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Curriculum reform in a global context: a study of teachers in Jordan

KADHUM KHAN AL-DAAMI and GWEN WALLACE

The gap between the educational achievements of the comparatively wealthy and those living in poverty is widening world-wide, with the associated threat to social cohesion. Twenty-five years of curriculum reform has largely failed in its objective of providing quality, basic education for all. Arguing that successful innovation requires the participation of willing teachers, and associating this idea with the claim that schools are important for social cohesion, this study surveyed 500 Jordanian elementary teachers about their involvement in a programme of curriculum change and their desire to participate. Twelve key informants were interviewed. The reform has raised the qualifications of teachers and increased male teacher numbers but has neither raised overall standards nor improved truancy rates. Tight central control has failed to engage teachers' allegiance to the changes. Officials blamed failures on schools; head teachers blamed parents, and teachers criticized a policy that left them mediating a curriculum that lacked relevance and failed to engage pupils.

Keywords: curriculum development; elementary teachers; Jordan; social cohesion; teacher participation.

Introduction

In this paper we use the example of a study of Jordanian teachers engaged with a 10-year programme of educational reform that began in 1989 to address the problems of social cohesion. Jordan was selected for the study because, as an open, Arab state, it could be used later as a comparator against other Arab and less westernized educational systems. In addition, Jordan's colonial past has left a strong legacy of British influence, an influence that makes it culturally more accessible to western interests than many other Arab states. The study covers a time of rapid changes in government policy on the school curriculum. Outside the school, while already encompassing wide cultural differences across a diversity of local economies, Jordan was also accommodating an influx of immigrant refugees from other Arab nations and addressing the associated internal tensions and conflicts. It was also under pressures from secular, western strategic interests and a struggling macro-economy (Al-Daami 2000).

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The centralization of Jordanian curriculum reform was of major interest to the first author because of his lengthy personal experience in the region, first as an elementary-school head-teacher and later as a lecturer in a teacher-training college. These experiences had brought him into contact with many educators from different Arabic-speaking countries. At such meetings, concern was often expressed about the problems the highly centralized, hierarchical control of education was creating for the next generation. We focus here on Jordan's elementary school teachers in order to explore how and why curriculum reforms failed to engage their allegiances and loyalties.

Hopmann (2003) has discussed how, over the last 25 years, the long-held belief in the value of engaging teachers' professional commitment to curriculum change had been replaced in both Europe and the US by centralized systems of control and accountability. These new structures have been justified by the 'need' to modernize technologically and to raise levels of achievement in the global marketplace. Advocates of this technical-rationalist approach have believed that relying on teachers to do their job as professionals out of a value-based commitment was a recipe for failure (see for example Skidelsky 1996). They argued against a participative approach on the grounds that by holding teachers and schools accountable for their results, they would effectively integrate them into the modernization of the system and ensure that teachers accepted change out of self-interest. However, the current recognition of the widening gulf between those who are socially included and those who are excluded under these systems is leading to new thinking around the concept of social cohesion.[1] Osttveit's (2000: 3) reflections on the Jomtien Declaration of 1990 and UNESCO's subsequent 10-year drive for a universal basic education help to establish this point:

> Some 100 million children aged 6 to 11 remain out of school, and a further 150 million, including adolescents, have dropped out without acquiring basic levels of literacy. This is not just a developing country issue: one in five adults in industrialized countries cannot read or write a simple text.

Osttveit went on to argue that, as 'skill requirements' change with rapidly changing, all-encompassing new technologies and the global liberalization of labour markets, the widening of the gap between those who can access, and benefit, from the new technologies and those who remain in 'deepening poverty' are a matter of increasing concern. His claim is that, 'Closing the education gap is a first step to closing the income gap' (p. 4).

Where Osttveit (2000) advocates improvements in education in order to bridge what may be an economically-driven, social gulf, Heyneman (2003: 4) sees the first purpose of schooling as social cohesion. Focusing on the Millenium Challenge Account (MCA) (the US commitment to see foreign aid increase annually by $5 billion over 3 years), he asks why the Marshall Plan was so successful while other aid programmes have achieved very little. He lays the blame at international agencies working to pre-ordained models of infra-structural change that have not met the needs of their clients. Aid, he claims, works well for health and education, and works best where governments allow it to work and where processes are not, 'burdened by

micro-management from domestic legislation'. He goes on to state, unequivocally, that:

> it must be remembered that the first purpose of public education is that of social cohesion, and therefore the success of this new MCA initiative will lie primarily not in the improved math[ematics] and science scores but in the improved understanding of the prerequisites for a stable and peaceful world. (Heyneman 2003: 6)

In an earlier macro-economic analysis, Heyneman (2000) measured social cohesion along polarized dimensions of inclusion and exclusion. His results led him to conclude that US education was more successful at social cohesion than the school systems in the European Central Asia (ECA) region. Reflecting this conclusion, he turned to advocacy for the establishment of democratic public institutions where operational decisions would be decided locally. Accepting that the US education system has many problems, he saw school boards, acting as 'consensus-building mechanisms', building local consensus around what should be taught (Heyneman 2003: 5).

de Beer (2003) adopted a qualitative approach to the debates around social cohesion and mounted a fundamental critique of the kind of bi-polar, dualistic thinking that is being used to measure outcomes mechanistically along ill-defined and 'under-theorized' factors (De Beer 2003: 5). Noting that social cohesion is a very loose concept, she sees it as a re-packaging, under a new label, of the overlapping and confused concepts of 'social capital, social exclusion, community, solidarity, diversity, multi-culturalism, citizenship, human rights, discrimination, democracy, etc'. She nonetheless concedes that it has, 'utility as a framing concept ... offering us a new angle to look at how society's structures and processes affect us'. Importantly, her work leads her to question the efficacy of policies that are experienced by practitioners as 'pressure to play by the rules of the game (determined by those in power)'. While de Beer's work in her working paper is largely exploratory, we are drawn to her arguments for a more meaningful, socially-binding sense of social cohesion than is evident in hierarchically-controlled social settings.

