

## The “voice of the teacher” in curriculum development: a voice crying in the wilderness?

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Education in South Africa is facing great challenges, especially with regard to curriculum development. Teachers are principal role-players in the process of addressing these challenges. The question is: Are they allowed to participate in the process, and if they do participate, what is the nature of their involvement? Within the context of the current curriculum changes in education in South Africa, stringent demands are being made on teachers. This process of continuous change has not yet stabilised and therefore it is imperative that there should be dialogue about what is expected of teachers when it is suggested that they should be “more involved in curriculum development”. An attempt is made to contribute to this discourse by focusing on what is meant by teacher involvement in brief, the possible viewpoints regarding this concept, and the real nature and extent of possible involvement within a specific South African context. Results of the research project indicated that teachers were for the most part excluded from participation in curriculum development at curriculum levels outside the classroom. Their perception was that, although they were the subject and/or learning area specialists, little attention, if any, was given to their “voice” — they were only involved in the implementation of the new curriculum.

### Introduction

Over the past 10 years curriculum change has become a major feature of teaching in South Africa. Whilst this process involves various role-players and interested parties, teachers are in effect the principal role-players.

A perception often held by teachers is that the curriculum is developed “elsewhere” so that they simply need some guidance for the “correct application” of a curriculum which is “handed down to them from the top”. It might create the impression that teachers operate solely within the context of the school and the classroom, making this seem the only place where they can make a contribution to the curriculum. This view denies the broader curriculum functions that could possibly be fulfilled outside the classroom by teachers who serve on provincial or national curriculum committees.

The practice of teachers simply implementing curricula, which have already been developed elsewhere, probably also holds true for the South African context. Curriculum 2005, for instance, was developed on a national level in 1998 and teachers only became involved when they received training in the application of the new curriculum at a school and classroom level. The same holds for the Revised Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Department of Education, 2000). It appears that the same pattern will be followed with the phasing in of the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (Department of Education, 2003) from 2006, namely, the curriculum will have been developed on a national and provincial level before teachers actually become involved during the implementation phase. In the course of teacher training the teacher's role is referred to as that of a facilitator, in other words, a particular curriculum function is apparently assigned to teachers during the implementing phase only.

Within the South African context it would be worthwhile to investigate how this phenomenon of teacher involvement is in fact manifested, in other words, whether “the voice of the teacher” is heard or consulted, or whether it remains a “voice crying in the wilderness”. The aim in this article is to take a closer look at the matter and to report on the results of a research project launched in November 2004 on teacher participation in curriculum development in a South African context.

### Teacher involvement

Curriculum development as a concept is open to many possible interpretations, but for the purposes of this article, it is regarded as the encompassing and continual process during which any form of planning, designing, dissemination, implementation and assessment of curricula may take place (Carl, 2002:44). This process may occur in various areas of the curriculum, ranging from national and provincial levels to schools and classrooms. It is within this process of curriculum development that the teacher can and should become involved. The scope and nature of involvement with curriculum development

will understandably vary from one curriculum area to the next, as the classroom teacher probably focuses mainly on the micro-curriculum, whilst, for instance, on a national level the macro-aspects may call for a stronger focus. The question is, however, whether the teacher cannot also become involved in curriculum development outside the classroom. Obviously change cannot be successful if the teacher focuses on the classroom only, as rightly contended by Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch and Tucker (1999:152): “Teaching is more than the activities defined within the classroom walls”.

It is difficult to conceptualise teacher participation in one single definition. Moreover, the nature and scope of teacher involvement is often determined by the conceptualisation. This phenomenon has already been described extensively in subject literature (*cf.* Connelly & Clandinin, 1984; Imber & Neidt, 1990; Elbaz, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Fullan, 2001; Haberman, 1992; Carl, 2002). Two main tendencies regarding teacher participation can be distinguished:

- Firstly, teachers are regarded as merely the “recipients” of the curriculum that is developed by specialists elsewhere. The teacher's curriculum function remains limited to the correct application of what has been developed by these specialists. This so-called “top down” approach is detrimental to the process of taking ownership of the curriculum.
- Secondly, teachers are partners in the process of curriculum change. There should therefore be an opportunity for their “voices” to be heard before the actual implementation, in other words, they should be given the opportunity to make an input during the initial curriculum development processes.

