Teacher voice: A balancing act?

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This qualitative case study set out to explore how teacher voice was manifested in their practices in curriculum change contexts, utilising the meta-theoretical paradigm of social constructivism and the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory. Data capture comprised a mix of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations conducted over a period of 1 year. Data were analysed using the content analysis method. The findings reveal that perceptions of structural suppression influenced teachers' sense of agency, which led to a unique construction of teacher voice. The range and scope of teacher agency was underpinned by subservience to the "legislated policy" and predetermined teacher voice, which influenced teachers' cognitive processes of their capacity to satisfy both internal and external requirements. The central position in this article, however, holds that some teachers can find space to explore possibilities within limitations, which enable and circumscribe subaltern subjectivity and agency, to develop a balanced teacher voice.

Keywords: curriculum reform; educational change, teacher agency; teacher compliance; teacher voice

Introduction
South Africa has a unique political orientation because of the apartheid system which promoted the creation of unequal schooling systems that were heavily regulated. Hence, after 1994, the Government incorporated the ideals of democracy and liberation to the extent that policy developers envisioned an education system that would break from the cycle of command and control to produce a schooling system that would display a spirit of democracy for the purposes of "redressing the social ills created by the past regime" (Badal, 2018:69). Thus, when Curriculum 2005 was introduced, it focused on outcomes instead of performativity. However, unpreparedness of the teachers for the drastic change destabilised teaching and learning as teacher capacity led to poor results and parent furore. In response, policymakers produced the National Curriculum Statement, which in turn created confusion because of certain ambiguities in terms of expectations and stipulations. Beset by these challenges, in 2011 the government introduced the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) for the Further Education and Training (FET)[i] phase. Taking on a "back to basics" and "teacher-proof" approach, CAPS is symbolic of the notion that educational change issues can be solved by the introduction of a technical curriculum that would lead to successful implementation, despite differences in context and teacher capacity.

CAPS is known for high specification of content, pace, sequence with content and delivery aligned with assessment practices. Scholars refer to these curriculum models as bureaucratic whims, adopting business models that turn teaching into absurdities (Goodman, 2004). Studies have concluded that teachers who work in high stakes curriculum change contexts perceive their voices to be muted (Bascia, Carr-Harris, Fine-Meyer & Zurzolo, 2014:223). Scholarship within this field stresses the importance of teacher voice in curriculum-making for the purpose of improved communication between pedagogical challenges and national aims. The persistent focus in this area of research centres on the differences between the relational power of teachers' own thinking and subsequent expectations from bureaucrats which are alien to teachers' contexts, experiences, and meanings. Trapped in these unequal power relationships, teachers often perceive the decisions made by policymakers to be too ideological and constricting, thus asphyxiating teachers' capacity to give voice to their own intuition and knowledge. Consequently, the notion of teacher voice needs to be articulated, debated, and investigated to gain better understandings of how hegemony and its consequences play out in teachers' manifestations of voice in their contexts of curriculum enactment. The notion of teacher voice is linked to teacher agency as manifestations of voice is the focus of this study.

In the context of this article, voice describes the way that teachers demonstrate their agency through reflective and well substantiated rationales. Teacher voice is taken as utterances and actions which imply that voice can be articulations, possible through speech and demonstrations achieved through interactions with the self and with institutional authority. Teachers' interactions with power vested in curriculum artefacts result in constructions of cognitive links emanating from their evaluations of perceived threats to their agency. These associations are reinforced by their socialisation into a system where teachers begin to interpret the power of external forces and come to accept or reject their subaltern positions.

We, therefore, aimed to explore how teachers perceived and demonstrated their agency in contexts of regulation and how their own and external influences contributed to the voice that they manifested. Teacher agency is a relatively unexplored area in South Africa as the focus remains on the disparate contexts, service delivery, teacher capacity and availability of resources. An understanding of how teacher voice is shaped by their perceptions of agency including how they negotiate both internal and external constraints would provide understandings of teacher attitudes and actions. We report here on findings from a broader project underpinned by the research question: How does teacher voice influence educational change? This question inspired an

examination of a) teachers' perceptions of their agency in reform contexts, b) how their beliefs about their agency in policy environments influenced change and c) how their evaluations of their agency in implementation influenced their manifestations of agentic voice in the implementation of the reform. With the article, therefore, we contribute to "the understanding of teacher voice from the perspective of teacher agency" (Badal, 2018:7). Accordingly, we delved deeply into teachers' reflections of control and authority over their practices and their capacity to manifest proactive agentic voice. Two participants' responses are captured in this article, as they, out of nine participants produced unique constructions of voice in comparison to the others who either complied or resisted external efforts to constrain their practices. Simon's and Khumalo's (pseudonyms) transformative processes provide an understanding of how teachers negotiate both internal and structural determinants to find a balance between internal and external needs.

