

## **Rethinking healthy school relations for curriculum change in Zimbabwe: A relational leadership approach**

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The article addresses the challenges faced in the implementation of the new curriculum in Zimbabwe. The new curriculum was rolled out in the midst of various trajectories (challenges), such as lack of resources, inadequate teacher preparation and resistance from teachers and parents, among others. We used relational leadership as a theoretical lens, which buttresses a need for school leadership that prioritises relationships within the implementation context. The study was qualitative, with 25 participants chosen through purposeful sampling and snowballing from five different schools in rural Zimbabwe. Data were collected through interviews and a focus group discussion. The data were then analysed using the lens proposed by Laws, Harper and Marcus (2003), where various themes were identified responding to the research questions. The study found that healthy school relations, though overlooked, are very important in the success of any curriculum implementation process and that there is a need for curriculum planners, school heads, teachers and learners to invest in healthy relations underpinned by social justice, emancipation and improvement of school conditions as alternatives to enhance a contested curriculum implementation.

### **Introduction**

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) in Zimbabwe rolled out a new curriculum in 2017 from grade one to advanced level. The new curriculum is replacing the traditional curriculum which was adopted in 1980 from the colonial Rhodesian regime (Gasva & Moyo, 2017:456). Thus, Shizha and Kariwo (2011) noted that at independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a two-tier racially structured education system which sought to protect the interests of the dominant white supremacists, while African education was meant to reinforce subjectivity and subjugation. The then Minister of Education Lazarus Dokora sought to reverse this by implementing the Nziramasanga Commission of 1999 that advocated an overhaul of Zimbabwean education to cater for the lived realities of the people of Zimbabwe (Nziramasanga, 1999). Another weakness was that it was predominantly academic oriented and relied much on summative evaluation.

According to the MoPSE (2014:22), the purpose of the new curriculum, among many others, is to “establish some strong scientific, mathematical and technological oriented learners to meet moral, national identity, pride, civic obligations and value country heritage”. According to Walsh (2016:2), curriculum change is necessary to enable reflection on content and methods and keep pace with wider societal developments. While the implementation of the new curriculum was a positive move to realign the curriculum to national aspirations, curriculum change is always complex and yet desirable (Bennie & Newstead, 1999). However, to assume that curriculum change and implementation are always set on a rosy path is a minimalist approach to understanding the curriculum issues

and discourses. In fact, the curriculum implementation has travelled an ambiguous and ambivalent terrain manifested by various trajectories (challenges) such as resistance by teachers and parents, to the extent that the MoPSE was taken to court (Nkala, 2017).

Other challenges include the unpreparedness of schools to execute the new curriculum (Esau & Mpofu, 2017; Mangwaya, Blignaut & Pillay, 2016); increased overload on the part of teachers and learners, triggering resistance (Maranganwa, 2017); and unavailability of resources on the part of the school and of teachers to implement the new curriculum (Murava, 2017). In addition, mere negativity by teachers, parents and learners towards new curriculum packages (Dzimiri & Marimo, 2015) and in some cases lack of qualified teachers or understaffed schools to implement the new curriculum (Marume, 2016; Mugadzaweta, 2017; Asebiomo, 2015; Kallery & Psillos, 2002) were also identified as challenges. This study thus explores the trajectories or challenges of implementing the new curriculum and suggests an alternative mitigation strategy to challenges by arguing the need for healthy school relations that reduce unnecessary and obstructive resistance and /or sabotage to curriculum packages.