The context (educational system, department of education, school system) often determines which of these two interpretations or tendencies triumphs. Aspects such as leadership and the centralisation or decentralisation of an educational system, that allows input and participation, may determine or influence the nature and degree of participation. An example: Education authorities may attach, from a governmental perspective, a particular meaning to the specific functions or roles expected from teachers. Within the South African context, there are certain requirements concerning teachers' roles and competencies (Republic of South Africa, 2000). These seven roles, namely those of (1) learning mediator, (2) interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, (3) leader, administrator and manager, (4) scholar, researcher and lifelong learner, (5) community, citizenship and pastoral role, (6) assessor, (7) learning area and subject specialist, give a good indication of what the national education department expects from teachers regarding their possible curriculum functions. Are these roles meant to become operative only when the curriculum is implemented in the classroom, or do they in fact point towards teachers' potentially broader curriculum functions? Do these roles imply that teachers are regarded as mere “recipients” of the curriculum, or as partners in the curriculum development process?

Kirk and Macdonald (2001:551-567) offer a further perspective on teacher involvement and ownership, based on Bernstein's (1990) model of discourse levels. This model focuses on the relationship between meaning-making processes on various levels of the educational system. The key aspects of this model are represented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Bernstein's model of discourse levels (adapted from Kirk & Macdonald, 2001:554)

Discourse level	Educational field (context)
Production of discourse	The intellectual field Primary level of discourse where knowledge is created in the form of disciplines (e.g. in education, health sciences, sociology) at institutions such as universities and other research institutions
Recontextualisation of discourse	Meaning is given to knowledge that has been produced in the foregoing discourse level, mostly by education authorities and curriculum writers. The field where agents have the opportunity to become involved in the process of giving meaning. Schools and teachers are, however, not normally involved in this process. If teachers are regarded as partners in curriculum change in order that they may take ownership thereof, they must also be involved within this level of discourse as active agents and role-players.
Reproduction of discourse	Real implementation and application of pre-developed ideas by teachers. Experience curriculum change as a "top down" process (must apply that which was developed elsewhere by education authorities without having acquired any access to consultation).

In the model of pedagogical discourse, a distinction is made between the three above levels of discourse. These three levels constitute the so-called context within which curriculum change takes place. The question arises as to which level of discourse, or within which context, the teacher can or should become involved, i.e. where the teacher should have a "voice", or in other words, gain access. Kirk and Macdonald (2001:565-566) express the opinion that teachers' contributions are particularly important in respect of the local context, in other words the classroom or school, when they mention that "teachers' authoritative voice is rooted in the local context of implementation ...". In terms of the South African context it would be worthwhile to try and establish on which discourse level teachers experience their own involvement, as it may bring about increased ownership and more effective curriculum development.

Therefore, different views exist on both the desirability and the nature of teacher participation in curriculum development.

**Problem statement**

Within the current South African context, where teachers are facing challenges and where educational change has not yet stabilised, it is crucial to investigate not only the question of whether teachers should become involved, but also what is expected of them when their involvement is sought.

Certain key questions such as the following arise: What are teachers' perceptions in respect of their present role in curriculum development, or what should they be? To what extent is cognisance taken of the "voices" of teachers who wish to become more involved, and are opportunities for access and participation being created? If such opportunities do exist, what is the nature and scope of their participation? What is the present tendency regarding teachers' involvement in terms of being "recipients" or partners in curriculum development?

These questions are intended to answer the key question, namely, whether teacher involvement in curriculum development is indeed being addressed, or whether the teacher's "voice" is merely a "voice crying in the wilderness".

With these questions in mind, a research project was undertaken in November 2004 to investigate teacher involvement in curriculum development within a specifically South African context. The study was aimed exclusively at generating relevant data in order to obtain possible answers on the situation.

