

CONFRONTING REPRESENTATION IN SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES: WHERE IS THE VOICE OF LEARNER ?

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ABSTRACT

School Governing Bodies (SGB's) are a legal institution that is meant to bring about democracy in the governance of secondary schools in South Africa. Representation is prescribed by the state and there are tasks assigned to each portfolio. Principals have a duty to develop each member of the SGB with special emphasis on learner representatives.

The article investigates the part played by learner representatives in School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in some public schools in South Africa. A study of 16 schools was undertaken in the Engcobo district of the Eastern Cape. Learner representatives, principals, teachers, parents and non-teaching staff members who are members of the SGB's participated in the research. Qualitative research was used, with interviews playing the major role in the investigation. Observations and focus group discussions were also used for data collection. The study draws on the critical emancipatory theory. This theory was chosen because it purports to make the world a better place to work and live in. The results revealed that learner representatives are not provided the opportunity and guidance they need to make a meaningful contribution to the governance of the schools through their role as learner representative on the SGB, as prescribed by the South African Schools Act (SASA), Act 84 of 1996.

Keywords: Empowerment, youth, development, equality, leadership, access

INTRODUCTION

Literature on the revolutionary stance of the youth of South Africa against autocracy of the government in the governance and administration of education institutions is well underway, both in this country and internationally. The ushering in of democracy and the Constitution, 108 of 1996, brought about significant changes to a system that was embedded with autocracy and travesty of governance and introduced legislation that would facilitate development of the youth and other minorities in management. Laws were passed and among them was the South African School Act (SASA), Act 84 of 1996, which aims to provide democratic governance of schools through compulsory representation and participation of all stakeholders. Karlson (2002) asserts that the primary aim of the reforms in school governance was to democratise the schooling system of South Africa and to rid it of autocracy and the disparities that were so evident in the past regime. With the introduction of democracy one of the main strategies was to acknowledge and entrench the role of those stakeholders who have been poorly represented in the past among them, the learners. Through this Act, the position of learners was purportedly established in school governance. Section 23(2) of the SGB guidelines provides for the participation of learners in the SGBs through their democratically elected representatives. The Act mandates the participation of different stakeholders, among them representation by learners from Grade 8 upwards. The Act was promulgated at a time

that was marked with euphoria over the transition to democracy and well-meant, but sometimes ambitious, plans which have not always translated into reality.

Since 1994 the government of South Africa has not been impervious to the importance of the involvement of the youth in all structures of decision-making. This is shown in the various modes of recognition given to the youth through the different structures of government, for example the different youth league bodies associated with the different political parties. Universities have student representative councils, a legal arm of university governance. Democracy in governance also has to translate to schools and that is embodied in institutional modalities that reflect the relationship between the older and younger members of the school community, to form one body that shares in the governance of the school, the SGBs.

The formation of SGBs points to the importance of recognising all members of the SGB, as equally important and indispensable in the successful functioning of the school. It is crucial that members of the SGB be prepared for what is required of the position through training and to ensure that the school functions efficiently. Through training each member is helped to develop the latent potential to perform and contribute to the democratic governance of the school (Maile 2002; Ngidi 2004). Edward and Daniels (2012) place emphasis on the manner in which the training of the SGB is introduced to the members so as to ensure their buy in in the process. They aver that the preparation and introduction of ideology decide the possible behaviour that is shown by the recipient. They refer to Vygotsky (1978:339) who says:

The emotional experience, arising from any situation or from any aspect of his environment determines what kind of influence the situation will have.....Therefore it is not any of the factors (if taken without reference to the future) that carves the course of his development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the child's emotional stand”.

This calls for a proper plan of action that targets the specific aspects and areas necessary for meaningful contribution in a given organisation. Without a proper plan to train the learners and other less empowered members of the SGB, reaching the efficiency that the SASA prescribes remains a mirage. Kgaffe (2001) believes that provision is made by the Act for the training of SGB members. The trajectory on the implementation of the SASA should be well in advance, but some schools seem to be lagging behind

Those who have had prior experience have to help their successors to close the gap that exists between discourse and reality; this is the idea in which SGBs should play the major role. Learner representatives, as minors in the situation, should be involved in the discourse that informs decision-making in the schools. Leclau (1981:1976) moves the debate further arguing that the discourse should graduate into a discursive and he describes the discursive thus:

“...the discursive ...is nothing which in a narrow sense relates to texts but the ensemble of phenomena of societal production of meaning of a society as such is based”.