From a range of perspectives it is now apparent that real dangers exist in the current fragmentation of societies, whether the fault-lines are in values and beliefs or socio-economic status. Indeed, the possibility that 'the lack of legal means to express dissent and affect change, has resulted in more people embracing Islam and some resorting to radical political expressions of the religion' (Kennan Institute 2003) adds a further edge to a study based in Jordan.

However, while the notion of increased democratic participation gains currency as a way out of the morass, much remains a matter of debate. The findings we present here on how the centralized, Jordanian education system, with its tight systems of both product and process control, has affected elementary school teachers throws light on the way global pressures for educational changes may be impacting more widely on the problem of social cohesion.

We turn next to the socio-historical and political background of Jordan. We then describe our study and discuss the findings that lead us to our conclusions.

Jordan

Jordan has a relatively small, but rapidly increasing, population of 4.1 million people. Different groups within the nation have very different ways of living and earning a living, with the most marked contrast between the more densely populated, westernized urban areas and the more remote, sparsely-populated rural areas. Roughly 60% of the population live in urban or semi-urban environments while ~ 40%, of whom half are under 16, live in rural areas. Nomadic and Bedouin areas are the most remote. There is a continuing influx of immigrants from other Arab countries which also causes tensions, particularly between the Palestinian camps and Bedouin nomads. At the time of the study, the influx of refugees was mostly from Iraq.

Nonetheless, although Palestinian schools have some degree of autonomy in terms of salary and organization—the staff salaries are paid by the UN (UNRWA)—they still have to follow the centralized curriculum. Bedouin schools, with a single teacher, also follow the same curriculum. The idea is that the common curriculum can work as a means of building social cohesion.

Traditionally, Jordan's social cohesion is rooted in its cultural identity, based in Islam, and the government aims to sustain this identity as a unifying national force. Even so, city life for the young increasingly reflects secular, western, commercial influences, aspirations, and lifestyles and, over many decades, Jordan's school curriculum has been strongly influenced by western ideas, first through British colonial control and more recently because of the country's strategic importance to and economic dependence on the west. In addition, Jordan is dependent for financial, developmental, and other aid on, among others, the US, the World Bank, and the EU.

Historically, Jordan has successfully adapted to successive changes stemming from fundamentally different belief systems. These range through the pre-Islamic, Islamic, Mongolian, and Ottoman to, in the first half of the 20th century, British colonial rule. Since 1946, Jordan has promoted its own culturally cohesive ideology through a system that has tied Islamic instruction to developments stemming from western influences. Even so, while the westernization of schooling is seen by some as a positive, aspirational, and socially-progressive influence on nationhood, others view it as a negative, disruptive, and inappropriate use of an educational system.

As indicated above, the school curriculum is devised and implemented by directives from central government. The general principles are decided by the Ministry of Education in accordance with the government's intention to promote a culturally integrative ideology. Many committees, such as the National Curriculum and Textbooks Committee and the (School) Inspectors' Committee, are involved in controlling the process. Implementation is a process of hierarchically-controlled, outward diffusion, more or less independent of teachers' views. A tight system of educational supervision operates from a Ministry department that oversees the supervisors who operate inspections at regional level. Teachers are provided with guidelines for curriculum delivery together with the specified content in officially sanctioned textbooks. Tight product control means that the success or failure of pupils in government-sponsored tests is a factor in the outcome of

teachers' periodic professional appraisal. In a further attempt to ensure teacher allegiance and loyalty, candidates are not accepted for training unless they profess belief in the ideology of the state, pledge loyalty to their homeland, the Arab nation, and believe fully in its message and aims (Ministry of Education 1975). Outwardly, the policy promotes social cohesion through hierarchical control. There is little opportunity for dissent.

In 1988, in line with UNESCO aspirations for universal, basic education, Jordan initiated a 10-year programme of reforms (Ministry of Education 1988). Compulsory basic education was extended from age 9+ to age 15+ and emphasis was placed on addressing the crisis in school buildings; buildings often housed double, sometimes triple shifts of elementary school pupils. Problems with the quality of textbooks were noted, and Billeh and Ahlawat (1996) argued for their redesign, together with the development of the associated teachers' guides and supplementary materials. In the end, however, the remedies enacted focused on the quality of the print rather than the curriculum content.

In promoting radical reforms in a culturally cohesive way, the government's rhetoric placed much emphasis on Islamic religious instruction as well as the development of democratic citizenship in the Arab homeland. However, behind the reform agenda lay the information-technology revolution and the question of how to integrate science and technology into Jordanian schools. While the reformers claimed to have shifted the curriculum towards more science and technology and away from what might be argued are the more culturally-integrative aspects of schooling like art, social science and music, Aish (1990) and Sotari (1992) argued that a large part of the curriculum remained traditional and lagged well behind the developments in science and technology.[2]

The reform was implemented in three phases, 1989–1992, 1993–1995, and 1996–1998. It increased all teacher training to a 3-year, degree-level programme in universities. To ensure rural schools were properly staffed, all newly trained teachers had to teach in rural schools for at least a year.

Aspirations for improvements were severely affected by the end of the first Gulf War in 1991 with the partial collapse of the economy of the Gulf states, especially Iraq, which at the time of the project was under UN sanctions. Both the 1995 and 1996 Ministry of Education reports (Ministry of Education 1995, 1996) noted a number of difficulties that had led inevitably to a lowered baseline from which the application of accepted educational principles could be applied.

However, Jordanian critiques of educational policy are rare. Za'rour (1980), Jamlan (1981), Sweilem (1991), Sotari (1992), and Billeh and Ahlawat (1996), whose work has a strong theoretical emphasis, have dealt with curricular issues in general at all levels of Jordanian education. Discussion around the involvement of teachers in decision-making is notably absent. However in that all of these authors were employed in the Ministry, it is not unreasonable to suppose that their publications reflect official policy.[3] In the main, Jordanian policy ignores the belief that teacher involvement in curriculum planning and development is a good thing. We would argue that *all* teachers face the task of mediating centrally-devised curricula to their pupils and at school level, to what Benavot and Resh (2003: 171)

characterize as, 'the ability of local schools to manoeuvre within official curricular guidelines'.