**Research methodology**

The research project was carried out as a survey employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data were obtained by means of a questionnaire. Teachers could exercise choices according to sets of questions, and these responses were quantified, especially in calculating the frequencies. The qualitative data were collected mainly from the respondents' comments on the motivation of their choices.

The questionnaire was structured in such a way that respondents could exercise their choice to each question/statement according to the 7-point Likert scale. This scale normally makes provision for options varying from *Definitely disagree* (1 on the scale) to *Definitely agree* (7 on the scale). In most cases they were requested to substantiate their choices by providing comments (the qualitative data). The questionnaire was tested in advance by asking a number of teachers to participate. The feedback obtained in this way was used to refine and finalise the questionnaire. Three questionnaires per school were then mailed to 400 different schools (200 primary schools and 200 secondary schools) under the jurisdiction of the Western Cape Education Department. The response rate was 26%.

For the purposes of this study it was essential that the respondents understood certain key concepts, and therefore the following description was taken as a point of departure:

Teacher involvement in curriculum development means that the teacher as educator can participate in the development of the curriculum at various levels. This could vary from participation in the classroom to doing work on learning areas and in subject committees, at both national and provincial levels.

School principals were asked to distribute the three questionnaires amongst their staff, and return them to the researcher on the due date.

**Aims and structure of the questionnaire survey**

For the purposes of this article it is necessary to clarify the aims and structure of the questionnaire. The following objectives were set for the research project:

- To determine the viewpoints and perceptions regarding teachers' involvement in curriculum development;
- to determine teachers' involvement in and participation at specific curriculum levels;
- to determine the nature and scope of this involvement; and
- to determine the level of preparedness and perceptions of Grades 10–12 teachers regarding the envisaged phasing in of the Further Education and Training Phase as from 2006.

In view of the above aims, the questionnaire comprised five sections, namely: Section A: General information and instructions; Section B: General and biographical information; Section C: Viewpoints with regard to teacher involvement in curriculum development; Section D: Teacher involvement at various curriculum levels; Section E: The Grades 10–12 teacher and curriculum change.

For the purposes of this article only the results of Sections A–D of the questionnaire survey are discussed.

**Results of the questionnaire survey**

**Biographical information of the respondents**

Of the respondents, 70.2% were older than 40 years. With regard to experience as school teachers, the respondents were generally a group of experienced teachers, with 31.2% having 1–15 years' experience, 21.8% having 16–20 years' teaching experience, and 47.0% having more than 21 years' experience. These facts are significant and should be noted, since the respondents were reasonably experienced teachers who were capable of giving an informed opinion. A high frequency,

i.e. 77.6% of these respondents, had had no further formal training to enhance their qualifications since they had entered the teaching profession.

### Viewpoints with regard to teacher involvement in curriculum development

Table 2 is a representation of the response to the statement:

Teachers must have the opportunity to participate in curriculum development both outside and inside the classroom (district, provincial and national level).

**Table 2** Opportunity for participation in curriculum development outside the classroom

	N		%	
No response	3	3	1.0	1.0
Disagree very strongly	1		0.3	
Disagree strongly	2	9	0.6	2.8
Disagree	6		1.9	
Neutral	3	3	1.0	1.0
Agree	84		27.3	
Agree strongly	71	293	23.1	95.2
Agree very strongly	138		44.8	
Total	308	308	100	100

If the categories *Agree* (27.3%), *Agree strongly* (23.1%) and *Agree very strongly* (44.8%) are merged, an overwhelming opinion that teachers should have the opportunity to become involved in curriculum decision making outside of the classroom becomes apparent. This is a strong call for accessibility to consultation, seeing that it confirms the existence of a clear need for participation.