Through the discursive, history of a society is built. The function of the SGB is to build a calibre of young people who will carry on the task of nation-building way beyond the existence of the present cohort of leaders and contribute to the building of a better society.

The South African government, therefore, identified and endorsed the participation of learner representatives and other weaker links of the SGB through the promulgation of SASA and, emphatically so, through Section 23 that deals with learner involvement. It is evident though that, in some schools, the good intentions of government, which manifested in the promulgation of SASA, have not succeeded in creating the envisaged conducive and enabling

environment for learner representatives to be shaped and honed to make worthwhile contributions to school governance. The role of the principal in realising the envisaged goal cannot be overemphasised. Fua (2007) places equal treatment of all members of society at the top of the list for all those who aspire for social justice and adds that social justice should benefit also those who are least advantaged. Learner representatives, as the youngest members of the SGB, and because of their dependence on the teachers and principals to obtain good grades and to progress in their education, pass the test to be labelled the least advantaged. Though there were high hopes of opportunities for quality education and improved governance of all schools after the introduction of democracy, some of these hopes have translated to naught, with some leaders holding on to the old tendencies of dictatorship or adopting a laissez faire leadership style. Grant Lewis and Naidoo (2004) argue that the envisaged result of democratic participation is usually relinquished in pursuit of other gains.

The purpose of this study is to:

gain insight into the experience and insight of Learner Representatives in the SGB of 16 schools of the Engcobo district.

examine the role played by principals' as ex-officio members to ensure participation of the Learner Representatives.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher used critical emancipatory theory for this study to achieve praxis, thus enabling the participants to claim the power and develop the know-how to take action against oppression and thus liberate themselves through participation in their education. (Giroux 2011).

Freire (1970) endorses students' ability to think critically about their education and other life situations. Through praxis learners can attain Freire's aim, in that they will develop skills to think and participate actively in their education. Praxis involves engaging in a cycle of theory, application, evaluation, reflection and then back to theory. Giroux 2011 endorsed the foregoing view in the explanation of the critical theory in the view that is embodied and is much appropriate to this study in the following words;" Critical theory is an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom that recognises authoritarian tendencies, and connects knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action."

Under the leadership of the principals, as ex-officio members and educational leaders, learner representatives should be given the theory in their training, and informed about how to go about in executing their task. The foregoing views are in line with the main objective of the study, which is to raise consciousness of students in their representation in the SGBs and to liberate themselves from covert and overt forms of oppression. Learner representatives have a legal standing in the SGBs as prescribed by the South African Schools' Act no 84 of 1996. This is in line with global trends as observed by Carter, Harber and Serf (2003). Active and meaningful participation of learner representatives in the SGBs would accelerate the view of the contemporary critical pedagogues, like McLaren (2000) who criticise those who resist change and, therefore, further enhance the of Frere's (1970) who argues that democracy allows disruption of all oppressive regimes and it opens gets to change and participatory systems. It also endorses the main aim of the SASA namely, to inculcate democratic governance of schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Mc Millan and Schumacher (2006: 119) a research is a plan that sets out the order in which the study will be undertaken. They argue that it is through this plan that subjects are selected; research sites and data collection procedures to answer questions are put in place. It builds in the information of which individuals will be studied, where and under which circumstances they will be studied. Information is gathered and the plan may be altered as dictated to by circumstances but deviation should fall within the prescripts of the chosen methodology. Coding of information follows. This is later transcribed and a report is compiled from the activities and findings that ensued from the procedures undertaken.

