list all be used in the school context?

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2. How many teaching methods do you know? Identify as many others as you can by consulting books and the internet.

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3. In some circles learning to become a teacher is called teacher training, while others call it initial teacher education. What are your thoughts about the difference between the two? Is learning to teach about acquiring a set of skills, or is learning to teach a deeper, life-long process? Is training part of learning to teach?

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Perhaps the term “education” is more holistic than “training”. It encompasses growing and developing the whole student. Education refers to developing a holistic knowledge, and the skills and values related to teaching, whereas training refers to just a narrow set of skills.

1.5 THE PLACE, IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF INSTRUCTION

Lowery and Hayes (2014:xiii) introduce the concept of teaching as “an essential part of life [that has been] on this earth for a very long time”. People throughout the ages have so valued their cultures and traditions that handing these traditions down to their children was an important part of life. Therefore, teaching and instruction have always been part of human existence. Teaching was often undertaken by the most educated people (Mda 1997), which led to a high regard for teachers. Teaching has changed, and the days when teachers were “mere transmitters of knowledge to passive, uninvolved learners are long gone” (Kruger 1997:218). Today, teachers need to involve learners creatively in their learning and incorporate relevant technology. Kruger explains that teachers need to be knowledgeable regarding up-to-date instructional methods. They also need to know how to adapt methods to learners at different levels and individual learners. Kruger also reminds us that teachers must have a holistic view of teaching, involving physical, cognitive, social and moral aspects and volition, and not just knowledge and intellect. Teachers are the most critical layer of the curriculum, since they breathe life into the curriculum and integrate what they know about their learners and their communities into the instructional environment. A teacher’s role in forming and building knowledge, skills, orientations, beliefs and values should never be underestimated.

1.6 TEACHER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN INSTRUCTION

As a teacher, you will be making many decisions every day. Orlich et al. (2010) remind us that with decision-making comes responsibility. They point out that some decisions are made for teachers, such as the curriculum, the number of learners in the class, and the time school starts. Teachers, however, still make many other decisions every day. You may not even be aware of the decisions you are making, as you make them almost automatically. Orlich et al. (2010) note that teachers who do take responsibility for decision-making try to get as much information as possible about their students and their subject, and then develop a teaching plan aimed at success.

One of your roles and responsibilities regarding instruction is to align your teaching to the relevant curriculum. The CAPS documents are underpinned by the wider framework of the South African Constitution. This wider framework has set out some general aims for the curriculum. Let’s have a look at these.

General aims of the South African curriculum

- (a) The National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 gives expression to the knowledge, skills and values worth learning in South African schools. This curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives.
- (b) The National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 serves the purposes of:
- equipping learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country;
 - providing access to higher education;
 - facilitating the transition of learners from education institutions to the workplace; and
 - providing employers with a sufficient profile of a learner's competences.
- (c) The National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 is based on the following principles:
- Social transformation: ensuring that the educational imbalances of the past are redressed, and that equal educational opportunities are provided for all sections of the population;
 - Active and critical learning: encouraging an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths;
 - High knowledge and high skills: the minimum standards of knowledge and skills to be achieved at each grade are specified and set high, achievable standards in all subjects;
 - Progression: content and context of each grade shows progression from simple to complex;
 - Human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice: infusing the principles and practices of social and environmental justice and human rights as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 is sensitive to issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors;
 - Valuing indigenous knowledge systems: acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution; and
 - Credibility, quality and efficiency: providing an education that is comparable in quality, breadth and depth to that of other countries.
- (d) The National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 aims to produce learners that are able to:
- identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking;
 - work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team;
 - organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively;
 - collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information;

- communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes;
- use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others; and
- demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

(e) Inclusivity should become a central part of the organisation, planning and teaching at each school. This can only happen if all teachers have a sound understanding of how to recognise and address barriers to learning, and how to plan for diversity.

The key to managing inclusivity is ensuring that barriers are identified and addressed by all the relevant support structures within the school community, including teachers, district-based support teams, institutional-level support teams, parents and special schools as resource centres. To address barriers in the classroom, teachers should use various curriculum differentiation strategies such as those included in the Department of Basic Education's *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (2010).

Reading 1.2

Source: Department of Basic Education (2011:4–5).