The essence of the comments of the majority of the respondents confirms these quantitative data. The respondents were of the opinion that input is necessary on ground level, that curriculum development is part of the teachers' daily tasks, that teachers as practitioners are best able to reflect true practice and make a contribution, that it is the teachers who ultimately have to implement the curriculum and therefore that teachers, as professionals (*Teachers are the professionals involved with implementing the curriculum ...*), ought to be involved in all these processes. The following responses serve to illustrate these viewpoints:

*It's the teachers who have to apply the curriculum in the classroom ... have a better understanding of the feasibility — will accept changes with a much more positive attitude;*

*Teachers are the ones who have to implement the curriculum and have the experience and contact with learners;*

*... therefore it can be more advantageous for the teacher to be given an opportunity to participate in curriculum development outside the classroom;*

*Teachers will accept ownership of the development of the curriculum and the paradigm shift will be easier;*

*Teachers should be involved in planning the curriculum as it then becomes easier to understand new concepts and to implement changes;*

*Policy shapers are often far removed from the classroom situation;*

*It is essential that their input is heard and that the curriculum is not just imposed from above;*

*The matter should not be "top down";*

*It feels as if those who develop the curriculum do not have an idea of what is happening in education;*

*Decisions are often made by officials who for many years have not been in the classroom and are not in touch with the realities faced by the teachers.*

Some of the respondents indicated that involvement at these levels can help the teacher to gain greater understanding of the envisaged change. Some comments in this regard were:

*It will provide teachers with an opportunity to understand first, before they implement an imposed curriculum;*

*We are, after all, those that must implement the curriculum.*

Although the above comments naturally reflect teachers' perceptions, they do indeed indicate that there is a deep-seated need for a greater degree of participation and access to decision-making processes.

With regard to the question whether teachers ought to be involved at a national level, 89.6% of the respondents answered *Yes*, whilst 93.5% indicated that they should also be involved at a provincial level.

Table 3 is a representation of the response to the statement:

In South Africa the education authorities are currently creating ample opportunities for involving teachers directly in the process of curriculum change at all levels, as was the case in the development of the revised National Curriculum Statement (that arose from the revision of Curriculum 2005) or is at present the case with the envisaged Curriculum Statement for Grades 10–12.

**Table 3** Ample opportunity for direct involvement in curriculum development at all levels

	N		%	
No response	7	7	2.3	2.3
Disagree very strongly	44		14.3	
Disagree strongly	49	189	15.9	61.4
Disagree	96		31.2	
Neutral	45	45	14.6	14.6
Agree	40		13.0	
Agree strongly	15	67	4.9	30.8
Agree very strongly	12		3.9	
Total	308	308	100	100

Altogether 14.3% of the respondents indicated that they disagreed very strongly with this statement, 15.9% disagreed strongly, whilst 31.2% disagreed with it. Therefore this response represents a total of 61.4% who disagree in some way or another with the statement. Of the respondents 14.6% were neutral about this statement. The perception of the majority of the respondents was therefore that at that time there was not ample opportunity to participate in curriculum change.

In conclusion, a number of responses are quoted to illustrate the respondents' viewpoints. The core of the respondents' motivation was that they were not afforded the opportunity to participate beforehand and that at the time ample opportunity for participation did not exist:

*... Not aware of any notification of participation. Teachers have not been involved. Have no knowledge of the above-mentioned.*

*There is a gap in communication;*

*Educators are not part of the decision-making process. We are simply informed and trained;*

*These "ample opportunities" are not properly communicated at ground level;*

*We were never consulted — I don't have any knowledge of this;*

*Curriculum is forced upon teachers;*

*A practising teacher who is involved in the day-to-day affairs of teaching would never design such systems.*

From these data it is clear that the respondents were of the opinion that decisions are being made on their behalf and that they do not have any access to participation at either national or provincial level. They feel that they are only involved in the application and implementation of the curricula.