Research was conducted through qualitative methods. The aim was to understand the work of the SGBs and to discern the level of participation of the learner representatives. Time was spent listening to participants and recording their responses. This was placed on understanding the role and actions of learner representatives and the impact of their participation or lack thereof on the SGBs in the chosen schools. Of great interest was whether they get any induction and support towards attaining the competencies they need to perform the tasks that they are expected to perform. As DeVos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:74) notes, qualitative research stems from the interpretive paradigm whose emphasis is on understanding social life and the meaning that is attached to it by those who bear interest in the environment as it benefits them. Participants in qualitative research methodology use words to describe what they have observed empirically. Qualitative data is defined as empirical information about the world. Ramadikela (2012:3) asserts that through qualitative research the researcher can explore the life worlds of participants. Punch (2009:117) endorses this view saying that qualitative research is holistic, allowing the researcher to study people's attitudes and aspirations in their natural settings.

The researcher subscribes to the ideology of emancipation and empowerment of the weaker beings. The learner representatives represent the youngest and most dependable members of the SGB's and are in some instances vulnerable as they cannot stand up to their counterparts, namely the principals, parents and the teachers in the same organisation.

This study was borne from the perspective that participation by all is essential and this can materialise in an emancipatory environment. Research conducted through emancipatory methods pays particular attention not only to literary expression but concentrates also on the tone of voice as well as the beliefs of both the researched and the researcher (Mahlomaholo:1998). In line with the preceding view the author used qualitative research methodology to capture the view of participants through their voices and other physical gestures.

Sampling

Springer (2010:100) explains that the researcher identifies the population that will give meaning to the investigation at hand and who can relate to the relevant questions. The population consist of all the schools in the Engcobo district of the Eastern Cape. The purpose of the study serves as guide to determine the sample size and the resources that are crucial in addressing the research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out that a sample is a means to explain facets of the whole population from which generalisation will be made. Because of the reasons cited above, the researcher worked through purposive sampling technique and, thus, deliberately decided on the schools in the Engcobo district. The researcher had earlier been exposed to the problems such as poor involvement of Learner Representatives in the school governance no training of members of the SGB, calling of meetings within very short notice and meetings taking place even without quorum. As a

frequent visitor to the area the prospective participants and the researcher knew one another. It, therefore, made it easy to select a sample that comprised elements of the population that is considered to be included in the actual study

The sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative and or typical attributes of the population. Devos et al (2007:2002). Burke and Larry (2011:217) argue that among other non-random sampling techniques is purposive sampling which targets a particular group that is seen to be well placed to respond to the questions about the study.

Population

The study was conducted in sixteen schools of the Engcobo district. Each school principal participated thus making sixteen principals; the group of principals was made up of twelve males and four females. Two of the female principals got into the positions of principalship in 2009 and 2011 respectively. The one who started in 2009 had never been part of the school management team while the other had served as a head of department and thus a member of school management team for six years, before she became a principal. Seven of the male principals have been in the position long before 1994 the birth of democracy in South Africa and therefore long before the introduction of the School Governing Bodies. Five of the principals get into principals after 1994 and they had been members of the Students Representative Councils at the various tertiary institutions where they studied.

The sixteen teachers were all local and fourteen of them did not hold any degree, and had qualifications from the former colleges of education that used to exist in the width and breadth of the Eastern Cape. Two of them were graduates of the then university of the Transkei which is now referred to as Walter Sisulu University. The teachers' ages ranged between thirty one and forty three years.

The non-teaching staff members were made factotums in the chosen schools. All of them were above the age of fifty and with retrenched from the mines in Gauteng, while three had been medically boarded for various illnesses and six of them having lost their jobs either through of the factories in Butterworth and Dimbaza respectively. They are all males all of whom had not gone beyond primary school education.

The parent cohort was made up of sixteen parents from the locality of the school, Seven of them were males and nine was made up of females, three of them being grandmothers who are foster parents to their grandchildren or who were playing the role of parents for their daughters who were on migratory labour outside in cities away from their homes. One of the grandparents was a retired school principal who was six eight years at the time the research was conducted. All the parent participants were between forty five and sixty three. Small businesses in the small businesses like brick making, sewing and two of the men unemployed. No chairman of the School Governing Body was allowed to participate in the study.