You should always have the greater aims of the curriculum in mind, even if you are not following the CAPS curriculum, as this will assist you in making some of the other decisions you need to make when planning instruction. In terms of instruction, your other roles and responsibilities include:

- **Analysing** the learning needs. This means that you design lessons that cater for the needs of the learners in your classroom by adapting, refining and redesigning learning activities so as to optimise the learning for your specific learners.
- **Articulating** your learning intentions. You write out your lesson planning to ensure that you have considered the detail of how your lesson will proceed. You have clear learning goals and outcomes. These aims and outcomes allow you to make a good selection of content, material and teaching methods. When you are doing lesson planning, these are usually the first things that you formulate.
- **Selecting** content to enable you to achieve your **teaching aims** and **learning outcomes/objectives**. You do this by considering your curriculum.
- **Selecting** the relevant teaching and **learning material**. Learning material is often referred to as teaching resources, or LTSM (learner-teacher-support material). Analysing your learning needs carefully and writing out your aims/goals/outcomes/objectives will guide you in your choice of learning material.
- **Selecting** appropriate **teaching methods** to achieve your teaching aims and learning outcomes/objectives. This will be the driving force of your lesson. How will the teaching and learning take place? Who will do what?
- **Planning** for both the formal and informal formative assessment as well as the summative assessment. Formative assessment guides your actions as a teacher in terms of how learners are progressing towards meeting the lesson aims and outcomes.

Formative assessment provides feedback to the learners while they are learning. Summative assessment is the way in which you will evaluate student learning at the end of the lesson/section of work/term and so on.

- **Reflecting** on your lesson. Spend time thinking about how learning could be enhanced or supported. Too many teachers consider the teaching and learning only after they have marked a test or examination. Reflection on your teaching should be built into your day. Don't consider the lesson from your own perspective only; think about how the learners experienced your lesson.
- **Keeping abreast** of the latest ideas in teaching as these relate to methods and technology. Don't be afraid to try new ideas. This will involve reading current journal articles and books, and attending professional development workshops.

Ultimately, your role and responsibility regarding instruction relate to learning. Nowadays, teachers are held accountable for the learning and assessment results in their classrooms to a greater degree than in the past. If you look at some of the criteria for teaching method selection, it is clear that the selection of a teaching method is not undertaken in a haphazard manner, but must be carefully considered and chosen by the teacher. This choice is part of the responsibility of teaching.



Activity 1.6

Spend some time thinking about these questions, and write down your ideas. Expand your answers in your workbook.

- (1) Which of the CAPS overarching aims will you find a) easiest and b) most difficult to meet? Why do you say so?
- (2) Which of the above roles and responsibilities will you find a) easiest and b) most difficult to fulfil?

Why do you say so?

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- (3) Why do you think some teachers use the same methods for all their lessons?

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- (4) How can you ensure that you offer a greater variety once you are a teacher?

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Never lose sight of the fact that as a teacher, you have a huge responsibility. If you examine the CAPS document, you will notice that a great deal is expected of you. In terms of making a difference in the classroom, your choice of a specific method or methods is going to have an enormous influence on the learners and how they learn – which is your primary responsibility.

The following section in your textbook deals with the intricacies of selecting a teaching method. Selecting and implementing a teaching method is a complex and multifaceted endeavour. It is one of your responsibilities as a teacher, and will have consequences for



Textbook chapter 2

Do you see that you can select either teacher-centred approaches or learner-centred approaches? Each strategy you select is likely to have both advantages and disadvantages, and you will need to weigh these up in order to make your decision. You cannot say that only one approach should be used all the time.

1.7 AFRICAN TEACHING PHILOSOPHIES AND PERSPECTIVES

In this section we are going to talk about African perspectives on teaching and instruction. African-based perspectives are more community oriented than individually oriented. Many of the more modern ideas of inclusive education and connectivism can be traced to African roots.

Ngara (2007:8–9) offers this insight:

In the African sense, a child is a child of every adult in the community. Teaching the child in traditional Africa was therefore not the monopoly of the biological parents. Every responsible adult could teach any child about the community's ways (etiquette, survival, welfare, etc). There was a division of labor and specialization whereby youths were apprenticed to skilled masters of healing arts, blacksmithing, hunting, midwifery, craftwork, etc. Any adult who happened to be free could enjoy teaching children traditional games including counting, puzzles, riddles and reciting children's poems (to the new moon, to the rain, to the sun, etc). Grandparents were not relegated into seclusion by virtue of old age but they remained with the family, imparting their acquired wisdom and philosophical ideas of the community. Children would congregate at the home of a well-known storyteller whose services they reciprocated by bringing firewood.