### **Healthy school relations space in curriculum implementation**

Various scholars have commented on the implementation of the new curriculum in Zimbabwe. Mufanechiya (2015) did research on the implementation of the new curriculum and argued that the success of any curriculum implementation has to be community oriented and all-inclusive. However, nothing was said on how the community can be integrated into the implementation process, which often requires some level of teacher professional education. Esau and Mpofu (2017) conducted a study on the implementation of the curriculum and claimed that the curriculum is not achieving some of its intended goals, in part because of the unpreparedness of teachers to execute the new curriculum packages. Thus, they recommended further training of teachers; however, continuous professional growth of teachers does not guarantee success of the curriculum, especially in a context where school relations are sour. In the same vein, Gasva and Moyo (2017) conducted a study in rural Zimbabwe on the implementation of the curriculum and recommended that there is need for continuous teacher professional development courses that will keep teachers abreast on the new curriculum. Olibie (2013) also advocated the need for continuous professional growth. Mangwaya *et al.* (2016) conducted research on the readiness of teachers to implement the early childhood curriculum and concluded that teachers were not adequately consulted on the mapping or formulation of the new curriculum; thus, its implementation was a nightmare as the teachers were not well acquainted with the new demands, especially with the new assessment procedures.

The limitation of the above mentioned studies is that their focus was on the teacher as an incompetent implementer who needs continuous teacher development, although there are various factors that limit the effectiveness of curriculum implementation, such as relations within the school context and curriculum planners conducting themselves in a listless way during the curriculum diffusion stage, thus hampering implementation since it requires a desire to change (Leithwood, 1991). Thus, only limiting the problem to inadequate teacher preparation is a minimalistic approach to understanding the complexities associated with

the curriculum; thus, even solutions suggested will not be holistic to address multiple challenges at implementation. To bridge the gap, we therefore focus upon school relations on which curriculum implementation rests. By so doing, we show how healthy school relations have the impetus to mitigate challenges at the implementation stage. We again buttress that, if intimidation, force and vertical hierarchies underpin the relationships, there is a likelihood that curriculum projects (despite their novelty) may suffer stillbirth or fail to achieve their intended purpose.

To this end, we agree with Anderson and Rogan (2010) by envisaging a curriculum implementation process that is not dominated by autocratic school heads, teachers and curriculum planners who use inflexible regulations, but are marked by democratic and collaborative processes involving inputs from key stakeholders, which we refer to as healthy school relations. Healthy school relations as used in this paper refers to the interaction between school stakeholders underpinned by the need to champion equity, equality, respect, social justice and fairness, with the goal of ensuring active participation of stakeholders for the success of the curriculum implementation.

### **Theoretical framework: Relational leadership**

We couch this article in relational leadership (RL), which has the impetus to usher in sustainable, healthy school relations. While the theory has been used largely in management discourses, it can, when used in the curriculum space, contribute to enhancing curriculum processes and reducing unnecessary resistance in executing curriculum packages. RL is defined in this article as a pattern of reciprocal interrelating between workers and managers to make sense of a situation, to determine what is to be done and how to do it (Gittel & Douglass, 2012:32). It represents the influencing processes wherein school leaders connect people, purpose and practices (Donaldson, 2006:47) in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, RL acknowledges the impact of the individual, togetherness and draws attention to the variances between agency and participation (Sklaveniti, 2016:1). RL offers an overarching social influence process (a desire to change for the better) through which emergent coordination, and change of values, attitudes, behaviours and ideologies construct a conducive milieu (Uhl-Bien, 2006:654) for teaching and learning. Moreover, RL creates the concept of reciprocal control, a form of control that is not coercive but attempts to coordinate all functions collectively, underpinned by self-control (Follett, 1989:226).

RL is ideal for this article in that it is purposeful and builds commitment towards positive change which is inclusive of people with diverse points of view and empowers those involved (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 1998:74) in the curriculum implementation process. Moreover, the use of RL in the context of curriculum implementation facilitates the interpenetration of expertise among educators, builds relationships and creates a safe space that reciprocates good relations (Foldy & Ospina, 2011:4). The strength of RL lies in the fact that it encourages “participation and collectively creating a sense of direction [as opposed] to control and exercising authority” (Denis, Langley & Sergi, 2012:44). In short, we have grounded this study in RL because it shifts attention from leadership being

what leaders do and instead, challenges us to see leadership as an emergent relational accomplishment (Crevani, 2015:3) that seeks to help in the acclimatisation of educators in curriculum crises and forges alternatives to problem-solving techniques through non-threatening and in respectful ways. Informed with this, curriculum implementation becomes a lifelong-learning journey, where stakeholders make meaningful inputs towards making a success in education that addresses lived realities.