The thirty learners were made up of two representatives from each of sixteen schools all between the ages of seventeen and twenty one years, females and males equally shared the sample, this being a deliberate choice of the researcher to allow gender equality.

All participants were black Xhosa speaking and all residential in the district of Engcobo at the time the study was undertaken.

Ethical Considerations

When approached to participate the student responded with alacrity. The principals did mention the question of time constraints but agree to participate without being coaxed. Parent

representatives found an opportunity to understand to express their dissatisfaction about some of their concerns and thus welcomed the request with great enthusiasm. The non governing staff members agreed to participate as long as they were assured that their participation would not jeopardise their employment which assurance they received from the researcher. Assurance was given to all prospective participants to avoid any possible any possible physical and emotional harm as warned by De Vos et al (2005) who place emphasis on respecting ethical principles, especially in human sciences where human beings are the major source of information that directs the course of the study. There was willingness and eagerness to participate and a good rapport prevailed between the researcher and participants from the start of the process to the end.

DATA COLLECTION

Focus groups were formed of learner representatives; non-teaching staff members as well as parent representatives, respectively. Although all members of the SGB have equal through a legal imperative, Mahlangu (2008) observed that parents in historically disadvantaged schools still do not have the confidence to exercise the authority vested in them. Non-teaching members are also reluctant to pronounce on matters other than to endorse the decisions of the principal and the teachers. The same can be said of learner representatives, who view the principal and the other members of the SGB as their superiors and would not dare challenge their word and views. For this reason these groups of “weaker” participants were placed in focus groups so that they could draw strength from one another as members of a given group. They could also voice their views freely, without fear of intimidation. They could render support to one another, verify information and fill in gaps in one another’s presentations. It was interesting to hear some learner representatives expressing the view that this forum allowed them the opportunity to speak freely, without being constantly corrected by teachers and principals about the way they expressed themselves, which is one of the reasons they were reluctant to voice their views in the SGB meetings.

Principals were visited and interviewed in their offices, at their own convenience. This arrangement presented settings where principals could give their own views within their own private spaces. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to be imbued in the setting environment and to be as close to the understanding of the role of principals as is humanly possible. The setting allowed for and worked well with the use of unstructured interviews and naturalistic observations of SGB meetings. Educator participants were also interviewed at venues of their own choice, away from the staff room and the prying eyes of other educators and learners. Individual interviews were conducted and educators were encouraged to express their honest opinions even if those views were contrary to the views of other members of the SGB. Responses, as captured in the field notes and recordings, were transcribed. Units of meaning were classified into categories.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The main research question is: Do learner representatives exercise their role as prescribed by the South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996? In response to this question an in-depth study of literature was undertaken. A literature review guided the researcher in establishing how the SGBs came into being. Heysteck (2001:27) states that SGBs were established with the aim to democratise the South African schools and to widen participation through the involvement of all sectors of the school population in the management and governance of the schools. The obligation of the principal in developing and assisting especially the student representative is clearly enunciated.

Literature intimates that the objectives of democracy and broader participation, as anticipated, remain subordinate to the interests of principals. Grant, Lewis and Naidoo (2004:102) aver thus:

“The reality is that these are focussed on supporting efficient functioning of the school organisation with little regard to extending democratic participation.”

Christie (2008:156) found that the South African government has not designed policies and education laws that address the reality of the situation with regard to education in this country. He argues that South Africa adopts conventional methods and policies, and that the education system reflects ideas drawn from Western countries and does not engage with local classroom realities. Such an approach is rather subtractive for it seeks to depict the South African classroom as similar to a classroom elsewhere. This directly contradicts the additive approach which allows the use of your own words as the basis whilst allowing drawing from international sources. Sayed (2001) echoes the sentiment forwarded by Christie (2008) saying that it is short-sighted to believe that a new policy will lead to enactment and bring about change if it was not been designed to suit the set objective.