In response to a statement that teachers are indeed involved maximally at provincial level (for example, in learning area and subject

curriculum committees), 62% of the respondents indicated that this was not the case. Comments varied between

- Is not being done. A few individuals — not the teachers who stand in the classroom every day;*
- Very little participation is being experienced;*
- Teachers are seldom involved;*
- Which teachers?;*
- Teachers are informed after the fact;*
- Little or no consultation before;*
- Specific individuals may be invited, but not as far as I know*

and a few remarks that some teachers may have been nominated by trade unions, but that they were in the minority. Respondents felt very strongly about the fact that more should be done in this regard to involve teachers at a provincial level. Some comments were, for example:

- This hardly ever happens, and when it does, it is only for individuals;*
- These institutions try to provide input but they do not coordinate their activities. To my mind they are still not doing enough.*

The essence of the respondents' feedback on the statement:

Teachers' main task focuses on subject and/or learning area instruction in the classroom and it is therefore not necessary to be involved outside the classroom

indicated an overwhelming difference (82.8%). According to the majority of the respondents education is not merely limited to the classroom. They were of the opinion that the influence of the curriculum goes much further. For example, their motivation included the following:

- ... Education involves the child's total development and is certainly not only concerned with the subjects;*
- Education has many different levels;*
- Total education has to do with more than the classroom alone.*

Their view was that education is a holistic process and what happens in the classroom must take place within the context of the total, broad curriculum, the community and the child in totality, as illustrated by the following:

- Education is wider than the classroom only;*
- A teacher needs to believe in the relevance of the content and the effectiveness of curriculum strategies to be effective, thus it is vital to be part of the decision-making process;*
- The curriculum must also be drawn to suit the communities' needs and wants as well;*
- ... future of learners after their school career has come to an end;*
- Educators must certainly be involved outside the classroom with interaction and the real life of learners/educators;*
- Education cannot happen in isolation. There needs to be integration. One has to incorporate the social, political and economic situations in context.*

The following two statements were both intended to arrive at teachers' perceptions of the idea that they are no more than "recipients" of curricula:

The main task of teachers with regard to curriculum development is seemingly to apply the curricula that come from "the top" correctly and to implement them in the class exactly as prescribed by the education departments (the so-called "top down" approach).

The majority of the respondents agreed with the statement, whilst 33.8% disagreed (Table 4). In this particular survey, therefore, the perception existed that teachers are merely "receivers" of the curriculum who have to apply the curriculum that is rolled down "from the top down".

The second statement:

Teacher involvement in curriculum development is merely an illusion because all that is really expected of teachers is to apply curricula that have already been fully developed "elsewhere"

produced the results presented in Table 5.

Table 5 clearly illustrates that the majority of respondents were of the opinion that teacher involvement in curriculum development is

merely an illusion.

With regard to both statements (see Tables 4 and 5) the prevailing perception was therefore that teachers simply had to apply curricula that had been designed "elsewhere". The teachers therefore felt that they were merely expected to respond to what was being prescribed by people who were not entirely in touch with the day-to-day classroom situation. The essence of the responses with regard to both Tables 3 and 4 are summarised effectively in the following:

*... It is exactly this approach that leads to the miscarriage of the process, because one group designs the curriculum while the other is responsible for applying it.*

**Table 4** Teachers' main task is to implement curricula that come from the top down

	N		%	
No response	3	3	1.0	1.0
Disagree very strongly	28		9.1	
Disagree strongly	24	104	7.8	33.8
Disagree	52		16.9	
Neutral	26	26	8.4	8.4
Agree	79		25.6	
Agree strongly	28	195	9.1	56.8
Agree very strongly	68		22.1	
Total	308	308	100	100

**Table 5** Teacher involvement is an illusion

	N		%	
No response	6	6	1.9	1.9
Disagree very strongly	12		3.9	
Disagree strongly	19	81	6.2	26.5
Disagree	50		16.2	
Neutral	21	21	6.8	6.8
Agree	73		23.7	
Agree strongly	50	200	16.2	64.9
Agree very strongly	77		25.0	
Total	308	308	100	100

Although it was not formally part of the relevant questionnaire, the following comment, which strengthens this perception, was made by a school in a covering letter with the questionnaires:

*Please look after our teachers ... too many decisions are made without any input from those who stand in the classrooms.*

