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# Civil society and policy-making on education: the Gauteng Education and Training Council

First submission: May 2004

The Gauteng Education and Training Council (GETC) is the first statutory council instituted in South Africa's new democratic dispensation which allows civil society to participate in policy-making on education. This article looks at the policy process and the role played by civil society in the development of education policy and legislation. It discusses the institution of the GETC and the role accorded to it in policy-making, as well as the factors which could prevent it from playing a significant role. These include the representivity of stakeholders; the participation of representatives in policy debates; the lack of consensus on the role of the Council; the relationship of the Council with government structures, and the role and place of the Council in the policy route of the Gauteng Department of Education. The article also includes recommendations on improving the role played by civil society in policy-making at the provincial level.

## Die burgerlike samelewing en onderwysbeleidvorming: die Gautengse Onderwys- en Opleidingsraad

In die nuwe demokratiese bestel is die Gautengse Onderwys- en Opleidingsraad die eerste statutêre raad in Suid-Afrika wat die burgerlike samelewing toelaat om aan die opstel van onderwysbeleid deel te neem. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die beleidsproses en die rol wat die burgerlike samelewing in die ontwikkeling van onderwysbeleid en -wetgewing speel. Die instelling van die Gautengse Onderwys- en Opleidingsraad en die rol wat daaraan toegeken is in die opstel van onderwysbeleid word bespreek, asook die faktore wat kan verhinder dat die Raad 'n betekenisvolle rol speel. Dié faktore behels onder meer die verteenwoordigendheid van die belanghebbers, die deelname van verteenwoordigers aan beleidsdebatte, 'n gebrek aan konsensus oor die rol van die Raad, die verhouding van die Raad met owerheidsstrukture en die rol en plek van die raad in die beleidsroete van Gautengse Departement van Onderwys. Aanbevelings om die rol te vergroot wat die burgerlike samelewing in die opstel van onderwysbeleid op provinsiale vlak kan speel, word ook gedoen.

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Central to the notion of a democratic system of education in South Africa is the idea that democracy should entail and enhance greater participation on the part of all relevant stakeholders in education and training. Thus it can be argued that all segments of the public should have the opportunity to participate in the process of policy formulation and that participatory mechanisms to provide the public with real opportunities to affect educational policies should be institutionalised (Carrim & Sayed 1997: 91). In answer to this need the Gauteng Education and Training Council (GETC) was established in 1997, thereby ensuring that the voice of civil society would be heard in policy-making on education at the provincial level (Lackey 1997: 12).

## 1. Policy and policy-making

Education policy can be defined as

... a specification of principles and actions, related to educational issues, which are followed or which should be followed and which are designed to bring about goals (Trowler 2003: 95).

Viewed in this way, policy may be seen as a statement of intentions as perceived by policy makers. It therefore follows that education policies are plans devised to serve some specific purpose, which may be economic, political, purely educational or a combination. This view of policy is, however, limited. Trowler (2003: 96) prefers to emphasise the dynamism of the policy process, the sources of which include the fact that there is usually conflict among policy-makers about identifying the important issues or problems, and the desired outcomes. This conflict may be exacerbated where stakeholders are afforded a role in the policy process.

In general, policies are developed at a level close to the top of the political system (Fowler 2000: 11). However, government today is so large and complex that much policy emanates from the bureaucracy, rather than from a legislative framework or from a minister or political party. Likewise, both politicians and bureaucrats administer and formulate policy (Taylor *et al* 1997:31). One can therefore argue that “[p]olicy is being made as it is being administered and administered as it is being made”(Anderson 1979: 98). This has an impact on decisions regarding the stage at which civil society should be included in the policy process.

In transitional societies which are embracing democracy after decades of authoritarianism, the purpose of policy is often to uproot old practices, beliefs and values about the social order and to replace them with new ways of “conducting national business” (Manganyi 2001: 28). The particular political, social, and economic context in which education exists should therefore be carefully considered by the government in order to enable it to achieve purposes which it considers to be advantageous or expedient (Hartshorne 1999: 6). This is an argument often used to justify the inclusion of civil society in policy decisions. However, in practice, a policy is sometimes the outcome of a political compromise among policy-makers, none of whom had in mind quite the problem to which the accepted policy is the solution.