It is the task of the school to develop the learners to enable them to participate in the democratic processes and in the running of the school. In this regard, Whitby (2007:7) advocates for enabling pedagogies so as to encourage curiosity among learners. In this way learners will be availed meaningful learning opportunities that will encourage them to question, critique and make informed choices. Fataar (2009:107) proposes that learners should be supported towards realising construction of self in their daily encounters with specific lived spaces. In their term of office as representatives in the SGB opportunities should be maximised for learner representatives to discover their potential and build their integrity. This needs a deliberate plan from the principals to develop and support the young members of governance in their efforts to contribute to democracy. Steinmann (2007:2) takes this further in the analogy of the lioness and her cubs saying: “The survival and competence of her cubs represent success in the fascinating life-cycle of nature – ultimately; their success ensures the future and sustainability of the pride.”

This analogy can be applied to the role of the adult members of the SGBs, especially the principals, who should develop the learners to participate fully in their designated roles. If the cohort of learner representatives is properly trained, they will be able to contribute to the process and to develop their own lives based on the office they had occupied as members of the school governing body. Ngcobo (2002) emphatically states that it is the schools’ obligation to promote the democratic rights of learners and to assist them to participate fruitfully in deciding matters that affect them. Participation can be practised through different styles which are influenced by different philosophies. Democracy is the cornerstone of operation for all the SGBs in South Africa. Democracy can manifest in various models, but for the purpose of this study only representative participation is upheld. Strauss and Corbin (1998:27) posit that with representative participation the role of the representative is not only to agree and endorse decisions of management, or to support recommendations, but they may even block management actions until consensus has been reached.

By virtue of their positions in the schools, principals tacitly consent to assist learners to develop to their full potential. Therefore, the expectation is there that the principals and other members of the SGB will assist the learner representatives and present them with opportunities to grow; develop skills and gain confidence to participate and contribute to decision-making in the governance of the school. With SASA having set out the role of learner representatives in the governance of schools, learner participation should have been in place by now.

Louw (2010:73) argues that training and creating new “intelligentsia” should be at the top of the list of social functions to be attained by higher education; he adds further that there is a need for the 21st century student to play an important role as part of the planning team.

While I subscribe to this view, it is my sense that education, training and participation in planning should start at the secondary schools, in the SGBs to be precise. Ramadikela (2012) laments the lack of enthusiasm to ensure participation by all those who have been elected as members of school governing body and, specifically, the unenthusiastic participation of learners as members of the SGB. This has to be turned around to accord the SGB s the real position that they are set to occupy in the governance of schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are grouped into the following categories:

1. Responses from the teacher representatives and school principals
2. Responses from the learner representatives
3. Responses from the parents and non- teaching staff members.
4. Data collected through participant observation

The main question asked from the principals and the teachers were the same. The rationale behind this decision is that though the task of the principals has been specified the teachers have the same role to play, albeit covertly stated. Their questions revolved around their role to train, develop and support learner’s representatives and the other less prominent groups of the SGB namely, the parents and the non-teaching staff members.

Most of the principals found the task that they are expected to train the SGB as daunting in the midst of their busy schedules. They also mentioned that the learner representatives that get elected by other learners are trouble makes who feel that they are in the fore front to dictate the rule of the school in the name of representing other learners. Principal AP had this to say:

‘Hay; these children are actually those who are most difficult, they take years repeating one class. If you want instigators and ring leaders, it is them.’

Principal G said:

‘I do my bit, but I do not have all the time. Sometimes there are urgent matters that need immediate attention. You can’t but call the few people you can get hold of; a teacher or parents that are available at the time. I mean, some people work and these children sometimes are absent or they are in class and school governance matters can’t be at a standstill because they are not there. After all they get informed, and the matter gets resolved at the right time’.

The view of principal G seemed to be a popular view and a common way of running the SGB. Principals feel that they have a prerogative to execute duties of management and governance with or without the other members.

There is also a common view that the learner representatives do not even communicate the information properly and it takes a lot of time find out what it is that they are trying to communicate. This goes with the view that they cannot be expected to govern, they are young. Principal, Y argue that without experience, they can never be able to make meaningful contribution to school governance. He argues thus:

“Experience is the best teacher In my twenty years of principal ship, some of things I just learnt through trial and error ,using my experience; This independence makes people think that everyone should take a chance; everything democracy, democracy; ha ha ha(It can’t work). In the old Transkei, students were students and there was order. Anyway, may be things will go wrong before they come right”.