Exploring the Terrain

The landscape of educational change has a range of burgeoning literature on teachers' responses to "regulatory policy systems" (Badal, 2018:10). These studies have as their foci teachers' contributions in fields of enactment with significant contribution by scholars such as Ball (1994), Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) and Fullan (1993). This line of scholarship is missing information on teacher reflections from initial processing of the reform, mediation and development of the reform up to the stage of implementation. Accordingly, this study aimed to provide snapshots of how these initial reflections of their voice influenced their teacher voice manifestations as these processes influenced their feelings of efficacy and constructions of teacher agency (Bandura, 1977). For the purposes of this article, mediation and development refers to teachers' meaning-making of the reform and, therefore, investigates space for teachers to influence their own practice through decision-making and contextualisation of the reform. Within this context, mediation and development involves taking ownership (Fullan, 1993) and coming to voice.

It is critical to investigate teacher positioning and their ability to "critically shape their 'voice' in classroom practices" (Biesta & Tedder, 2006:11) in curriculum change contexts. This belief stems from the notion that teaching is more than mere knowledge transmission (Soleimani, 2020). Social cognitive theorists and socio-constructivists concur on the nature of the intersecting variables of self-systems and the environment. These variables do not exist in isolation as it is in cohabitation and tension that strategies are manifested as both policymakers and teachers are in a symbiotic relationship. However, teacher voice should be the integrative link in knowledge creation and dissemination as their knowledge is unique and contextualised. We begin by examining some related literature surrounding qualitative studies, whose philosophical traditions involve understanding peoples' demonstrations of agentic voice constructions in contexts of prescriptive reforms. It is mainly for relativity that literature is hereby selected as there is a scarcity of studies that incorporate agency as a cognate of teacher voice (Badal, 2018).

Discourse and findings in educational research reflect deep concerns for the silencing of teachers because of imposed hegemonic constructions in policy documents (Vähäsantanen, 2015). In this line of research the focus is on the centrality of teachers' contribution to policy development and enactment (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012), curriculum implementation (Priestley, 2010), intensification of labour (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008), performativity (Winter, 2017) and teacher agency in curriculum implementation (Priestley, 2011). These studies have increased our understanding of teacher perspectives, explicated chiefly in dichotomous discourses of compliance and resistance. These studies demonstrate that teaching is "a complex activity that is not amenable to scripted materials, standardized lessons, or one-size-fits-all plan for the organization of instruction" (Allington, Johnston & Day, 2002:462). This study is positioned among these discourses and adds that teachers' interactions of both environmental and personal factors allow them to choose their manifested voices and influence educational change – allowing a range of voices to emerge in contrast to findings that indicate resistance or compliance.

However, it was found that it was not only the curriculum text that challenged teachers' agency in centralised curriculum making. Au (2011) found that some curricula come with attendant mechanisms of oppression that contribute to teachers becoming silent executors of external prescriptions of which the teacher-proof curriculum has been identified to have the greatest propensity to limit teacher autonomy. These occurrences lead teachers to perceive these mandates as policymakers' beliefs that "teachers are not intelligent enough to generate lessons and activities that promote student engagement or stimulate intellectual growth and maturation" (Eisenbach, 2012:154). Hence, emergent themes relate to teacher autonomy in decision-making (Smyth, 2012). Moreover, scholars report a strong correlation between a focus on performativity and teachers' efforts to narrow their teaching practices to match teaching content with test requirements. This practice leads to merely covering the content

while depth and understanding are sacrificed (Winter, 2017).

CAPS has also been identified as a technical curriculum that lays out the content, sequence, pace, and lessons in the form of guidance that ensures fidelity to the curriculum's specifications (Badal, 2018). Palmer and De Klerk (2012:75) argue that while "CAPS seemingly empower teachers" to assume some authority in the transfer of the content, the Department of Education still holds the power in the transfer of knowledge. While the literature suggests that teachers' professional judgement is crucial to autonomy and decision-making, teachers' efforts are still subordinated to external mandates and mechanisms such as accountability, monitoring of pace and content and a checklist that indicates the coverage of the tasks outlined in the document.