As a new democracy, South Africa is committed to ensuring a high degree of citizen participation in education. Following the democratic elections of 1994, the South African government has therefore been expected to be responsive to the will of the people, to guarantee increased participation and to extend democracy in society (Sayed 2002: 38). In particular, government was expected to establish a sound and vibrant relationship with organisations in and of civil society. Thus the various policy documents which followed the democratic elections of 1994 all make reference to the creation of advisory bodies involving stakeholders in consultation on policy development at all levels of the education system. The GETC is one such body.

## 2. Stages of the policy process

Two trends are identified in the literature on policy-making: the first by those who describe the policy process as happening in stages (Harman 1984: 17); the other by those who see policy-making as occurring in multiple streams or as a moving mosaic of deliberations by interest groups, shifting and overlapping, moving people, issues, ideas and activities around the system (Malen & Knapp 1997: 420).

Where policy-making is conceptualised as comprising different stages, each stage is treated as functionally distinct and as involving different actors. Harman (1984: 17), for example, identifies the following stages: issue emergence and problem identification; policy formulation and authorisation; policy implementation, and policy ter-

mination or change. Rist (1995: 150) refers to this last stage as policy accountability, while other authors also include policy evaluation as one of the stages. In this model of policy, research enters the policy process at “appropriate” stages to guide policy-making by documenting the existing state of affairs, assessing the feasibility of alternative outcomes and designing the mechanism for bringing about change. Likewise, civil society is afforded an “appropriate” stage for input.

The second approach to the policy process postulates that policy-making happens in multiple streams. Schoole (1999: 46) argues that a model focusing on the flow and timing of policy action better captures the on-the-ground realities of policy-making. In this model, streams of problems, solutions and politics move independently through the policy system. Weiss (1990: vii) affirms that in this situation, officials sometimes turn to advisers for additional assistance. But given the complexity of the issues with which they deal and their complex interconnections, they need specialised forms of knowledge and analysis. Mapping the policy process as multiple streams also means that decision-makers are not solitary or isolated actors confronted with clearcut policy choices; instead, policy-making is an interactive process involving various players making choices under conditions of considerable uncertainty and ambiguity (Schoole 1999: 46). The multiple stream model leaves space for the participation of actors other than the ruling elite. These actors are described as individuals and groups who are not in government, but nevertheless occupy important positions in civil society and have a considerable stake in policy outcomes (Schoole 1999: 47). Thus, confining the role of the GETC in the policy process mainly to the stage at which policy has already been drafted runs counter to the arguments put forward by those who stress the complexity and inter-relatedness of all aspects of policy-making.

### 3. The participation of civil society in policy-making on education

#### 3.1 Civil society

A review of the literature regarding civil society shows that the term has its origins in the notion of civilisation itself, and reflects a desire

to “make the world as it ought to be” (Bauman 1985: 7). This tension between what is and what ought to be is an inevitable consequence in society of “a multitude of moral forces which, although not possessing a rigorous juridical form and organisation, are nevertheless real and efficacious” (Musker 1996: 24).

In general, civil society denotes the presence of an assortment of intermediary groupings operating in the social and political space between the primary units of society (individuals, nuclear and extended families, clans, ethnic groups and village units), on the one hand, and the government and its agencies, on the other. Thus, Nzimande (1993: 6) defines civil society as all those sectors of society that are not part of the government. It is the coming together of private individuals, an association of those who are otherwise strange to one another. Stephan (1988: 3-4) adds that civil society is an “arena where manifold social movements and civic organisations from all classes attempt to constitute themselves in an ensemble of arrangements so that they can express themselves and advance their interests”.