The teacher representative from the same school just echoed the thinking of the principal though interviewed at a different time and different place. Teachers were more intolerant of the idea that they have to share the space of school governance with learners. In school X the teacher said:

“It is a real waste of time to think that schools can be governed by children. They do not even understand a simple comprehension or theorem in class, it’s a burden that we place on them- they can’t manage. What is democracy sometimes I think our government understands democracy wrongly. Actually I want out of this joke of SGB- trying to deal with complicated issues with children”.

The teacher in question was not even prepared to go to the end with the interview. In his view this is an idea that should not be entertained because it will not bear any fruit.

When asked the question: Do you train learner representatives for their roles in the School Governing Bodies.?

Principal C responded thus:

“I must say that this properly done can benefit our youth, however the way it was introduced forced it out of perspective. To come to your question, yes I try but the other people like teachers and even parents are not really supportive of the idea. I try to use Saturdays because Mondays to Fridays are jam packed you can’t. What you get is one group on Saturday another group the other Saturday- It just doesn’t work. The other thing is that learner representatives are in the forefront of the disturbances e.g. the learners

Don’t want teacher so and so, we can’t pay school fees etc. Believe me they do not take no for an answer- they gauge their success against destructive calls. But we shall keep trying”

The response of this principal shows that she trains learner representatives more to abide by the instruction and to fulfil an obligation. She goes on to say “its law what can we do?” This removes the sense of a democratic exercise and wish to contribute to the development of others.

Parents felt that the principals connive with the chairman of the SGB’s and they are expected to endorse decisions that have already been taken. Parent P’ had this to say:

“Ay man, these new (*which ner?*) The principals and the chairman sit in the principals. Office and hold the meetings- they just want us to say yes, yes, yes- a-a! no. You know mos that I am in the committee at school D and also at school F- you remember mos at the meetings- you saw my name twice and asked, so hay, we don’t want to be used to agree to things”.

Some parents felt that whenever they bring a view that’s incongruous with the views of the principal the principal will promise to check with the constitution of the SGB as well as with SASA. They indicate that these are documents they have always been promised to be trained on but nothing has come to fruition. One parent avers:

“If you give an idea that there must not be a meeting when most of us are busy, perhaps at work or have gone to church, principal says, ‘I think when it’s urgent we are allowed. I shall check with SASA or the constitution. We do things according to the constitution.’”

Parent O felt that the principal is in cahoots with the chairman and the treasurer. Being in the second term of the SGB in the same school, her experience gathers that the tendency of the principal in leading the members of the SGB is that of exclusion of the chairman and the treasurer from the other members of the group. He works with the two members and documents such meetings as authentic when there has not even been a quorum sometimes. The rest of the group will be invited for specific meetings, where they are expected to endorse the views of the principal and the treasurer. She says:

“You see, I am the member again after we were elected this year, this is my second time- the principal just talks with the chairman or treasurer. We are not called when they decide. Then we shall be told, it’s a big meeting you must come- all of you’. You find that there is much thing sand money they used and they want us to support their thing, it’s not easy.”

The members of the non-teaching staff felt that they did not have anything to contribute except to give information when asked by the principals on matters around the maintenance of the school. Non-teaching staff member ‘B’ avers thus:

“The time I am called by the principal to the meeting is when these children are silly- they make holes on the fence down there at the bottom of the school yard, sometimes a boy claps a girl or keep the girlfriend in a class after school, then I have to be called to the SGB to answer.”

They feel that they are seen as security and as such have to participate in the SGB. When asked if what can say about the constitution of the SGB, they have no idea. One says:

“I was only called by the principal early in the year and told me that I am in the committee and I shall be called with him, the parents and the children- but I have never been in a meeting with all the people he mentioned at the same time. Sometimes I’m called with a child as with parents or a parent. Mostly I’m called by the principal alone and he asks the question or he tells me what to do”.