Winter's (2017) study confirms that teachers within regimes of accountability struggle to find authority as regimes of accountability tend to award content coverage over depth and experience. She found that teachers instead tended to comply unquestioningly and subordinate their voice to external agents. She noted that teachers had stopped using their own professional judgements and telescoped their lessons to meet assessment requirements which increased their dependence on external bureaucrats. Participants in Winters' (2017) study acknowledged that they were aware that they were acting contrary to their beliefs and students' needs. In this policy climate external obligations and mandated standards are prioritised over teacher intuition. Studies (Campbell, 2012; Lasky, 2005) found that teachers' capacity to manifest agency is dependent on the curriculum enactment context. This finding is aligned with Biesta and Tedder (2006:18) who conclude that teachers act "by-means-of-an-environment rather than simply in an environment." In these contexts, teachers assess, deliberate and factor all the threats emanating externally through personal systems and manifest their agency, accordingly, often supressing the will to contest and act in favour of the learners.

External threats provide the impetus for certain behaviour which do not necessarily need to be dichotomous responses of compliance and resistance. Ollerhead (2010:607) argues that teachers can make deliberate decisions to "resist feelings of powerlessness and negativity experienced." He concludes that teachers need to draw on their passion for teaching to display the potential for "transformative effects of teacher agency." Hiver and Whitehead (2018:77) found that teachers demonstrated agency through the negotiation of external stimuli through individual beliefs, goals and values and therefore describe agency as a "complex continuous negotiation process between teachers' personal characteristics,

their sense of self [identity], and the context in which they work." Teachers are socially situated actors in the field of teaching and should take cognisance of the "intent of curricular authority in their classroom-based and school-based interactions with students for whom the curricular initiatives are intended" (Campbell, 2006:111). However, teachers need to be willing to critically shape their voices to match the needs of the context, their beliefs and authority as masters of their own spaces.

Thus, literature acknowledges the potential for harmony and discord in the relationship between the policy document and the actor, hence, the tension needs to be negotiated for transformative change. Bowe et al. (1992:23) convincingly assert that "teachers' subjective frames of reference result in contested interpretations." It is in this space that the possibilities for teacher voice exists.

Theoretical Mooring

The theoretical framework of this study was socio-cognitive theory (SCT) of agency, including properties of the triadic reciprocal framework (Bandura, 1999, 2001, 2006). This framework allows for an exploration of teacher agency from both external and internal perspectives. It presents individuals as having the capacity "to transcend the dictates of their immediate environment, making them unique in their power to shape their life circumstances and the courses their lives take" (Bandura, 2006:164).

Bandura (2001:8) argues that through cognitive deliberations a teacher plans, has foresight, is motivated, and is a self-regulator demonstrating that agency through which an actor has "not only the deliberate ability to make choices and action plans, but the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution." At this juncture it is important to clarify the difference between the freedom to make choices and the intent to make choices in the interest of the learner (Badal, 2018:63). In this vein Campbell (2012) advises that teachers who display agency expertise should align with certain educational aims and purposes, hence, manifestations of agency should be underscored by consideration of the interests of their learners.

Such a framework of agency allows a focus on teachers' actions in contested spaces of which curriculum implementation is a crucial context. This focus helps to scrutinise teachers' perceptions and responses of "the constraints and affordances in a particular socio-institutional context" (Huang & Yip, 2021:2). Another belief is that teachers' reflections enable and constrain behaviour in a "dynamic" rather than "static" way (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020:1) in constant evaluation of what is possible in the situated context. These perspectives

all align to notions of situated internal and external factors that are in a two-way negotiation process in constant interaction with each other to produce certain manifested behaviour.

The core properties model (Bandura, 2001) proposes that agency is reflected in teachers' actions that demonstrate intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Intentionality can be seen in teachers' ability to deliberately plan and execute change in their practices. Forethought is related to teachers' capacity to manifest actions that represents goal setting that is motivated by certain expectations and outcomes on behalf of their learners. Self-reactiveness is when teachers can regulate their actions to suit their contexts by focusing on the appropriateness of their actions and self-reflectedness is demonstrated when teachers are able to reflect on their past, present and future behaviour. These actualisations of agency manifest within constraints of teachers' work lives (Bandura, 1977).