The government and civil society are often perceived as distinct, separate and independent but related entities (Carrim & Sayed 1992: 29). This implies that civil society is a contested political terrain which cannot be totally divorced from government. Thus, while government and civil society may be distinguished on methodological grounds, the distinction does not imply a substantial separation. In this article we have found it important to consider the interrelatedness of the two concepts, rather than their separation within contemporary society.

The power of government is closely related to civil society. In this regard Giddens (1986: 7) states that democracy exists “where the citizens are regularly informed of the activities of the State, and the latter in turn is aware of the sentiments and wishes of all sectors of the population”. It can be measured in terms of “how far there is an interplay of communication between state and society”. Accordingly, it is necessary for individuals acting in their private capacity to become involved in government in order to counteract the power of the state “which comes into existence by a process of concentration that detaches a certain group of individuals from the collective mass” (Musker 1996: 24). This is important as political participation can provide the mechanism by which citizens can communicate their interests, preferences

and needs, putting pressure on government to respond to these (Burde 2004: 3). In the context of this discussion, the GETC may be seen as an advisory body which is able to counterbalance the province's power to make laws and policies on educational issues.

### 3.2 Interest groups

In an attempt to become more specific, representative structures generally replace notions of "government" and "civil society" by the notion of "interest groups". This is based on the acknowledgement that people have various interests and that nobody, not even the state, can be assumed to speak on behalf of everybody. In practice, it means that it is necessary for specific interests to be articulated by particular interest groups (Carrim 2001: 103). However, in order to address the problems and limitations of interest groups as a mode of representation, it is necessary to ensure two things. First, people claiming to represent particular interests need to be representatives of organised interest groups, rather than free-floating individuals expressing their own individual interests. Secondly, people claiming to represent such groups need to show that they have a mandate to act as representatives of the particular interest groups and to speak legitimately on their behalf (Carrim 2001: 104).

However, the success and role of interest groups, as well as the extent of their influence on policies, depend on a number of factors (Anderson 1994: 35), including the size of the group's membership, its monetary and other material resources, the skill of its leadership in dealing with policy-makers, and the presence or absence of competing groups. As Anderson (1994: 35) puts it, "the group struggle is not a contest among equals". This factor should also be borne in mind in considering the role of the various interest groups serving on the GETC.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Persons or groups with a common interest or stake in a particular action and its consequences are termed stakeholders (Reimers & McGinn 1997: 60). In education this includes groups as diverse as parents, learners, taxpayers, teachers' unions, public service employees, public contractors, employers, professional organisations, and non-governmental

organisations, among others. All of these groups have an interest in setting the education agenda and shaping the organisations established to participate in the process of providing education (Reimers & McGinn 1997: 60). Their inclusion in the decision-making process is now widely accepted as an important instrument, providing information crucial to decision-making and increasing the level of commitment to the decisions made. Moreover, they have a common set of interests which sets them apart from people in other positions in the education system, as well as distinctive resources and styles by means of which they can hope to influence policy (King 1977: 79).

The problem with the stakeholder mode of representation is that one cannot assume that the contributions of stakeholder representatives truly reflect the opinions of the whole stakeholder group (for example, parents) or that they are speaking on behalf of their constituents on educational issues.

### 3.4 Participation

In South Africa, following negotiations, elections and the setting up of a new government, a culture has been established that demands participation (De Coning & Cloete 2000: 27). Regulated participation can be defined as “the process by which broad-based participation by communities and stakeholders is affirmed, but [with] limits [...] regulat[ing] the nature of the interaction” (Carrim & Sayed 1997: 96). The agency of regulation is normally government. The authors argue that the notion of regulated participation assumes that no single agency is, or should be able to transact educational decision-making unilaterally and, secondly, that it is possible to achieve consensus between agencies/groups/individuals by means of forums for negotiation. This is reflected in the Gauteng Education Policy Act (Gauteng Province 1998), which proposes an Education and Training Council comprising organised interest groups, but leaves final decision-making to the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in the Gauteng Province.