## **Method**

The study was qualitative in nature and utilised interviews and a focus group discussion, with 25 teachers of rural Zimbabwe participating in the study. Purposeful sampling was used to select knowledgeable participants. In addition to purposeful sampling, the snowballing or chain method was used, where participants were allowed to identify other possible participants who could provide useful data for the study (Onwuegbuzie, 2007). To this effect, there were 15 females and ten males who participated in the study, of whom all had more than five years teaching experience. Data were collected from participants by means of interviews and a focus group discussion. For the interviews, we spent at least 30 minutes with each participant discussing the implementation of the new curriculum, especially its challenges and relations with department of education officials. A focus group discussion was then arranged, where participants gave different views on the new curriculum. Because of time and financial constraints, the social media platform *WhatsApp* was used in this regard, an emerging form of doing research (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014; Reeve & Partridge, 2017). Thus, a group chat was created where the challenges in the implementation of the new curriculum could be discussed. This was pertinent in allowing the researchers and the participants to discuss further issues of curriculum implementation, economising on time and budget for conducting the research. The participants responded to the question: *How can healthy relations enhance effective curriculum implementation?* This question was motivated by the fact that there has been a general outcry by teachers on poor relations affecting curriculum implementation and negation of the human element of relations as a key determinant of the success of curriculum implementation.

## **Data analysis and ethical considerations**

The data collected were analysed through the model suggested by Laws et al. (2003), which provides seven steps:

- Step 1: Reading and rereading all the collected data: The data from the interviews and focus group discussion were read and reread, to get the essence on the implementation of the new curriculum.
- Step 2: Drawing up a preliminary list of themes arising from the data: Major issues and themes were identified and arranged according to the research question of the study.
- Step 3: Rereading the data: By rereading the data, we checked if the themes we had identified corresponded with what the participants said and with the research questions.

- Step 4: Linking the themes to quotations and notes: The themes emerging from the data were linked to various scholarly views.
- Step 5: Perusing the categories of themes to interpret them: During interpretation of the data, we remained cognisant of the research question.
- Step 6: Designing a tool to help discern patterns in the data: Through this we were able to determine the patterns during data analysis.
- Step 7: Interpreting the data and deriving meaning: We identified themes which then became the subheadings.

Data from the interviews and focus group discussion were transcribed and then coded and categorised into various themes, revealing the lived realities of participants with the curriculum implementation. To ensure validity of data, member checking was done, where themes were sent back to the participants to verify if the data responded to their lived experiences (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016:1802; Bygstad & Munkvold, 2007:1; Gunawan, 2015:10). Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Free State (UFS, reference number: UFS-HSD2017/0998). In addition, permission was granted by the Matabeleland North Education office to proceed and carry out research in the schools. Participants also signed consent forms and were assured that their identities will be protected (Fritz, 2008:7) and that the information they provide would be used only for compiling this research which makes suggestions for healthy relations in the curriculum implementation process. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identities.

## **Findings: Investing in healthy relationships**

This section discusses the benefits of investing in healthy relationships for effective curriculum implementation. The discussion below emanated from data that were analysed using Laws et al.'s (2003) model.

## **Reduction of teacher victimisation and prejudice**

The victimisation of teachers and uncondusive work relations have become common phenomena in some Zimbabwean schools (Kurebwa, Wadesango & Dick, 2014; Chireshe & Shumba, 2011; Erlwanger, 2013; Magudu, 2012). Victimisation as used in this article refers to different forms of force used to get a task done or an element of instilling fear on subordinates to get tasks done. Victimisation has been manifested in curriculum execution through embracing a militant approach (exerting force on subordinates to do things), reducing positive curriculum outcomes (Shoko, Monyumwa, Muguwe & Taruvinga, 2011). In an interview, Mpo noted that

Life in school is no longer the same because of this new curriculum; the school heads and the public service are on our back every minute. If you seem against the new curriculum, life becomes so difficult here.