In the remaining sections, we present and discuss the findings from our study of Jordanian teachers. Ozga (2000) has taken up the theme of 'contested terrain' to argue for local and historically-contextualized understandings of educational practice as it responds to the wider forces of globalization. We conclude that, in spite of a highly centralized control where teacher conformity is the norm, there are, nonetheless, signs of Ozga's 'contested terrain' as a conservative Muslim country articulates with the west. Western influences can be identified in past policy documents promoting liberal and social-reconstructivist ideologies around equality of opportunity and notions of gender equality. At the time of the study, curricular innovations reflected the technical-rationality of western pressures for 'modernization'. We cannot explore these issues in great depth here. Our intention is to raise them as features of the social-historical context within which we undertook the fieldwork.

Returning to the perspectives of teachers, we have adopted Gramsci's (1972) ideas on the ideological domination (hegemony) of the state. We must therefore note that teachers may well have some awareness of the source and character of political constraints, but take them for granted. Where constraints are more overt, then it is likely that the source is also more apparent. In either case, it is crucial that the interpretation of the data should both relate to and extend beyond the responses of teachers to their global and socio-historical context.

The study

Elementary schooling in Jordan starts at age 6+ and lasts for 6 years, with 3 years of secondary schooling following. The Ministry of Education report of 1996 gave the total number of elementary schools as 2492 and pupil numbers as 1 074 855. Elementary teachers numbered 44 508. Class size ranges from small numbers in a Bedouin tent to 45 in a large urban school.

The fieldwork sought to explore the extent to which a prescribed, centralized curriculum in which process- and product-control are tightly intertwined would attract the allegiances and loyalty of teachers in a country with significant cultural differences. As a rough indicator of allegiance and loyalty, we set out to explore, first, how far elementary school teachers were involved in curricular decision-making; secondly, how far the system met their aspirations for involvement; and, thirdly, what the results meant in terms of teachers' loyalties and allegiances towards government policy. We used two very different methods: we first undertook a large-scale survey of a sample of all elementary teachers in order to get an overview of teachers' orientation to curriculum development and change. We then followed up with 12 in-depth interviews: two with officials from the Ministry, four with head teachers, and six with teachers. The in-depth study was necessarily small but gives some important insights into the deeper issues behind the survey results. The research took place towards the end of the 1988–1998 period of educational reform.

The questionnaire was designed in three parts: Section A asked for personal and demographic data on age, gender, qualifications, experience, school location, and subjects taught. Section B was in two parts. The first part asked the respondents to indicate on a 2-point scale (yes/no) whether or not they were involved in 20 aspects of curriculum planning and development (see tables 1 and 2).[4] The second part asked them to indicate, on a 5-point

Table 1. Urban teachers' involvement in curriculum planning and development.

	Are you involved in …?	
Statements	Yes, *n* (%)	No, *n* (%)
1. Providing primary information at their request to curriculum planners in the Ministry of Education.	124 (31.7)	267 (68.3)
2. Suggesting modifications to the Ministry at their request to ensure better curriculum implementation.	121 (30.9)	270 (69.1)
3. Deciding on the educational goals of the elementary schools where you work.	115 (29.4)	276 (70.6)
4. Defining the ways and means for achieving these goals.	128 (32.7)	263 (67.3)
5. Designing programmes and activities in line with instructions issued by the Ministry of Education.	58 (14.8)	333 (85.2)
6. Defining the criteria for evaluating curriculum implementation in your school.	112 (28.6)	279 (71.4)
7. Evaluating curriculum plans before implementation in your school.	97 (24.8)	294 (75.2)
8. Any training to ensure your competence in curriculum implementation.	137 (35.0)	254 (65.0)
9. Developing the specific curriculum objectives.	128 (32.7)	263 (67.3)
10. Continually evaluating the current curriculum in your school.	126 (32.2)	265 (67.8)
11. Changing or manipulating course materials provided by the Ministry throughout the school year according to educational objectives.	62 (15.9)	329 (84.1)
12. Deciding which learning experiences should be utilized in your school.	128 (32.7)	263 (67.3)
13. Selecting suitable instructional supplies to be used in your school.	59 (15.1)	332 (84.9)
14. Selecting reference materials for the school library.	50 (38.4)	241 (61.6)
15. Writing textbooks and/or selecting their contents.	52 (13.3)	339 (86.7)
16. Discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks.	115 (29.4)	276 (70.6)
17. Discussing with the Ministry of Education pupils' interests and needs.	132 (33.8)	259 (66.2)
18. Selecting procedures for assessing and analysing pupils' progress.	125 (32.0)	266 (68.0)
19. Involving parents in participating in curriculum planning and development.	117 (29.9)	274 (70.1)
20. Encouraging other organizations to participate in curriculum planning and development processes.	193 (35.5)	252 (64.5)
Total	2225 (28.4)	5595 (71.6)

Table 2. Rural teachers' involvement in curriculum planning and development processes.

Statements	Are you involved in …? Yes, *n* (%)	No, *n* (%)
1. Providing primary at the request information to curriculum planners in the Ministry of Education.	31 (28.4)	78 (71.6)
2. Suggesting modifications at their request to the Ministry to ensure better curriculum implementation.	24 (22.0)	85 (78.0)
3. Deciding the educational goals of the elementary schools where you work.	33 (30.3)	76 (69.7)
4. Defining the ways and means for achieving these educational goals where you work.	31 (28.4)	78 (71.6)
5. Designing programmes and activities in line with instructions issued by the Ministry of Education.	37 (33.9)	72 (66.1)
6. Defining the criteria for evaluating curriculum implementation in your school.	25 (22.9)	84 (77.1)
7. Evaluating curriculum plans before implementation in your school.	23 (21.1)	86 (78.9)
8. Any training to ensure your competence in curriculum implementation.	33 (30.3)	76 (69.7)
9. Developing the specific curriculum objectives.	23 (21.1)	86 (78.9)
10. Continually evaluating the current curriculum in your school.	28 (25.7)	81 (74.3)
11. Changing or manipulating course materials provided by the Ministry throughout the school year according to educational objectives.	21 (19.3)	88 (80.7)
12. Deciding which learning experiences should be utilized in your school.	31 (28.4)	78 (71.6)
13. Selecting suitable instructional supplies to be used in your school.	33 (30.3)	76 (69.7)
14. Selecting reference materials for the school library.	39 (35.8)	70 (64.2)
15. Writing text-books and/or selecting their contents.	16 (14.7)	93 (85.3)
16. Discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the text-books.	28 (25.7)	81 (74.3)
17. Discussing with the Ministry of Education pupils' interests and needs.	33 (30.3)	76 (69.7)
18. Selecting procedures for assessing and analysing pupils' progress.	29 (26.6)	80 (73.4)
19. Involving parents in participating in curriculum planning and development.	22 (20.2)	87 (79.8)
20. Encouraging other organizations to participate in curriculum planning and development processes.	22 (20.2)	87 (79.8)
Total	562 (25.8)	1618 (74.2)

