

**RESEARCH TITLE**

# An exploration of leadership practices in enacting a curriculum policy platform in working class secondary school

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**ABSTRACT**

*It can be argued that South African schools, particularly those in working-class contexts, are struggling to contend with the challenges of curriculum reform. These curriculum reforms, which were introduced in an attempt to alleviate past injustices, are arguably not providing equal educational opportunities for all. Based primarily on their students' poor results on tests and examinations, schools in working-class contexts are labelled as underperforming or dysfunctional schools by the Department of Education (DoE). Consequently, this negative positioning of many working class schools places huge pressure on the principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) of these schools.*

*Based on qualitative research in three selected working class schools, the thesis explores how curriculum policy plays out in working-class secondary schools by focusing on the leadership practices enacted by their School Management Teams. The research concentrates on how these SMTs develop and implement a range of leadership practices within their schools in order to enact a curriculum policy platform for optimal teaching and learning. Employing Stephen Ball's theory of policy enactment, the study is an illustration of how the contexts of working class schools impact on the type of leadership practices that are enacted, which, in turn, impact the type of curriculum policy platform that is constructed. A key conceptual assumption of the study is the view that policy enactment is regarded as a process of 'becoming' and not as something fixed or with predetermined outcomes within a school. This thesis elucidates how curriculum policy is received by the formal leadership structure of the school, and shaped and implemented in the 'messy' reality of selected working class schools in the process of enacting a curriculum policy platform. The thesis focuses on the processes, mediations and meanings of curriculum policy in selected working-class secondary schools. I present the argument that the enactment of leadership practices by the selected schools' SMTs are fundamentally impacted and determined by the schools' 'materiality' and discursive constructions. Their leadership practices, based on narrow and one-dimensional enactment of the*

*curriculum policy, have negative and uneven consequences for these schools' curriculum and teaching and learning offerings.*

**Keywords:** policy enactment, curriculum policy, leadership practices, curriculum policy platform, working-class context, materiality, school management team

The full thesis can be found at <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/100072>