In addition, Noma noted that

Teachers are always threatened with dismissal from service for not cooperating or discharging the curriculum in the manner expected. I think it is not fair because some of us are really struggling to understand the new curriculum and its implementation.

Mamzo, during the focus group discussion, indicated that

When the new curriculum was being introduced to us as teachers, we had questions, and when we asked them, no satisfactory answers were given, but the presenters became militant and started threatening. That's where we saw that this curriculum is bringing trouble to us.

When taking a closer look at participants' responses, it appears that the implementation of the new curriculum has brought fear in schools. In addition, teachers were not adequately consulted in the drafting of the curriculum; thus, when questions are raised, facilitators respond with victimising statements, perhaps to cover up their own ignorance. It also emerged that relations were not good between teachers, school heads and the curriculum planners; this was manifested through intimidating responses towards teachers, which in turn deprived the teachers of the right to ask questions and ultimately making teachers implement a curriculum which they did not fully understand.

However, from a different angle, victimisation can be caused by teachers' negativity regarding innovations that they believe threaten their status quo. We agree with the observation by De Clercq (2013:7) that the majority of teachers have deeply ingrained negativity and scepticism towards their jobs and developmental programs aimed at improving the lives of learners. An education official during their interview buttressed De Clercq's (2013) view by noting that

You see, when you approach things gentle with teachers, you applying for more trouble; some teachers are generally lazy, not duty conscious. As a result, our approach has to engage force to ensure that learning takes place.

The sentiments by the educational official denote victimisation where there is a lack of teacher professionalism. This sentiment was confirmed by Dlomo.

Some teachers are not content with what they get from the department; thus, they become negative unnecessarily, lazy and exhibit attitudes unnecessary.

This implies that while implementing a new curriculum is a noble idea, the curriculum planners and leaders must engage teachers positively by fostering values of respect and justice, to promote the new idea, which in turn will change teachers' attitudes (Ndawi & Maravanyika, 2011). To this effect we argue that RL offers an opportunity for teachers, school heads, educational officers and curriculum planners to create healthy relationships for the sake of the learners. This is because RL values behaviour based on strong values, with a strong emphasis on the need for healthy relations for the success of a program (Smit & Scherman, 2016:2).

When asked how healthy relations can help in this challenge, Memo replied that

We as teachers need to be respected and treated as professionals. We are not kids but colleagues with headmasters and curriculum planners; then we can begin to support their initiatives.

Responding to the same question, Dlomo, an educational officer, noted that

Once teachers portray professionalism, then there won't be a need to victimise; it will allow us to work as a team for the good of the learners.

Our observation is that there is a general lack of dialogue among educational stakeholders, and thus people may come into the curriculum space with preconceived ideas such as “the new curriculum seeks to add more work and stress”, which might not be true at all times, ultimately affecting relations through a need to resist and sabotage the curriculum. In this regard, it is critical that curriculum players rethink how they relate to one another by adopting an RL approach to school and curriculum implementation, which, according to Denis *et al.* (2012:44), provides the basis on which stakeholders can participate and cooperate to change conditions that are marked by intimidation and suspicion. It is our submission that victimisation and prejudice can be reduced and that creating healthy relations could be a useful approach to dealing with the trajectories of curriculum implementation in Zimbabwe.

### **Minimising top-down curriculum implementation**

Under normal circumstances (notwithstanding the subjective nature of the term “normal”), the curriculum is expected to address the lived realities of people, offer solutions and facilitate the improvement of human lives (Koopman, 2013:16; Geduld & Sathorar, 2016:44; Mbatha, 2016:24). In addition, we concur with Bentley (2010:30) that any curriculum worth its salt must strive towards improving “literacy and numeracy and essential standards of equity or fairness, while also actively reflecting the heterogeneity and diversity of the societies they serve”. However, this is not always true with all curriculum packages and arguably with the new curriculum in Zimbabwe, thus affecting its implementation. This is because many post-colonial states, such as Zimbabwe, have not been weaned from the top-down approach to curriculum development. For example, many mission schools in Zimbabwe have rejected the implementation of Family and Religious Moral Education (FAMERE) on the basis that it does not address their lived realities (Katongomara, 2016); and, of course, it is this top-down approach that triggers resistance and negative attitudes.