scale (strongly agree/strongly disagree) their relative desire to be involved in the same activities (see table 3). The statements covered issues around curriculum planning and development set out in documents issued by the Ministry of Education Planning Committee (Tibawi 1972, Ministry of Education 1978, 1990, 1994).

Table 3. Teachers' aspirations to participate in curriculum planning and development.

Statements, expressed strength of agreement to desire to be involved in:	Strongly disagree, *n* (%)	Disagree, *n* (%)	I don't know, *n* (%)	Agree, *n* (%)	Strongly agree, *n* (%)
1. Providing primary information at their request to curriculum planners in the Ministry of Education.	13 (2.6)	14 (2.8)	63 (12.6)	120 (24.0)	290 (58.0)
2. Suggesting modifications to the Ministry at their request to ensure better curriculum implementation.	14 (2.8)	11 (2.2)	61 (12.2)	119 (23.8)	295 (59.0)
3. Deciding the educational goals of the elementary schools, where you work.	13 (2.6)	11 (2.2)	65 (13.0)	126 (25.2)	85 (57.0)
4. Deciding the ways and means for achieving these educational goals, where you work.	15 (3.0)	11 (2.2)	59 (11.8)	130 (26.0)	285 (57.0)
5. Designing programmes and activities in line with instruction issued by the Ministry of Education.	11 (2.2)	10 (2.0)	59 (11.8)	125 (25.0)	295 (59.0)
6. Defining the criteria for evaluating curriculum implementation in your school.	10 (2.0)	12 (2.4)	61 (12.2)	120 (24.0)	297 (59.4)
7. Evaluating curriculum plans before implementation in your school.	12 (2.4)	11 (2.2)	57 (11.4)	112 (22.4)	308 (61.6)
8. Any training to ensure your competence in curriculum implementation.	11 (2.2)	11 (2.2)	50 (10.0)	132 (26.4)	296 (59.2)
9. Developing the specific curriculum objectives.	11 (2.2)	12 (2.4)	48 (9.6)	124 (24.8)	305 (61.0)
10. Continually evaluating the current curriculum in your school.	11 (2.2)	10 (2.0)	46 (9.2)	131 (26.2)	302 (60.4)
11. Changing or manipulating course materials provided by the Ministry throughout the school year according to educational objectives.	11 (2.2)	12 (2.4)	50 (10.0)	116 (23.2)	311 (62.2)
12. Deciding which learning experiences should be utilized in your school.	14 (2.8)	9 (1.8)	51 (10.0)	124 (24.8)	302 (60.4)
13. Selecting suitable instructional supplies to be used in your school.	13 (2.6)	9 (1.8)	56 (11.0)	126 (25.2)	296 (59.2)
14. Selecting reference materials for the school library.	10 (2.0)	10 (2.0)	43 (8.6)	134 (26.8)	303 (60.0)
15. Writing textbooks and/or selecting their contents.	22 (4.4)	14 (2.8)	51 (10.2)	113 (22.6)	300 (60.0)

Table 3. ***(Continued)***

Statements, expressed strengths of agreement to desire to be involved in:	Strongly disagree, *n* (%)	Disagree, *n* (%)	I don't know, *n* (%)	Agree, *n* (%)	Strongly agree, *n* (%)
16. Discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks.	10 (2.0)	9 (1.8)	44 (8.8)	118 (23.6)	319 (63.8)
17. Discussing with the Ministry of Education pupils' interest and needs.	11 (2.2)	10 (2.0)	42 (8.4)	125 (25.0)	312 (62.4)
18. Selecting procedures for assessing and analysing pupils' progress.	11 (2.2)	9 (1.8)	41 (8.2)	126 (25.2)	313 (62.6)
19. Involving parents in participating in curriculum planning and development.	3 (2.6)	9 (1.8)	40 (8.0)	124 (24.8)	314 (62.8)
20. Encouraging other organizations to participate in curriculum planning and development processes.	12 (2.4)	8 (1.6)	39 (7.8)	130 (26.0)	311 (62.2)
Total	248 (2.5)	212 (2.0)	1026 (10.3)	2475 (24.8)	6039 (60.4)

The range of possible teacher involvement

The Ministry of Education Planning Committee drafted the curriculum for each subject and issued precise instructions regarding the dates and times when each part of the programme was be taught. Fifty teachers from across the country were invited to join the Planning Committee, but their role was that of observers. In the schools, every teacher had to produce a yearly and weekly plan, in line with Ministry instructions, for his or her head (see items 4, 5, and 12).

In other words, at the time of this study teacher involvement in curriculum planning and development was strictly limited by Ministry instructions, and was confined to the comments they submitted in their yearly reports. While the Ministry's feedback form allowed teachers to comment on the course criteria, evaluate the Ministry's plans, and suggest improvements to textbooks (see items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 16, 17), there was no evidence that teachers' comments ever changed anything other than the order of pages in the textbooks. Year-by-year, apart from some changes in page order, the texts have remained the same.

As far as library books are concerned, the choice was not an open one. Schools received a list of approved books, from which teachers made their selection (see item 14). Any charts and teaching aids produced by the teachers, including their blackboard work, had to follow Ministry instructions (see items 11, 13, 15).