As you can see, in this context instruction is communal and based on rich traditions rather than being individual and atomistic, as more Western approaches tend to be. Dei (2010:35)

talks about the “cult of individualism” in Western countries as opposed to a “community of leaders” or “collaborative responsibility,” which is more in tune with African philosophy. Dei says that within the Western paradigm, those students who do well do not feel an obligation to assist those who are struggling. Dei suggests that learners should develop a sense of obligation towards one another, and he gives examples of cooperative learning, study groups and working in pairs as ways to foster this mutual obligation. Dei explains that within the Western paradigm, those who fail fail as individuals, while an African perspective would see failure as a collective problem. Dei (2010:39) further explains that African-centred educational philosophy supports inclusive education – African-centred education makes provision for a diversity of learners who come from different backgrounds. Dei (2010:42) further proposes that learners develop a connectedness and identification with their schools, and suggests that teachers should aim to get students to “own” their knowledge. Adult–peer mentorship encourages ties between teachers, learners, family and community, and this in turn will promote leadership in learners. You can see from Dei’s writing that connectedness and inclusivity can be traced back to African roots, although they have surfaced in recent thinking about education.

Reagan (2005:61), on the basis of the work of Fafunwa (1974), identifies the following goals of traditional African education:

- To develop the child’s latent physical skills
- To develop character
- To inculcate respect for elders and those in positions of authority
- To develop intellectual skills
- To acquire specific vocational training and a healthy attitude toward honest labour
- To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs, and
- To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large

In citing Moumouni’s (1968) four features of traditional African education, Reagan presents similar ideas to those of Dei:

- The great importance attached to it, and its collective and social nature;
- Its intimate tie with social life, in both a material and a spiritual sense;
- Its multivalent character, in terms of both its goals and the means employed; and
- Its gradual and progressive achievements, in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional, and mental development of the child.

Integrated within the discourse on African philosophy is the notion of ubuntu. Letseka (2000:179) defines this concept as “an important measure of human wellbeing or human flourishing in traditional African life. *Botho* or *ubuntu* is treated as normative in that it encapsulates moral norms and virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others.” Letseka emphasises the human aspect arising from our connection to other people. African ways of knowing cannot be separated from ways of living, which include language, knowledge, cultural practices and heritage.

In reviewing the book, *Non-Western perspectives on learning and knowing: perspectives from around the world* by Sharan B Merriam, Carruth (2012) distils some of Merriam’s findings.

An African perspective was cited as an example of a non-Western perspective. Carruth notes that, in the book, non-Western perspectives are cited as valuing knowledge learnt informally or from experience, and that there is a focus on interdependence in non-Western perspectives as opposed to the independence that is favoured in the Western context. Carruth also draws attention to Merriam's finding that in non-Western contexts knowledge has a number of dimensions (spiritual, emotional etc.), but that in terms of Western perspectives knowledge is compartmentalised.

Dei (2010:42) reminds us that "African-centred philosophical ideals are not simply for Black and African students. African-centred ideas are shared by many Indigenous communities and are relevant to global humanism. For this reason, the African school is defined by its philosophical grounding rather than its racial characteristics". Ngara (2007) reaffirms that pedagogy in Africa should include different layers of knowledge and that indigenous knowledge has a vital role to play in education.

As you work through the remaining units in this module, please look out for ties between some of the concepts we will be dealing with and African perspectives – for example, there are parallels between social constructivism or connectivism and African thinking and perspectives on education. You will also find communalism and ubuntu mirrored in some Western ideas.



Activity 1.7

- (1) Why is it important that, as teachers in Africa, we have a good understanding of African teaching perspectives?
 - (2) What aspects of African-based teaching can you integrate into your own teaching philosophy?
 - (3) How will this be of benefit to you, the learners and your school?
 - (4) Dei (2010) mentions that individualism is a non-African concept, while African concepts are more community based. What is your experience in this regard at the schools you attended or have visited?
 - (5) Reagan (2005) states that one of the goals of African education is to instil a sense of belonging. What is your experience in this regard at the schools you have visited? How can schools improve this sense of belonging?
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It is important that you consider different cultural approaches to issues in education. You will find that many of the ideas about education across the world are based on similar philosophies.



Activity 1.8

Please go to myUnisa and listen to PODCAST 1 for feedback on this section.

1.8 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have looked at some of the concepts associated with instruction. An important point we agreed on was that there is no single concept of teaching or instruction, and that these terms cannot be narrowly defined. We also considered some definitions of concepts closely related to teaching. In terms of instruction, we examined some of your roles and responsibilities as these relate to the instructional choices you make as a teacher. An African perspective on pedagogy was presented as an important contribution to our understanding of teaching. In the next unit, we will look at some of the forms, styles, approaches and strategies encountered in instruction.