In an interview, Portia noted the following on the curriculum.

Our problem here is that the curriculum is formulated by politicians and educators who are prone to politics and have little or no knowledge of the everyday happening of the classroom; thus, we get a curriculum which we wonder what is its purpose and difficult to implement.

In the focus group discussion, Meli noted that:

The curriculum we are implementing is just terrible. Just imagine: we teach mass display, dancing, sports, heritage etc., which have absolutely nothing on how to create jobs and solve economy; subject such as sciences are not compulsory, so where are we going as a nation? To me, implementing it is a waste of time.

Evidently, a curriculum that does not address lived realities faces resistance at implementation level. In addition, as suggested by Oloruntegbe (2011:444), teachers often show resistance and lack of commitment to the implementation of curriculum reforms because they are seldom involved in their development and in how best to implement them. Implementation faces resistance because, as Fullan (2007) argued, educators fail to get the subjective meaning of change, but instead ask the question, *what is there for me?*

Asked on how this can be mitigated, Sheppy in an interview noted that:

All starts and ends with adequate research and consultation. There are wrong assumptions that teachers are not educated enough to participate in curriculum planning; that's not true, we have PhD holders in schools who can contribute. In short, teachers need to be respected and consulted, then they can meaningful[ly] contribute to effective curriculum implementation.

Nceku added that:

The approach which the MoPSE uses is not good at all. They are bosses and we servants; they're always in office and we are always in the community. It is us teachers who know the problems and have solutions. If they had consulted us we would have given them relevant content to include in syllabuses.

There is an indication by the participants that education that addresses lived realities should come from teachers since they have daily experiences of the learners. By so doing, a curriculum that addresses the lived realities is realised. This can be achieved through embracing RL, which, according to Komives *et al.* (1998:74), is purposeful, builds commitment towards positive change, is inclusive of people with diverse points of view and empowers those involved in making decisions which affect their lives and professions, such as in the curriculum.

## **Teacher capacitation in curriculum implementation**

Research also indicated that healthy school relations assists teachers, school heads, learners and curriculum planners in drafting a curriculum that addresses the lived realities of the community. Teachers need to be empowered through non-threatening ways, as teacher knowledge is the biggest factor in the implementation of the curriculum (Quyen & Khairani, 2017:165). Cognisant of this argument, we agree with the observation by Schwartz (2006:450) that

... curriculum planners, with all good intentions, have compiled volumes of well-conceived educational action plans, choosing specific materials and activities for their pre-conceived target, curriculum receivers, students, only to find that the curriculum users, teachers, are not prepared for the innovations. (Schwartz, 2006:450).



To substantiate this observation, Stabback (2011:2) concurred that curriculum development needs to take into account where a country is, in terms of the current breadth and depth of the curriculum; attainment levels; the quality of teachers; and the range and effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment practices. While a new curriculum is desirable to address societal trajectories, the lack of teacher capacity poses a threat to the new curriculum. In an interview, Ntabi noted that:

This new curriculum has exposed me as a clueless teacher. I have been exposed to learners and other colleagues, but am not alone; many educators are not able to implement the curriculum.

When asked to mitigate this, Ndlovu indicated that:

We need those who know to take us by hand and orient us very well without showing tendencies of victimisation and superman-attitude mentality; then we can achieve the goals of the new curriculum.

If this view represents the general feeling of the teachers concerning the implementation of the curriculum, then the good intentions of the curriculum planners can be achieved as long as a new approach such as RL to leading curriculum implementation frames working relations. We argue as such because RL encourages participation and collectively creating a sense of direction, as opposed to control and exercising authority (Denis *et al.*, 2012:44).

