The structure and functions of a prefect system in primary schools predominantly attended by black learners

GP Boweni
MEd dissertation (Education Management); Supervisor: Prof PC van der Westhuizen, Faculty of Educational Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus
nsopcvdw@puk.ac.za

Abstract
The purpose of this research was to investigate the structure and function of a prefect system in primary schools predominantly attended by black learners. It is the wish of learners to participate fully in school governance to bring about desirable changes within the education system. The riots that broke out in 1976 proved beyond doubt that learners no longer wished to be onlookers in the system, but to actively take part in stabilising it for their own future. In the past, learners who served in the prefect council were randomly chosen and elected by the principal and the staff. This was done in isolation of the learners in the school. Favouritism and popularity were the main factors for a learner to be elected. At any given moment during the course of the year, a member of the council who did not perform according to the principles as set out by staff members, was dismissed and replaced by anybody who they felt would do a better job.

The democratic government that was voted for in 1994 brought about drastic changes within the education system. Unlike in the past, where learners were omitted as part of education stakeholders, the present government gives due consideration to learners' inputs and ideas. Legislative Acts such as the South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996) were passed to accommodate the needs and aspirations of learners. In terms of section 10 (3) of Act No. 84 of 1996, public schools are allowed to institute a prefect system where necessary. This urged the compilation of this research, to bring primary schools predominantly attended by black learners on par with their white counterparts who still make use of the prefect system. The procedure for establishing an effective structure for SRCs in secondary schools is applicable in primary schools as well. The system for the election, nomination and voting in secondary schools can be applied in primary schools as well. The functions of a prefect system that included, among others, monitoring of both educators and learners outside the school premises, have been replaced by functions that lead to the creation of an educative environment within the school.

Key terms
Learner empowerment; prefect system; learner participation; learner leadership; leadership development.