



The Leadership Challenge in South Africa: Perspectives of Child Citizens to Strengthen Citizenship Education

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Abstract

In times of conflict and turmoil people ask for strong leadership. The transformational challenges of democratic nation-states world-wide and especially in South Africa, call for leadership who will cast the vision of a 'better' life for all its citizens. Leadership is a complex task and per definition dynamic as it is about change and engagement with the future. In a largely democratized world empowered by the accessibility of information and knowledge, leadership is no longer reserved for the few at the top of an organization or a government. In such a world people increasingly realize that they can claim their own destiny. Growing knowledge of and insight into South Africa's challenges can no longer be seen as a luxury but have to be a preference for all who want to create a better future for South Africa. This priority includes the revisiting of our thinking paradigms about the world, South Africa and its people [Van Rensburg, 2007]. It also pertains the education of the youth, especially the very young children who have to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to deal with the future. In a longitudinal study I explored the perceptions and experiences of children in the first grades of primary school about leadership. Interesting themes emerged from their writings such as: 'The leader must be kind and he must respect us'. When asked to write about their abilities to be a child leader a child wrote: 'We must tell people to take care of themselves'. The perceptions about leadership and themselves as child leaders enhanced my understanding of how to strengthen citizenship education. Citizenship education will enhance the potential of children in South Africa to develop their unique qualities and cultures in such a way that they will live proudly, prosperously, competently and with moral integrity in claiming their destiny.