### **Team work in task-based assessment**

If there is anything that has brought more pain, agony and friction between teachers and the school heads, learners, parents and curriculum planners, it is task-based assessment, introduced in the new curriculum, which media say has been suspended, yet no formal communication has been given to schools. Policymakers, with high expectations of teachers, prescribed task-based assessment, in the context of Zimbabwe, with overly ambitious and designed projects despite uncertainty or indications that it would fail (Walsh, 2016:12). The introduction of task-based assessment meant the reworking of teacher, learner and school boundaries to meet the envisaged national aspirations (James, 2010:58; Bennie & Newstead, 1999:1). However, similar to many other African countries, there is generally upheaval regarding the best way to implement continuous assessment (Quyen & Khairani, 2017; Lumadi, 2013; Umalusi, 2009; Shilenge, 2004). For example, Shilenge (2004:vi) said that in South Africa, continuous assessment was marked by enormous infrastructural backlogs, resource limitations, inadequate supply of quality learning support materials and absence of common national standards for learning and assessments. While continuous assessment has its merits and demerits, teacher beliefs make continuous assessment practices more rigid and tense (Quyen & Khairani, 2017:166), especially in the absence of good relationships.

Sadly, the majority of the teachers who participated in this research seemed to indicate that they have no idea of how to deal with tasks. Darling-Hammond and Ball (1999:1-2) were right to point out that:

... teachers' skill in assessing their students' progress also depends on how deeply teachers know the content and how well they understand and interpret student talk and written work. Nothing can fully compensate for the weakness of a teacher who lacks the knowledge and skill needed to help students master the curriculum.

Dlomo, a teacher participant, commenting on task-based assessment, said,

Tasks are hell for both the teachers and learners; work has been made so hard for us unnecessarily.

In addition, another teacher participant noted that

Tasks are too much, teachers do not even understand them. They demand too much resources, there is no rubric to follow, we just do and we are afraid that we may be doing things that are absolutely wrong.

The participants felt that task-based assessment unnecessarily puts greater mental demands on learners and teachers (Sesuthu, 2012:20). The teachers are unable to plan the details of this kind of formative assessment because they cannot predict what exactly the students would be doing (Lo, 2006:3). In the focus group discussion, a school head participant alluded to the fact that

Tasks are good – but the problem: teachers don't have sufficient knowledge on them; those who facilitated workshops did not satisfactorily respond to the questions. Right now the enrolment is going down because learners do not have resources needed for the tasks and that they are just too difficult.

The sentiments echoed by the school head confirms Lo's (2006:9) observation that many teachers lack professional knowledge and skills in continuous assessment. This manifested in the inconsistencies of assessment modes adopted in different class levels and subjects, one result of heavy workloads, as also noted through the feedback on interviews.

Cognisant of the difficulties in task-based assessment, teacher participants noted the importance of a collaborative approach being used in designing and supervising tasks. In the focus group discussion, Tindo noted that

We just need support. This is new to us and the learners. Those who design tasks must come down from the ivory tower and collaborate with us implementers.

In support, Mpume noted that

Task-based assessment seems good but the problem is that we don't know and those who know are not in our disposal. So the manner in which it was handed down to us makes teaching difficult, but we are generally willing to learn.

From these sentiments, it is clear that the way in which tasks were introduced to these teachers indicates a lack of collaboration between the planners and the implementers. Thus, Schwartz (2006:450) suggested that, "curriculum writers, with all good intentions,

have compiled volumes of well-conceived educational action plans, choosing specific materials and activities for their pre-conceived target, curriculum receivers, students, only to find that the curriculum users, teachers, are not prepared for the innovations". In the midst of this ambivalence, collaboration can help, especially when relations between planners and implementers are framed in respect and needs for emancipation. In addition, Komives *et al.* (1998:104) argued that when school leaders, curriculum planners and politicians frame relations in respect, there is the possibility of collaboration, reflection, feedback, civil confrontation, community building, and a level of profound understanding called meaning making. To achieve this, there is a need for education leaders to take teachers by the hand and help them through the process and, in the same way, teachers should be willing to learn and accept changes in the education system.