Pupils were formally tested at monthly and termly intervals as well as at the end of year. The tests were prescribed by the Ministry. For each test the pass mark was set at 50%. If a pupil scored 47%, the teachers' council, made up of the head teacher, the assistant head, and other, best-qualified teachers with more than 10 years' experience, had the option of re-grading the mark as 50%. Pupils who obtained less than 40% in more than three subjects had to repeat the year (see items 10, 18).

Twice a year, teachers met parents at planned parents' evenings (see items 19, 20); very few parents attended these events.

Section C asked teachers what helped or hindered their involvement in curriculum development. The alternatives offered were: 'lack of competence', 'lack of time', 'lack of opportunity', and 'lack of encouragement'. A space was left for 'other reasons'. Teachers were then asked to comment on their reasons for thinking their involvement was or was not important. Finally, they were asked what suggestions and recommendations for change they would like to make to the ministry. All three sections of the survey were translated into Arabic.

The sample

We decided that 525 teachers would give us a 1% sample and negotiated with the Jordanian Ministry of Education to get a stratified sample of schools that would cover regional differences, although we were inevitably limited by accessibility.[5] The final sample covered the staff of 52 schools.[6] The response rate gave us 500 completed questionnaires (95%

response); specifically, 391 teachers from urban schools and 109 from rural.

The high rate of return can be attributed to the involvement of the Ministry in the selection of the sample and the support of head teachers for the survey. Inevitably, head teachers were involved in distribution and collection. However, the questionnaires were filled in and returned anonymously and the results do not suggest that the unavoidable involvement of the Ministry and head teachers affected the teachers' willingness to respond.

Twelve, tape-recorded interviews, using a semi-structured schedule that allowed issues to be explored in depth, were undertaken in Arabic by our Jordanian colleague.[7] Two officials from the ministry, four head teachers and six teachers agreed to being interviewed.[8] The focus of all the interviews was on the objectives of curriculum change, the resources available, the consequences of the changes, and the involvement of teachers in curriculum planning and development.

More specifically, the six teachers were asked for some background information about their age, qualifications and experience, and their classroom practices. The questions then explored their views on their involvement in planning and developing the curriculum. The interviews with the four head-teachers covered 20 questions about the activities they undertook to implement the curriculum in their schools, the benefits and problems they experienced, and their views on the involvement of teachers in curriculum planning and development decision-making. The interviews with two senior officials in the Ministry of Education covered the role of the Ministry and their opinions about teacher involvement in curriculum planning and development. As narrative responses, we use the teachers', headteachers', and Ministry officers' comments to illustrate the meanings that arose from their different perspectives.

Results and discussion

The demographic analysis showed that 78.2% of the responding teachers (391) were in urban schools and only 21.8% (109) in rural schools. Given that 37.5% of Jordan's population lived in rural areas, this confirmed the relative under-representation of the rural schools. We therefore explored the differences further, first through the demographic data for age, gender, and qualifications and subsequently by exploring the differences between the urban and rural groups in terms of the their current involvement in curricular decision-making (see tables 1 and 2). We reverted to whole sample data in order to contrast the teachers' responses to the questions about their actual involvement with their desire to be involved, for reasons we explain later (see table 3).[9]

While the majority, that is 56.4% (282) of the whole sample, was aged 35–39, this proportion divided into 51.4% (257) in the urban schools but only 5% (25) in the rural ones. The next largest group, 21.8% (109) was aged between 30–34. Of these, 15.4% (77) were teaching in urban and 6.4% (32) in rural areas. Only 13.6% (68) of the sample were between 25–29 years old, and even fewer, 8.2% (41) were 20–24 years old. These groups divided

roughly equally between urban and rural. Given that all teachers begin their careers in rural areas, as a matter of policy, the age differences reflected the smaller proportion of rural schools in the overall sample. There were no teachers aged over 40. The reason may be because they had administrative positions in the schools or had moved on to work, for example, in teacher training or Ministry's departments.

The gender differences between the urban and rural samples reflect the relative success of the drive to recruit more men into elementary schools since 1988. Of the rural teachers 47.7% (52) were men and 52.3% (57) women. This contrasts with the urban schools where the sample was made up of 82.6% (323) women and only 17.4% (68) men.

Jordan has inherited a varied system of teacher training, but government policy has been to move towards an all-graduate profession. As a result of this policy, differences were also noticeable in the changing levels of training and qualifications. The highest percentage of qualified respondents, that is 62.2% (311) were trained in community colleges (urban: 67.5% (264); rural: 43.1% (47)). The situation was reversed in rural schools where 26.8% (134) of the full sample held university degrees. Given that newly-qualified teachers were being directed into rural schools, the trend in government policy towards the recruitment of more men into a graduate profession was evidently having an effect.

In interpreting the data, it is important to remember that in Jordan the cultural difference are most marked in the division between rural and urban communities. Urban areas are more industrialized and developed; rural areas are sparsely-populated, remote from the industrial sector and western influences, and economically poorer, with fewer facilities in their generally smaller schools.

Table 1 presents the data for the 391 urban teachers only. For 16 of the categories, the proportion of teachers indicating positive involvement overall was around a quarter to a third. This ranged from 24.8% (97) who claimed to be active in evaluating curriculum plans (item 7), to 38.4% (150) who were involved in selecting references for the library (see item 14). In between we had 35% (137) who claimed to be involved in competency training (item 8). There was also a very small proportion (13.3%) who claimed to be writing text-books or selecting their contents (item 15), designing programmes and activities, (14.8%; item 5), and designing course materials (15.9%; item 11). It needs to be recalled that the production of materials would have been limited to resources that supported the statutory curriculum in the context of approved classroom activities and displays. Furthermore, 'participation' in planning and development was limited to the yearly reports teachers made to the Ministry when they could recommend changes to textbooks. The overall proportion claiming 'no involvement' averaged out at 71.6% (279).