#### 4. The Gauteng Education and Training Council

Because of its excellent infrastructure and relative wealth, in comparison with most of the other provinces in the country, Gauteng was the first to establish a consultative structure giving stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the process of policy-making on education. It is the task of all individual members of a legislature to ensure that the expectations and needs of their interest groups are taken into account and their values respected during deliberations of the legislative body. To include civil society in educational policy-making, the GETC was established to advise the MEC for Education on policy, regulations and legislation (Gauteng Province 1996). The GETC was officially launched on 28 February 1997 (Lackay 1997: 12). Regulations for such advisory councils have been published in only four provinces: Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga (Zafar 2002: 17). The KwaZulu-Natal Education Council has been established and held its inaugural meeting on 10 March 2000. By 2004 no other province had yet followed suit.

##### 4.1 Membership of the GETC

According to Section 10 of the Regulations (Gauteng Province 2001), the GETC must include one representative of each of a number of interest groups such as parents, education and training development practitioners, the provincial Department of Education, heads of institutions, governing bodies of institutions, non-governmental organisations whose core activities relate to sectoral education and training authorities established in terms of any law, business, labour, and so forth. A group may apply for representation on the Council if (i) it has a constitution or set of rules relating to the admission of members, and does not violate the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa; (ii) the MEC is satisfied that the organisation represents a significant proportion of the relevant interest group in the province, and (iii) the MEC is satisfied that the organisation has a demonstrable interest or history of involvement in matters falling within the terms of reference of the Council. Certain procedures were followed in establishing the Council, including the publication of a notice for application for membership in major newspapers in Gauteng. The applications of organisations from different interest groups were then evaluated by



the MEC or a membership committee. In addition to these representatives, the MEC also appointed to the Council a number of individuals who, by virtue of their experience and/or expertise, were deemed able to make a valuable contribution to education in the province. In April 2004 the Council had a total of 71 members. It elects an Executive Committee and may, with the concurrence of the MEC, establish various subcommittees to deal with particular matters. These subcommittees, chaired by a Council member, may co-opt members of the public with necessary expertise (Heckroodt 2002: 89). The Council and its Executive Committee must meet at least four times a year. At least eleven Council meetings have been held since its inception.

#### 4.2 The functions of the Council

Section 7 of the Gauteng Education Policy Act (Gauteng Province 1998) stipulates that the GETC must assist the MEC in developing policy for the province; consider and make recommendations to the MEC on all legislation related to education before it is introduced in the provincial legislature; on its own initiative or at the request of the MEC investigate and consider matters relating to education and report on its findings to the MEC; on its own initiative or at the request of the MEC make recommendations to the MEC on matters regarding education in the province; consider and respond to the annual and quarterly reports of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Gauteng Department of Education; perform any function assigned or delegated to it in terms of the Act or any other law, and submit a written annual report on its activities to the MEC. Legislation further stipulates that the Council must be consulted by the MEC prior to determining policy on education, introducing education-related legislation in the provincial legislature, or promulgating education-related regulations.

### 5. Discussion

The GETC is still a largely untried statutory advisory body. The value of the Council is that it is able to provide stakeholders with a forum by means of which they can be consulted and participate in significant policy initiatives with regard to education and training. However, a number of factors may have a negative impact on the effective functioning of the Council.

## 5.1 The challenge of representivity

Musker (1996:124) states that the concept of civil society is abstract and amorphous while the concept of stakeholders is more operational and more closely linked to the pursuit of goals or the defence of interests by organised groups. The relevance of this is that the GETC may claim to represent civil society, but may not necessary represent all stakeholders in education and training within the province. This is problematic, for unless the voices of all stakeholders in education are heard in the consultative process, policies will be impoverished and will fail to address the educational needs of the province adequately (Heckroodt 2002: 69). Carrim (2001: 98) concurs, and claims that policies are more effective when they allow for maximum participation, engaging with people's lived experiences and perceived interests at a local level. This, it is argued, allows for more effective policy implementation.