## Discussion

The above findings suggest that curriculum implementation can be improved when the various stakeholders value improved relations. While the teachers in most cases are the users of the curriculum, the findings indicate that they are also an important element of the curriculum that cannot be ignored, especially as experts who must be consulted and respected throughout the whole process of curriculum implementation. This is important for the success of the curriculum and for ensuring that teachers as implementers are valued, consulted and respected as professionals. Though curriculum development can be challenging, involvement of all stakeholders, especially individuals who are directly involved in student instruction (teachers), forms a vital part of successful curriculum implementation (Johnson, 2001).

With this in mind, the top-down approach to curriculum implementation is arguably undesirable through its limiting of innovation and involvement by the teachers who execute curriculum packages. While involving teachers from the onset may have its own challenges, we are of the view that educational leaders, teachers and other stakeholders need to create a culture of continuous improvement of relations underpinned by respect, justice, hard work and a desire for the successful execution of curriculum packages (Alsubaie, 2016). It is critical that post-colonial states like Zimbabwe begin to rethink and avoid the top-down approach to curriculum practices. This is because, as observed in this case study, teachers tend to respond to top-down change with immediate outrage, deliberate avoidance, partial adoption, major adaptation, sneaky subversion or even quiet revolution (Mutch, 2012). Thus, our argument, in line with Oloruntegbe (2017), is that successful reforms are initiated from the grassroots (bottom-up), particularly by teachers who are in the field and know what and where changes are needed. The bottom-up approach has the potential to transform curriculum practices and mend negative, skewed relations and more so enact emancipatory structures that are cognisant of all players as equally important in curriculum processes. Thus, the findings confirm that the type of leadership which curriculum planners, school heads and principals practice has a bearing on how the curriculum is perceived, received and also practised. To achieve better outcomes, educational leaders must understand the reasons for teachers' resistance (Snyder, 2017), while teachers should be willing to learn new things and to accept change

and implement it accordingly. This reciprocal underpinning will succeed if relations are framed by RL.

### **The way forward in curriculum implementation narratives**

In light of the findings and discussion above, the field of curriculum implementation needs to take seriously the issue of human relations where the curriculum is contextualised. To this end, the MoPSE needs to invest in school relations through research on school heads and other stakeholders, and navigate relational tensions that continuously surface (Kurucz, Colbert, Freund, Upward & Willard, 2017:192), with the aim of improving the human element in curriculum implementation. We argue that framing school leadership or broadly, curriculum management, in RL offers an opportunity that allows the containment of emotions, and restrains anger and victimisation (James, 2010:61), which as seen in this research are presenting curriculum implementation challenges. Rethinking management of the curriculum within the lens of RL offers an opportunity for positive change; change that improves the human condition and does not intentionally harm others (Komives *et al.*, 1998:83) but is aimed at their emancipation.

### **Value of the research**

The uniqueness of this article lies in the fact that we used a management theory in the curriculum space. The article's view of the way relationships are formed during the curriculum implementation process has a bearing on how teachers execute curriculum packages. Again, we make the case that relations are paramount in curriculum implementation, from the school level to all structures of government. The paper seeks to sensitise educational stakeholders, that in the context of the contested curriculum implementation terrain, leaders have the role of creating relations that motivate as well as promote social justice and emancipation to enable teachers to confront new realities with a sense of confidence. In addition, the article has departed from common curriculum narratives that teachers "cannot" effectively implement the curriculum, but has argued that when relations are healthy, collaboration and effective implementation are facilitated, because teachers feel part of the curriculum process. Finally, the article exposes how a militarised curriculum implementation space marked with victimisation and prejudice can create friction and neglect of good intentions envisaged in the new curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, we highlighted various opportunities where healthy relations should be prioritised in the curriculum implementation process. The study revealed that healthy relations can reduce victimisation and emancipate teachers towards achieving the goals of the curriculum. The main argument of this paper is that in the implementation of any curriculum, policymakers and government officials need to invest in creating good relations among stakeholders, especially educators, underpinned in relational leadership. Only under those conditions are educators more likely to cooperate in delivering a

curriculum that seeks to address social trajectories effectively and efficiently to the benefit of the learners and community at large.

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