The learner representatives participated in focus groups. In the beginning the learners were reluctant to talk, not sure of what those from other schools would say. Gradually their discussion started but communication tended to be disturbed by vague consensus seeking remarks e.g. “Andithi guys?” the chorus from others affirmed those who started and gradually all participants gained confidence and started participating.

The interview data were analysed to get conceptual ideas which were then placed into clusters of meaning and shaped into categories. This is based on the view that data analysis involves reducing and organising data, synthesizing, searching for significant patterns and discovering what is important as purported by Aryl, Jacob and Razaviech (2006:490). The clusters were formed out of related and, in some cases, similar statements, responses, comments, and gestures of participants during the interview sessions. Meanings were deduced and categories emerged out of the themes. These categories are as follows:

Learner Representatives Make Minor, Non-Significant Contributions

Basically, learners endorse what has been decided by the principal and, even though they may hold a divergent view, they find themselves compelled to support the view of the principal. This can be attributed to fear and may also be to curry favour with the principal and the

teaching who are members of the SGB. The result of this is poor and, sometimes, dishonest contributions. Grant Lewis and Naidoo (2004), and Ramadikela (2012) argue that when the interests of principals take the upper hand the whole idea of SGBs, as a democratic and participatory exercise to improve school governance, gets undermined.

Learners Are Not Informed of Meetings

Learner representatives are sometimes not aware that there is a meeting because they are not invited or informed. The principals excuse learners by explaining that learners are preparing for tests or they may give other reasons that sound protective of the learners' circumstances.

Learners' Contributions are Trivialised

The role of learner representatives is not clearly delineated and learners find that they are reprimanded for the manner in which they speak, corrected or belittled when they want to contribute to issues because their knowledge is not adequate according to the educators and principal or the parent representatives would accuse them of being impolite when they are firm on certain issues, especially when the other members believe otherwise.

Students Do Not Receive Adequate Induction

Much time was spent with learners bouncing their ideas on one another. There was a bit of chorused responses and the group members became united. Learner representatives from all focus groups that school principals find it difficult to lead without dominating. They feel that there they are given neither opportunity nor direction to understand and participate in governance.

The SASA stipulates that all members of the SGB must be trained. Intensive training and induction must be conducted by the Department of Basic Education. This training has to be followed by on-site induction of especially the learner representatives who are more likely to be new to the SGB. Ndou (2012) argues that it is unfortunate that the prescripts of the SASA are not followed; especially in as far as training is concerned. The learner representatives in this study uniformly stated that they have never received any training during their tenure which, at the time, was three months away from ending. Karlsson (2002) laments the lack of training saying that without such training, which ensures that all of the stakeholders have the capacity to participate effectively, the whole plan becomes elusive.

Fear of Prejudice

There is tendency on the part of learner representatives to avoid active participation, especially in matters that could potentially harm their relationship with the principal or the teachers. The Act itself is potentially prejudicial in that parts of the Act, for example the part on matters relating to teachers' discipline, exclude any participation of the learner representatives. This can be interpreted to mean that learner representatives' contribution is good enough, but only to a certain level. While this may be based on good intentions, it also presents a lack of trust in learner representatives in some areas of co-governance. Learner representatives argue that they find it risky to question the fact that they may not attend some meetings due to the nature of items on the agenda. If they do, they risk their lives and may even fail the subjects taught by the educators concerned. The same situation pertains to their relationships with some of the learners, when they have to participate in meetings where learners have transgressed the rules of the school.

They find themselves torn between the parent representatives and the principals and, in some cases, and the educators. In most cases they choose to remain neutral and, thereby the

possibility of, losing face to any of the adult participants of the SGB. They find themselves constantly compromising their views and convictions.

Lines of Communication

Learner representatives opine that it is difficult to operate under the present circumstances with the type of communication that prevails between them and the chairperson of the SGB. Sometimes a learner representative will be called because he is spotted when the meeting has already proceeded or just a few minutes before the meeting starts. They posit that they are included when it is convenient to have them in the SGB and even communication between them and the principals seems to be coincidental.