Many groups, including parents, learners, teacher unions, public service employees, non-governmental organisations and others, are seen as stakeholders in education. All of them have an interest in setting the educational agenda and shaping the organisations established to participate in the process of educational provision (Reimers & McGinn 1997: 60). However, this presupposes that all stakeholders have the knowledge, skills and interest to engage effectively in policy debates. What is more, stakeholder participation can only be relevant if the representative of a group reports back regularly to its members (Heckroodt 2002: 179). This is proving to be difficult for groups which do not have access to the infrastructure needed to communicate quickly with members when decisions need to be taken. Because of South Africa's history, racial, gender and political representivity are also seen as crucially important. The GETC currently makes no allowance for this, as there is no legislative requirement that organisations must pay attention to representivity and organisations may thus nominate or elect any members they deem suited to serve on the Council. Additional stakeholders can be included on the subcommittees of the Council to address particular issues or aspects of proposed legislation and/or policy. However, these working groups are often convened at short notice, with a consequent loss of representivity (Heckroodt & Van der Vyver 2000: 104). In order to address this, dates for subcommittee meetings

for the whole year were made available early in 2004. However, no mechanisms are in place to ensure representivity on subcommittees and attendance is determined by the topic and the interest of stakeholders in it. Thus far, attendance at subcommittee meetings has been poor.

In the final analysis one has to agree with Lungu (2001: 92) that in a policy area as large as education, thousands of people and institutions are affected, making it impossible to achieve adequate representation on a structurally limited body such as the GETC. At best, interest groups involved in education but not included on the Council should be encouraged to apply for membership, either by directly approaching them or by publicising the role of the Council, so that more groups will apply for representation. In this regard Heckroodt (2002: 168-9) mentions the need for broader representation of parents on the Council.

## 5.2 The challenge of consensus

Ideally the recommendations of the GETC should reflect a consensus embodying the diverse viewpoints of the full range of stakeholders. However, there is a danger that under certain circumstances the viewpoints of only a section of the Council might prevail. Such a situation could arise if role players deliberately or inadvertently failed to engage adequately with a particular issue and allowed a particular voice to become the voice of the Council. It could also arise if members' understanding of the issue at hand were limited or if they were reluctant to argue with speakers who seemed better informed. Groups with specific agendas might also make a concerted effort to push a particular issue through Council, thus failing to fulfil the Council's commitment to keeping discussion open until true consensus has been reached. Innes (1999: 9) argues that consensus is often difficult to achieve, adding:

The players in each sector — many of them arch rivals — have to work together and agree on a whole range of issues [...] they have to see that their actions and procedures are focussed on achieving the same aims.

Moreover, consensus occurs naturally. Indeed, in some instances it has to be “manufactured” to accommodate disparate and conflicting viewpoints. This issue needs to be addressed if the Council wishes to be seen as a consensus-seeking body. Serious attempts therefore need to

be made by all stakeholders represented on the Council to ensure that diverse views are recognised and given a clear voice. Where consensus cannot be achieved, the various positions should be indicated in recommendations or reports (Heckroodt & Van der Vyver 2000: 12).

### 5.3 Contributions of stakeholders

The potential strength of the GETC lies in the diversity of its stakeholders. But its real strength lies in the degree to which stakeholders commit themselves to the Council as a mechanism for dialogue with the State. If there is uneven political participation with respect to the various ideological perspectives represented, a particular viewpoint could achieve hegemonic status, either by design or by default (Heckroodt & Van der Vyver 2000: 12). Likewise, various stakeholder constituencies occupy different positions in terms of power (taking into account both tangible and intangible resources), which impacts on their participation at meetings (Musker 1996: 163). Representation in itself is no guarantee of added value. Representatives must also have a clear understanding of their roles and functions. Added value requires them to understand the significance of their roles and to have the capacity to fulfil these roles adequately. Thus attention may have to be paid to assisting weaker or less organised constituencies to enable them to participate and prevent their being marginalised in debates. Likewise, it may be necessary for officials of the Department of Education involved in the drafting of a particular policy document to present it to the Council and to assist the Council in engaging with it before the draft policy is published in the Provincial Gazette. In spite of repeated requests, however, departmental officials still do not attend meetings and/or assist members in engaging with policy documents.

