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Educators' experiences of learner involvement in transforming traditional school policies and practices at a former Model C school

Transformation is a word that has a significant and varied sense of meaning throughout South Africa. However, at its core, transformation is about movement and change. This desire for change leaves no area of civil society untouched, as illustrated by the power of the student voice in matters of social justice. From lecture halls at tertiary institutions to the classrooms at secondary schools in our country, change and movement seemingly are an inevitable and necessary part of development in our country.

This study aimed to explore attempts of one school to bring about transformation through collaboration between learners and educators. This aim was achieved by giving a voice to the educators who had been employed and active in the events leading to significant learner-led policy changes during the 2016 academic year.

Based on a review of the literature and approached from a social constructivist framework, this study was used to explore the findings gathered during individual interviews and focus group discussion. Data were then transcribed and analysed to identify five prominent themes, namely the perceptions of transformation in former Model C schools, the inclusion of civic educational elements, positioning student voices, educators' experiences of the student voice, and acknowledging educators' voices.

The research findings suggest that the provision of student voice opportunities in schools provides the means to negotiate issues of transformation better. In addition, these opportunities serve to develop adolescent identity while educating learners to become functional members of a democratic society. Consequently, the potential for power imbalances between learners and educators because of growing entitlement may exist. However, the data linking these imbalances with perceived growing learner entitlement were inconclusive.

Finally, the findings suggest that a sufficient level of management is required when allocating responsibilities such as the management of SVOs to educators, as failure to do so can lead to overburdened teachers and consequential adverse effects on teaching and learning.