In order to determine whether teachers have the need to be exposed to broad curriculum theoretical aspects, and since it is often alleged that teachers want to deal with the practicalities of their work only, the question was asked whether sufficient opportunities had been created to empower teachers adequately in this connection. Of the respondents, 60.0% indicated such a need, whilst 16.6% were neutral. Respondents reacted strongly with regard to presenters who do not have the knowledge themselves (for example, it was said that *guidance is ineffectual and superficial — presenters are frequently unsure of what they are trying to "sell"*), whilst others were of the opinion that this in itself had the potential to develop teachers' understanding of current developments. In this regard a respondent commented:

*This is now the time where learning has meaning and is interesting and challenging, because of integration within the learning areas, this brings about more understanding of the content.*

An attempt was made to apply Bernstein's model of discourse levels (see Table 1) and to determine teachers' perception of what they regarded as the level with the highest priority (the model itself was not described in the questionnaire, but the essence of the discourse levels were included in three statements). Respondents were required to place them in order from 1 = *Highest priority* to 3 = *Lowest priority*. The results are represented in Table 6.

**Table 6** Priority functions

Statement	Priority
Giving meaning to the curriculum by making it more comprehensible and by planning with a view to implementation	1
Developing and creating knowledge by means of disciplines and subject areas	2
Merely applying and implementing pre-developed ideas within the school and the classroom	3

The information in Table 6 correlates with earlier data, seeing that respondents expressed the need to be not only "recipients", but also to be involved effectively at other levels because they believed they could contribute to a more relevant curriculum.

An attempt was made to ascertain whether teachers were indeed involved in the process at an early stage before any form of curriculum change. Teachers of Grades R–9 were asked to what extent they had been involved in the development and planning of learning areas *before these were applied in the schools*. The response to this question was a resounding 64.6% who indicated *None* and 8.4% *Little*. Grades 10–12 respondents were asked a similar question on the extent to which they had been involved in curriculum planning at that stage (November 2004) in view of the phasing in of the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10–12 (Department of Education, 2003) as from 2006. Of the respondents 56.5% indicated *Little* (5.5%) or *None* (51.0%). They were also asked to indicate to what extent their "*voices had been listened to*", i.e. whether their opinions had been considered before any form of in-service training had taken place. An overwhelming 77.6% indicated *None* and only 14.0% of the respondents indicated *Little*. From these responses, within the context of this specific survey, the conclusion can therefore be drawn that teachers' contributions or input (their so-called "voice") was generally not considered.

A number of questions focused on the knowledge levels of respondents, since it is important that teachers who wish to participate in curriculum development have certain knowledge. One question focused specifically on the amount of knowledge that teachers had or channels they could access in order to communicate their curriculum needs to the national Department of Education. In this regard 23.7% indicated that they had *No* knowledge, and 43.8% that they had *Little* knowledge of these mechanisms for consultation — this represents a high 67.5% of respondents. If teachers are not aware of such means of access to consultation, how can their participation be optimised? The attainment of more knowledge can promote greater involvement at school level. In this regard 62.6% indicated that they consulted recent literature in order to stay informed, 82.8% indicated that they experimented with new ideas in their classes (in other words, that knowledge was applied in some or other way), and 72.8% used so-called "traditional teaching methods" and strategies in their classes because they still found them useful (this implies that there was an integration of existing and new knowledge). All these activities could be regarded as forms of teacher participation in curriculum development. It could be expected that teachers who strive towards being involved in curriculum development at national and provincial level would also link up with subject associations in order to keep up to date with the latest trends, but only 6.5% indicated that they actually did this: *Frequently* (4.2%) or *Regularly* (2.3%). This does not necessarily constitute a problem, but greater participation at this level would impact positively

on the classroom situation. There was an interesting response to the question on the extent to which the respondents did classroom research. A few examples were given of what was understood by this concept, for instance, how to manage a class, how to handle slower learners with learning problems, how to manage discipline, and how to promote learning. In response to this question 26.9% indicated that they did this *Sometimes*, 34.1% that they did it *Frequently*, and 24.4% that they did it *Regularly*.