### 5.4 The challenge of participation

Participation makes huge demands on people in the restructuring of a society. De Clercq (1997: 142) is of the opinion that effective participation depends, among other things, on the State's assisting in the democratisation of civil society by mediating between various groups and facilitating the empowerment of the weakest. Van Valen & Petersen (1987: 40) argue that meaningful participation is only possible if all sectors of the public have the opportunity to take part in the

policy process, so that outreach efforts may be necessary to ensure participation by poor and minority groups. They also argue that technical assistance will frequently be necessary to translate existing scientific knowledge for citizens and enable them to collect and analyse new data. Accordingly, participation should be seen as a learning process requiring intermediate steps toward the consolidation of small gains. Likewise, one must be aware that administrators may tend to control councils instituted to encourage stakeholder participation, thus relegating civil society to its traditional role (Pini & Cigliutti 1999: 199).

The ideal conditions for participation do not exist in South Africa. The involvement of civil society could either be a token gesture due to the concerns of and demands on senior state bureaucrats or, if encouraged by means of public submissions, lobbying and involvement in multipartite advisory bodies, it could entrench the positions and interests of already powerful, privileged voices (De Clercq 1997: 143). Manganyi (2001: 29) agrees, adding that the ability of individuals to exercise their democratic rights and to participate fully in the social, economic, cultural and political life of a nation is closely associated with literacy and numeracy levels. In a situation of “entrenched inequality” such as we have in South Africa, the presence of elite groups is inevitable. Such groups have in the past taken it upon themselves to determine the country’s policy agenda. One of the most daunting tasks is thus to find a way of giving the silent majority a voice on major policy developments. However, even if participation is illusory at times, the empowering element of active participation — resulting in a more educated and critical citizenry — is worth striving for. This implies that the engagement of ordinary citizens in discussion groups, meetings and other interactive forums actively appraising and critiquing policy documents and texts, among other activities, should be encouraged. This further validates the institution of the GETC and supports the extension of its membership and activities.

### 5.5 The place of the GETC in the policy pathway

In general, the GETC is asked to comment on draft policy documents which have already been formulated by officials of the Gauteng Department of Education and published in the Provincial Gazette. However, Van Valen & Peterson (1987: 4) argue that, for effective partici-

pation, the public must be able to enter the decision-making process at an early stage, defining the problems of society and suggesting alternative solutions. In other words, the public should be involved in setting the agenda, which is considered the most important stage of the policy-making process (Ababio 2000: 53). Dye (1995: 301) agrees, adding that it is often more important to play a role in deciding what should be considered as problems than in determining solutions. This approach is not followed by the Council, which has been restricted since its inception to commenting on draft policy documents. An additional problem is that the Council is required by law to respond to proposed policy, regulations and/or legislation within thirty days of receiving the request for comment. This limited time-frame often circumscribes the degree of participation that is possible on a particular issue, both within the Council and among stakeholders.

Although the Council sometimes functions pro-actively by reporting on national draft policy and legislation as well as on reports, discussion papers and research initiatives (Heckroodt 2002: 89), this role should be extended and the Council should be involved earlier in the policy process. In an attempt to address this, various subcommittees were established by the Council in 2004 and are currently discussing various educational issues, as well as agendas for policy-making and policy implementation, which they wish to bring to the attention of the MEC for Education. The effectiveness of this new initiative and the extent to which the issues raised will be put on the policy agenda need to be carefully monitored.