Table 2 presents the 109 rural teachers' perception of their involvement. The table shows only 11 categories where 25% or more of the teachers indicated involvement, although a further eight categories suggest the involvement of around one in five teachers. The highest proportion are involved in selecting references for the library (35.8%; item 14); it needs to be remembered that the selection had to be made from the list supplied by the ministry. (This statement also received the highest percentage of support in the

urban areas: 38.4% (150).) Designing programmes, deciding on school goals, selecting instructional supplies, and discussing pupils' needs with the Ministry of Education all involved around one in three teachers. Least common were those who claimed to be writing textbooks or selecting their contents (14.7%; item 15), followed by those teachers who claimed to be involving parents and encouraging other organizations to participate in curricular decision-making (20.2%; items 19, 20). A similar proportion claimed to be involved in defining criteria for evaluating curriculum development, evaluating plans before they were implemented and developing specific curriculum objectives (items 6, 7, 9).

These results suggest that rural teachers perceived themselves to be marginally less involved than urban ones. In rural schools, the average proportion of teachers claiming no involvement was 74.2% (80), a figure that compares with 71.6% (279) of urban teachers. However, the differences are small.

In six areas the differences were particularly high (see items 2, 5, 9, 13, 19, 20). It is reasonable to hypothesize, for example, that urban teachers were significantly more likely than their rural colleagues to feel able to suggest curriculum modifications to the Ministry of Education (item 2), however the difference turned out not to be statistically significant. On the other hand, we found that the differences in the remaining five areas were significant at the 5% level. Only 14.8% (58) of the urban teachers saw themselves as involved in designing programmes in line with Ministry instructions against 33.9% (37) in rural areas. However, urban teachers were more likely to see themselves as developing specific curriculum objectives (32.7% as against 21.1%); to be involving parents (29.9% as against 20.2%); and to be encouraging outside organizations to participate (35.5% as against 20.2%). Rural teachers, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to be involved in selecting instructional materials (30.3% as against 15.1%).

These differences between urban and rural teachers could mean that teachers in urban schools, where communication networks are better, numbers enrolled in schools higher, and with more staff with greater experience, had some advantages when it came to seeing themselves as actively involved in curricular decision-making. The frequency with which we found between one in four or five urban teachers indicating their participation in some aspect of curriculum development leads us to suppose that we may be looking at one or two teachers with particular responsibilities in schools of 10 or more staff. In the smaller, rural schools, one teacher is commonly working with a relatively small number of pupils and very few resources. The greater involvement of rural teachers in seeing themselves as selecting instructional supplies must be seen in the context of tight process- and product-control; as we have noted, the teachers' efforts at producing any supplementary materials had to be in line with Ministry instructions. The findings suggests that the better-qualified (if less experienced) rural teachers were, if anything, rather less likely to see themselves involved in curricular decision-making than the urban ones, but more likely to be producing supplementary materials (in line with Ministry instructions). Where the interview data offered some insights into these issues, we will return to them later.

Table 3 presents the responses to a request to the teachers to indicate their aspirations to be involved in the same 20 curriculum areas identified in table 2. However, this time, they were asked to use a 5-point scale from, 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', and the question (in Arabic) asked them to express their relative 'desire' to participate in each area. Given that many teachers in rural areas were in their first teaching position and were located there by government order, it appeared reasonable to us to assume that, in terms of their aspirations, rural teachers were likely to see their future careers in urban schools. In analysing these results, therefore, we decided that dividing urban from rural teachers would cease to be useful.

Overall, the results demonstrate that in spite of their current lack of involvement in curricular decision-making, only 4.5% (23) of the whole sample either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea that all of the listed activities were desirable activities for teacher involvement. Indeed, 85.2% (424) indicated their wish to be involved with either agreement or strong agreement.

The strongest feelings were expressed over the strengths and weaknesses of textbooks (item 16). Strong agreement with the desirability of more involvement in what were seen as inadequate and out-of-date textbooks was expressed by 63.8% (319) of the sampled teachers. A further 23.6 (118) expressed agreement with this aspiration, making textbooks as a source of considerable dissatisfaction for more than 87% (437) of the sample. Similar numbers of teachers wished to be active in involving parents (item 19), selecting procedures for assessing pupils progress (item 18), encouraging other organizations to participate (item 20), discussing pupils' interests and needs with the ministry (item 17), and changing or manipulating course materials provided by the ministry (item 11). Indeed, even the lowest proportion to indicate their strong agreement with the desire for involvement in any item reached 57% (85) for both deciding the educational goals of the school (item 3) and deciding the ways and means of achieving them (item 4). As these activities are more likely to be associated with school management rather than classroom roles this remains a very substantial proportion. Furthermore, adding on those who merely 'agree' that deciding educational goals and the means of achieving them are activities they would wish to be involved with brings the percentages indicating an interest in involvement up to 82.2% and 83%, respectively. In both areas, we interpret the findings as demonstrations of the desire of teachers not just to increase their involvement with their own classes in every respect, but also to have some input into overall school policy.

Table 3 also shows that the respondents not wanting involvement do not exceed 2.5% for most statements. These findings were consistent across the variables of age, gender, experience, and qualifications. It is clear, therefore, that there is considerable discrepancy between the way teachers perceive their role as it is and as they would like it to be. We interpret these results as indicating the teachers' strong feelings about their general dissatisfaction with their exclusion from meaningful participation in decision-making on curriculum activities.

The final section C of the questionnaire confirmed this view. This section gave teachers the choice of five reasons for their lack of involvement:

'lack of competency', 'lack of time', 'lack of opportunity to contribute', 'lack of encouragement', and 'other'. Respondents were then given the opportunity to comment on what would need to happen for them to get more involved, including their ideas about how changes in teacher training and in-service courses could facilitate this. The open comments from this section were grouped into themes.

The results showed that half of the urban teachers and more than a third of rural teachers felt that, in spite of their strong wish to be more involved in curricular decision-making, they were largely excluded from such activities by lack of opportunity because of the way the system worked. More rural teachers (49.3%) than urban (20.5%) cited lack of encouragement, possibly referring to their isolation. More urban teachers (15.3%) than rural ones (9.2%) cited lack of time. Very few, around 8% in both cases, felt that they lacked competence. Only 2.6% believed they should not participate and more than 90% believed they should.