### Synthesis of the questionnaire survey

Based on the results of this questionnaire, the following could be concluded:

Within the context of this particular survey, it was clear that teachers experience a strong desire to become involved in the earlier stages of decision-making processes of curriculum development, i.e. prior to the implementation phase, at a national as well as a provincial level. As professionals and owing to their hands-on contact with daily teaching practice, respondents were of the opinion that they can make a creative contribution to relevant curriculum development, and that they should therefore be involved accordingly. In real terms it would obviously not be possible to accommodate everybody, but as strategies and channels for participation seem to be lacking (or not communicated effectively), the "voice of the teacher" still remains unheard and unutilised.

The results of the empirical data underpin the results of the literature survey. Although views differed as to whether teachers should be involved, and if so, how this is to be accomplished, the respondents confirmed that they are still regarded as "recipients" who are practically excluded from curriculum decision-making processes. Actual participation, according to the teachers, is an illusion, because final decisions have already been taken elsewhere by the time they become "involved". They experienced the curriculum as prescriptive and imposed upon them "from the top down" (the so-called "divinely inspired curriculum").

Responding teachers felt that their opinions and needs should be accommodated *Beforehand*, seeing that, in the main, policy-makers and curriculum agents have already lost contact with classroom and school practice. In this respect they regarded their main curriculum function not as being limited to the school and classroom, but as one that particularly includes their contribution "outside" the classroom.

### Discussion

What is expected of teachers regarding their participation and involvement? Respondents are clearly of the opinion that they do have a role to play at curriculum levels outside the classroom, but that their voices "are not listened to". This is in accordance with the findings of authors such as Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), Carl (1994), Kirk and Macdonald (2001) and Fullan (2001), who believe that there are ways and means to involve teachers in curriculum development outside the classroom situation. In the present context of outcomes-based education in the RSA, it is clearly expected that teachers have a specific role to play. Mechanisms will have to be put in place to optimise this involvement, thereby ensuring that their "voices are listened to" and creating opportunities for participation. Departments of education may probably be under the impression that they are aware of teachers' needs, even without determining these needs by means of consultation. Strategies should be applied to establish these needs formally. Direct prior consultation and situation analysis should therefore form an important part of any curriculum dissemination.

This process of prior consultation has two advantages. Firstly, it could serve to counter the perception that policy planners are not in touch with present educational practice. Problems concerning credibility could arise if teachers experience curricula to be imposed upon them from the "top down" by those who are *not adequately informed* (according to the respondents). Secondly, prior consultation and the acknowledgement of teachers' input would ensure that teacher participation is incorporated in good time. This opportunity could serve as

an incentive for teachers to gain access to and take ownership of the curriculum in a more significant way.

Quality teacher involvement is essential, not only for the sake of institutional and curriculum development in schools and the country's curriculum, but also for nurturing the personal and professional growth of the teacher. Teacher participation can therefore bring positive results. Sadly, this principle is not always fully endorsed, in which case the teacher's professional status is placed in jeopardy. Purposeful strategies must therefore be developed in order to integrate the issues of teacher participation and teachers' professional growth effectively. These strategies should take due cognisance of teachers' needs to be involved outside the classroom. Teachers do not wish to be viewed as mere "recipients" who are to implement the curriculum in the classroom — they expect to be included in the initial process of meaningful decision-making where their "voices will be heard".

### Conclusion

Curriculum change does not only require new thinking on relevant curricula; it should also be realised that the role of the teacher in this process has changed. The curriculum functions that are presently expected from teachers differ from those assigned to them in 1998, for example. Is this changed role and the need for participation being taken seriously? Curriculum change should therefore not only include new thinking and action concerning curriculum development, but also how it relates to the way teachers can be optimally involved in the process, making the outdated focus on the role of teachers as mere "recipients" redundant. By ignoring "the teacher's voice", the outcomes of new thinking on curriculum development may in fact be thwarted, prolonging the dangerous situation that teachers, as potential curriculum agents, simply remain "voices crying in the wilderness".

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