## 5.6 Attendance at meetings

The annual report of the GETC indicates that the attendance of meetings from April 2003 to March 2004 averaged 53%. Attendance was not improved by the institution of travelling expenses and limited attendance fees from July 2003. Although the MEC has the power to suspend members who regularly fail to attend meetings, this procedure has not yet been followed as the Council (through its Executive Council) prefers to consult with members themselves. Musker (1996: 162) states that one reason for non-attendance could be that many black communities are situated far from the venues used for meetings. However, in a survey conducted in 2004 most members expressed satisfaction with

the venue used. More research will need to be conducted to get to the root of some members' poor attendance.

### 5.7 Interpreting the role of the GETC

Written policies are problematic in that, like all written texts, they can be interpreted differently by those who read them (Fowler 2000: 205). This appears to have occurred in the case of the Council. According to the Gauteng Department of Education, it lies within the discretion of the MEC to decide whether he or she requires the Council's assistance in developing policy, rather than being obliged, by law, to be assisted by the Council (Heckroodt 2002: 107). Because of this interpretation, the Council's role has been limited to a very late stage of the policy cycle. By contrast, the Council interprets section 7(a) of the Gauteng Education Policy Act (Gauteng Province 1998), as implying that it should be involved at the agenda-setting stage of the policy process, rather than only once draft policy has been published in the Provincial Gazette. This interpretation is based on the belief that the Council should assist the MEC in developing policy, and not just comment on policy which has already been formulated. This difference in the interpretation of the role of the Council has far-reaching consequences and needs to be resolved, which requires extensive discussion between the Council, its Executive, the Gauteng Department of Education and the MEC. This is proving difficult to arrange in view of the fact that MECs, as political leaders, are often moved to new departments as the political landscape and the needs of the province change. Thus the Council has, in the seven years since its institution, functioned under three different MECs.

### 5.8 Relationship with the Gauteng Department of Education

Various forces, including official and unofficial actors shape policy in a liberal democratic state (Lungu 2001: 94). Official actors comprise governmental institutions such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, while unofficial actors comprise the institutions of civil society, such as interest groups and the general citizenry. The GETC makes provision for civil society to engage with the state (the province) on issues of education policy. In terms of legislation, the Gauteng Department of Education must provide administrative support to statu-

tory bodies set up by the MEC for Education to assist in the policy and legislative development process (Gauteng Province 1998). Moreover, an Administrative Secretary appointed by the Gauteng Department of Education is tasked with liaising between the Council and the Department; advising the Council on working procedures; providing information on pending legislation; preparing agendas and notices of meetings, and ensuring that all documentation pertaining to meetings is received by the members at least 10 days beforehand (Heckroodt 2002: 99). This assistance is vital to the functioning of the Council, but also means that excessive influence on the part of government officials may lead to continued bureaucratic control of political formulation processes (Musker 1996:110). It is therefore essential that Department officials give a true reflection of what transpires at Council meetings and that more contact and discussion take place between the Council and government officials in order to ensure mutual respect and understanding on the part of each group.

## 6. Conclusion

Chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996) provides for co-operative governance and embraces the concepts of “participation”, “democracy” and “decentralisation”. Likewise, democratic decision-making at both the national and the provincial levels implies a degree of openness and accountability among political representatives and government officials. Coombe & Godden (1996: 1) foreground this need within the South African context:

There is an acute need for sharing information on local governance in education, and developing practical guidelines on policy and practice.

However, all the policy documents and Acts since 1994 reflect a key tension in policy development between the imperative for strong central regulation and control — given the disparities of the past — and the simultaneous commitment to extending participation and democratic control (Sayed 2001: 190). Although much still needs to be done to enable the GETC to play a significant role in the policy process in the province, it is a valuable forum, allowing civil society to engage in the education debate. It can assist policy-makers to understand the full pa-



norama or landscape in which policy is implemented and to recognise the continuities and discontinuities between the generation and the implementation of policy. It may also be argued that policies are more effective when they allow for maximum participation, forcing policy to engage with people's lived experiences and perceived interests at the local level (Carrim 2001: 98). Tickly (1997: 186) agrees, adding that "... mass mobilisation around education issues could potentially become a powerful force for education reform".

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