One Learner Representative Had This to Say

It's better when they don't call us, in fact me I run when I think they are going to see me because ,ay! They sarcastic sometimes. I was speak in meeting and principal and one mistress laughed. They say they will discuss that thing I was saying with me at school tomorrow. I was shy; I think really they disappoint me in the meeting.

Learner representatives feel some form of direct and sometimes indirect humiliation when they contribute to discussions in SGB meetings. This discourages them from participating and, therefore, many discussions take place without the invaluable contribution from the learner's perspective.

Some of them feel threatened by some members of the community and expressed the view that their lives are threatened by some of the villagers who feel that they did not do enough to protect their children or their siblings or some other relative. They find themselves isolated by the system that require them to be involved in a governance structure with no the support or appreciation for the effort they make. The leadership that the principals and other adult members of the SGBs in Engcobo district provide have curious resemblances that are divergent from the views espoused by Daniels and Edwards (2012) who aver that intelligent leadership is characterised by empathy when there is interaction with others and it constantly takes systematic reflection and review of actions and strategies for the betterment of the communication and participation of all concerned.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study depict a picture that is contrary to the objectives of SASA, which is to purge the schools of the tyrannical and non-transparent tendencies of governance. The study which aims to confront inadequacies in representation in school governing bodies enabled the researcher to come to the following conclusion and recommendations:

It is evident that principals take the lead in the work of SGBs in the district of Engcobo; however, the style of leadership is laden with autocracy. It is a common thread that runs through the responses of participants that principals take decisions without including learner representatives. This leaves the learner representatives with no option but to endorse the wishes and decisions that ensue from discussions they did not participate in. In some instances they find they find themselves in the awkward position where they have to ratify a decision that would not benefit the community of learners or contribute to the enhancement of democratic forces in the schools.

Learner representatives should be allowed to expurgate practices they find undemocratic without fear of victimisation. The leadership of the schools in question should resuscitate the voices that are waning off due to the manner in which the SGBs are managed. They need to inculcate an interest to participate. With learners feeling enervated, broad-based participation

will be hindered and democratisation will remain a mirage. The guidelines outlined in the SGB constitution can go a long way in acknowledging learner representatives and, thus, uplift their integrity.

The study reveals that there are blurred lines of communication which leave learner representatives in the dark most of the times. This emerged strongly in questions about scheduled dates for meetings, the agenda and, most commonly, in final decisions that are taken about matters that had been discussed at previous meetings of the SGB.

In this study it became evident that the principals talked down to the learner representatives and did not treat them as equals in the governance of schools. The way the principals, as the senior and most influential members of SGBs, interacted with learner representatives, especially with regarding to announcements, agenda and office calls, were viewed as condescending. Learner representatives reported that they were corrected in a humiliating manner during meetings and this caused them to withdraw and remain passive during discussions. In some instances agendas would be read item per item as the meeting progresses. Only the teaching personnel, the principal and some parents, some of whom attend the same church as the principals, are privy to some matters in the SGBs.

Communication has the ability to build or break the initial stage of talk lays a foundation for healthy interaction during discussions, the pinnacle of communication. Integrity is gained through being recognised and supported. Well thought-out and formulaic correction is the cornerstone to growth and later readiness to lead. The principal's task is to mould learner representatives and the other non-prominent members of the SGB to be the best they can be.

The good intentions of democracy are still clouded by euphoria and in some instances personal gains. This in some instances perpetuates the pre-democratic tendencies of autocracy. The reality is that there is a need to build future workforce capacity by way of empowering the younger generation. The SGB is an ideal tool to contribute to the development of the youth and with the yearly turnover of learner representatives in the SGB, an opportunity is there to have a great number of learners exposed to training through SGB. The need for interface in all forms of governance can never be overemphasised. There is need to build the understanding of principals about their role in creating enabling environments for democracy to thrive in their schools. The SGB's have a mandate to fulfil, namely bringing about democracy in the governance of schools in South Africa. Without creating enabling conditions for all to participate the plan of government remains a mirage.

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