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Educational policies in post-apartheid South Africa: the national curriculum and the social stratification of working class families

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ABSTRACT

Soon after taking office, the post 1994 government of national unity embarked on a programme to reform the curriculum for grades R-12 in line with the new political dispensation. The new curriculum's main objective was to transform the sector in order to create equality in the school system.

Research shows that curriculum reform has failed to achieve some of the desired objectives due to some in-built mechanisms within the education system that limit opportunities for the majority of learners from working class families (disadvantaged groups in society).

This study examined certain of the mechanisms within the education system -- and the curriculum for grades R-12 in particular -- that limit opportunities for learners from working class families (disadvantaged groups in society). The study explored the political transition as well as the economic and social contexts in which the post 1994 national curriculum for grades R-12 was formulated. It assessed the relative explanatory power of group approaches (that explore how different interests interacted during the transition negotiations and after) and structural approaches that focus on the role of educational systems in the reproduction of class structure. In the most general sense the study is an investigation of government's policy shifts in the education system and in particular the curriculum for grades R- 12 and implications thereof for learners from vulnerable groups in society.