In their open comments the teachers' responses mentioned either their closeness to and mediation role with pupils or implied that they believed that they had an important role in matching the curriculum to pupils, a role that was currently tightly controlled and limited. It was in facilitating their interaction with pupils that the teachers believed more involvement in curriculum planning and development would be beneficial.

The teachers' three most frequent suggestions were, first, their wish to debate curriculum changes before they were implemented; secondly, to have more in-service training; and thirdly, for the Ministry to pay more attention to the annual reports teachers submitted. Slightly less frequent was their desire to study curriculum planning and development in their training courses. More urban teachers (52.7%) than rural ones (31.2%) wanted more in-service training, possibly because rural teachers were better and more recently qualified. However, more rural teachers (20.2%) than urban (12.3%) suggested they would like a periodical to which they could contribute ideas on the curriculum planning and development processes.

These issues are not unfamiliar in many school systems. However, it is worth noting that the high level of discontent being voiced by these teachers occurred in a context where teachers were culturally accustomed to working under a highly visible, centralized system, and where their loyalties had been monitored and tested both before and during their employment. In Jordan, the teachers as well as the process and product of the curriculum were tightly controlled and monitored. We also need to note that the central issue for these teachers was the extent to which they encountered real problems in 'mediating' the government-controlled curriculum to their pupils.

The in-depth interviews supported and underpinned the survey results. We have had to be selective in presenting this data. While recognizing the limitations of our small sample, we still cannot do justice to the information we gathered. Nothing said in the interviews gave us reason to challenge our interpretation. We focus here on those responses that add insights to the issues raised by the questionnaire results.

The interview narratives confirmed that teachers, head teachers, and senior officials readily supported the view that the participation of teachers in curriculum planning and development process is important. However, we

must also note that some interviewees showed a reluctance to criticize the policy of the government and were very reserved when giving their opinions. The degree of reserve related to their position in the hierarchy. Officials were least critical and the teachers most critical.

While both of the officials interviewed agreed with the sentiment that 'successful' teachers needed to be involved in curriculum planning and development, they also stressed the responsibility of the Ministry to develop the curriculum and saw no necessity to take teachers' views into account. One saw the curriculum as 'the most important tool … to implement the state's goals for the present generation'. The other pointed to developments required 'to keep pace with the technological development which is happening in the world today'. They both agreed that textbooks were 'not of a high standard' and blamed the Gulf War and the economic crisis for this. If teachers were not reaching the required standards, the officials claimed that the faults were in the teachers' classroom practice, not in the curriculum.

The role of the head teacher, a figure of authority in Jordan, is to oversee and supervise each teacher's daily and yearly plans for classroom instruction for consistency with Ministry requirements. For every lesson, there were two goals, one general and one specific. Both goals were set by the Ministry and neither head teachers nor teachers had any control over these goals. All four of the head teachers interviewed acceded to the Ministry the right to draw up such educational goals and saw it as their duty to conform to Ministry requirements. They also admired the western influences they were aware of and saw technology as the future. Over and above this, the three female head teachers stressed their open and democratic relationships with their teachers in observing their lessons, discussing their work, and writing reports back to the Ministry.

The head teachers' main problems stemmed from the instability of a system where teachers frequently transferred from one school to another, the textbooks changed yearly, and there were wide differences in teachers' qualifications. They applauded attempts to raise the standard of teacher training. They deplored the high levels of truancy and blamed poor results on parental influences and poorly motivated pupils who were unwilling to grasp the content of the national curriculum. Their suggestions for change included upgrading and updating the science curriculum for 5th-graders and a corresponding downgrading of the moral and ethical aspects of the curriculum taught to 1st-graders, who did not understand them. Overall, they wanted more consistency and fewer changes. Changes occurred annually, but new curricula were not published until shortly before the start of each academic year and took no account of the feedback teachers had provided from previous years. They believed teachers should play a greater role in curriculum decision-making.

The teachers were more willing to be outspoken and critical. They said they conformed in order to keep their jobs and to enable their pupils to cope with the demands of assessment. They emphasized their loyalties to their pupils, rather than the nation-state. However, they did not believe the curriculum effectively prepared pupils for life. In particular, it failed those who left early. They complained about the poor quality of textbooks and the mismatch between curriculum content and local environments. They

claimed they had to re-interpret texts in a form simple enough for their pupils to understand; a claim that supports the teachers' views in the survey that they were involved in producing curriculum materials. They saw the annual revisions of the curriculum as largely a matter of shifting information around the pages of the textbooks rather than the fundamental revisions that were necessary. They pointed out that although there was much talk about technology, most teachers in most schools were still using 'chalk-and-talk', and they felt the lack of technology would hinder their pupils' progress. They claimed that teacher training was focused on theories, that they had insufficient opportunity to practise, and that in-service courses failed to relate to their professional problems. They pointed to the failure of the Ministry to recognize their problems: 'How do they expect teachers to implement these instructions in a double-shift school?' One teacher argued very strongly that teachers were contributing to the poverty of the system by complying too readily with the demands of the authorities.

In summary, the mismatch between teachers' actual involvement in curricular decision-making and their aspirations to be involved suggests a considerable gap between these teachers' values and beliefs and the roles assigned to them by government policy. In spite of the tight, centralized control, loyalties and allegiances were to pupils rather than the system, and failures were blamed on policies and resources. Although the numbers interviewed were very small, the teachers' comments reflected the sentiments of the teachers expressed in section C of the survey.

Interestingly, the differences between the sectional interests in the interviewees' responses highlighted their respective positions in the hierarchy. The officials focused on their responsibility to 'keep pace' with developments and blamed teachers' failures on the way they implemented curriculum changes in their classrooms. The head teachers showed concern for their supervisory roles and were anxious both to work co-operatively with their staff and to comply with authority. Their criticisms were directed 'upwards' at the volatility of the curriculum changes, towards colleagues, and at the difficulties of coping with frequent changes of staff, and 'downwards' at what they saw as the poor motivation of many pupils and lack of support from parents.

The teachers, although tightly constrained by the systems of accountability that dictated the curriculum process and made them responsible for producing their pupils' results, were more inclined to criticize the unsuitability of the curriculum as a whole and what they saw as the impossible demands made upon them, given their lack of resources. Their feelings towards the Ministry reflected their beliefs that their work was both inappropriately and under-resourced and their efforts under-valued.

Overall, we suggest that the evidence supports the views expressed by, for example, Sarason (1990) and Fullan (Fullan with Steigelbauer 1991). The absence of teachers from participation in decision-making creates a situation where reforms inevitably founder, no one feels responsible, and the blame for shortcomings is directed at external 'others'. However, we are also arguing here that the problem goes beyond a failing curriculum. Jordanian schools were certainly failing to achieve the goals the Ministry set for them. We also found quite significant signs of disaffection among the teachers who

reported frequent changes of staff and high rates of truancy by pupils. If we add to these problems the suggestion by head teachers that the moral and ethical issues taught to 1st-graders be downgraded because they did not understand them, we get a sense of schools also failing in their traditional roles of building social cohesion around shared values as well as failing to construct a new consensus around technological modernization.

Green's (1997: 134–135) claim that national education systems have traditionally nurtured their future citizens' allegiance around language, religion, historical myths, laws, customs, and social mores in order to promote loyalty, discipline, and a sense of national identity and civic pride was prescient. The key players in this endeavour were teachers in schools. The structured and structural forces were conceptualized by Green as 'a massive engine of integration, assimilating the local to the national and the particular to the general'. In the absence of a loyalty-generating ideology, systems of accountability have produced what Hopmann (2003: 460) sees as ever more tightly intertwined patterns of formal control over both curriculum processes and products.

As Green (1997: 134–135) also argues, the post-modernist belief that globalization has rendered state education systems historically obsolete fails to take account of the state's continuing need for legitimacy, loyalty, and citizenship. With some foresight, he claims that education systems may yet be seen as the 'building blocks of international governance' and 'the key instrument of social cohesion'. We accept Green's (1997) argument and suggest that the failure to engage Jordanian teachers' loyalties and allegiances in more participative ways in curriculum innovation and development is a fundamental mistake, not only for its implications for raising pupils' achievement but also for generating those aspects of schooling that are integrative and loyalty-generating. However, we must also acknowledge the issue of poor resources. The teachers in our study had plenty of ideas and welcomed the possibility of more involvement, but they worked with intensive demands under very difficult conditions.

Conclusion

Debates about the changing relationship between globalization, the state, and schooling have raised questions about the extent to which governments are able to use schooling to raise educational standards and inculcate the kind of shared loyalty and allegiance that binds communities in socially cohesive ways. Hartley (2002) raises questions about the suitability of centralized control of curriculum development for driving the knowledge-economy. In the case of Jordan the issue is not simply about imposing the kind of technically-rational programme of modernization typically founded on western, secular values. The state also faces profound questions around how to hold its diverse communities together around the traditional values, religions, and cultures of an Arabic people while also accommodating migrants and refugees from the surrounding, destabilized regimes.

The general question is how to connect change and the requirements of national governments' interests in the global economy to local contexts. The

assumption that economic globalization means an inevitable rise in competitive, possessive individualism has lead governments to adopt a pragmatic, utilitarian approach to modernizing the school curriculum from the centre. Hierarchical structures have been used to ensure compliance to government-prescribed targets, paradoxically distancing the curriculum from global market forces. Our study supports the view that such an approach, while appearing to bring some successes in instrumental terms, raises questions about its value in engaging hearts and minds and generating and maintaining teachers' and pupils' civic allegiances and loyalties to the institutions of their nation-state.

As Heyneman (2003: 6) pointed out, 'the success of the new MCA [i.e. Millenium Challenge Account] initiative will lie primarily not in the improved math[ematics] and science scores but in the improved understanding of the prerequisites for a stable and peaceful world'. What his claim might mean in local terms has to be worked through in new forms of participatory discourse that engage meaningfully with the necessary debates around those issues of ethics and morality that bind communities together in mutually respectful and meaningful ways. State dependence upon rewards and punishments for civic compliance tends to leave governments floundering in meaningless rhetoric or management jargon, dependent upon coercive powers to support their legitimacy.

If governments are to take forward the radical changes in the school curriculum required by the globalization of trading interests and the 'knowledge-economy', our study lends weight to the arguments that identify a need for a national curriculum which, at the local level, balances the agreed knowledge, skills, and values with a professional role for teachers working in participation with other community interests, including parents. The essential and neglected task is to generate and sustain shared and dynamic moral discourses and practices around democratic citizenship and community-based needs.

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Notes

1. Interestingly, where Hopmann (2003: 474–475) questioned the failure of western societies to raise levels of achievement in schools, Macdonald (2003) argued that curriculum

reform was an anachronism now that much of young peoples' learning was being gained outside school. The evidence suggests that they both have a point, but they refer to different worlds.

2. Al-Tikriti (1984) explored the only current government exercise in teacher consultation; the enlistment of a very small number of classroom teachers onto committees directed by a curriculum consultant or specialist in a discipline.
3. The reforms were funded by the World Bank and by bilateral aid from countries of the European Union (EU), one of which was the UK (European Community 1993).
4. The idea of a 5-point scale for Part 1, the 'level' of involvement, was rejected, following a pilot study of 25 teachers in five schools because of the confusion it caused respondents and the difficulty we had making analytical comparisons between the different ways in which different teachers judged their contribution as 'involvement'. This difficulty was not entirely overcome by the substitution of yes/no responses because of the subjective judgements the teachers had to make regarding what counted as 'involvement' in a centrally-controlled system.
5. As most of the questionnaires had to be delivered by hand, an important criterion in the final selection of schools was accessibility. The counties of Irbid, Ajloun, Zarka and Jarash were chosen as representative of the north; Amman, the capital, and Madaba were chosen to represent the centre, and Al-Karak, Ma'an and Aqabq the south of the country.
6. The final negotiations with the Ministry were carried out by a colleague resident in Jordan.
7. All the tapes were transcribed and translated when they were returned to the UK.
8. The teacher interviews were anonymous and undertaken away from their schools.
9. Where we wanted to test the significance of correlations between measures, the chi-square test was used. The comments teachers offered for the open questions in part C were grouped into themes and analysed and interpreted qualitatively.

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