A core feature of teacher agency is self-efficacy which contributes to teachers' beliefs about their capacities (Bandura, 1999) to articulate proactive teacher voice. Evaluations of self-efficacy allow teachers to think about the possibilities for manifestations of a certain behaviour or action and make sound judgements about their capabilities by anticipating the probable effects of different events and actions. Thus, certain manifestations are achieved by "ascertaining socio-structural opportunities and constraints which allow them to regulate their behaviour accordingly" (Bandura, 1999:157).

The model of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1999:159) proposes that people are not merely "reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by external events", as they "have the power to influence their own actions to produce certain results" by being "self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating" (Bandura, 1999:155). Jenkins (2020) states that proactive agency is demonstrated by teachers when they display intentionality, foresight, and initiate changes through personal deliberations. Reactive agency is mechanistic as manifestations of this behaviour indicate an absence of any influence on the process as it emanates from direct external influence (Bandura, 1999). Teachers displaying this type of agency are mere conduits for external structures. Passive agency is demonstrated when teachers feel obliged to follow dictates unquestioningly through notions of bureaucratic power relations. Agency is, therefore, a product of negotiation and is not a personal trait that can be given, or an inherent capacity (Biesta, 2015). Negotiation takes place in the intersecting space of personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants (Bandura, 2000). Personal attributes include interests, capacity, emotions, beliefs, cognitive capacities, personality and behavioural determinants. External factors within this model relate to the contextual affordances and constraints in terms of structural dynamics of the space of educational change (Bandura, 1999:155). Hence, the dynamic interplay of both personal and environmental influences is important to determine how teachers negotiate both internal and external influences in the implementation of a teacher-proof curriculum that is said to silence teacher voice in fields of enactment.

Methodology
This article emerged from a broader study in which a qualitative and constructivist paradigm was adopted. Choice of this paradigm was motivated by the need to allow the research participants to "construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam, 2009:22), to "develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012:206). Thus, the qualitative case study design provided resources to examine the participants' complex and dynamic social realities in line with the research question and goals (Morse, 1999). At the time of data collection (2017–2018) the CAPS curriculum had been introduced for a few years and teachers were in the process of teaching it, hence, teachers' initial as well as current perspectives and perceptions were sought. The criterion for selection were that they needed to have taught English as a Home Language (HL) in a public school for 5 years and more. For this article, we showcase the efforts of two participants of a sample of nine, purposively drawn from one school district in the Gauteng province, South Africa. Data gleaned offered opportunities to understand the connection between teacher agency and voice in the curriculum change context of urban public schools with a focus on the teaching of English as HL in the FET phase of schooling.

Selection of data collection instruments was guided by consideration of the flow from the research question, "matching the data sources, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques … [which] is fundamental to the quality and success of any study" (Forman & Damschroder, 2008:42). Primary processes in this study included semi-structured interviews, listening attentively to the participants, observations of teachers' classroom practices and in their natural settings, scrutinising teachers' planning and preparation documents and recording their unique voices as they freely spoke about challenges and complexities of teaching in their contexts. These instruments were augmented at different stages of the research by document analysis, classroom observations, interviews with heads of department and field notes. Data gleaned from this tool led to the development of interview protocols and follow-

up interviews, which varied in length depending on the teacher's propensity to talk about their experiences even though they were set for a duration of about an hour.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed with careful considerations of the participants' right to privacy, and accuracy. Observations of teachers' lessons allowed a view into teachers' manifestations of their decisions and beliefs in contexts of enactment and provided a space for confirmation of data provided in the interviews. Thus, observed deviations were addressed in the follow-up interviews. Document analysis concluded the inquiry and proved to be a useful tool for triangulation as scrutiny of teachers' planning documents also served to confirm data gleaned from the other sources.

Transcripts and data collected through observation and document analysis were analysed holistically through thematic content analysis (Merriam, 2009). Aligned with this type of analysis, the data were a priori re-coded (Charmaz, 2006) to reveal "new insights" (Sandelowski, 2000:338). Following Krippendorff's (2004) suggestion that the content analyst looks at all data collected as images and texts to be read and interpreted, we did not see the words on the page as independent from its origin and viewed them as the voice of the participant carrying the tone, timbre and nuances that were unique notes that gave rhythm to their expressions while still connecting them with other voices. Interview transcripts were coded with attention given to teachers' voice/s of external and internal constraints on their agency. The coded data were categorised for making sense of the emergent themes that demonstrated perspectives and actions of participants and afforded rich, thick analysis of their agency in educational change contexts viewed as emergent manifestations of voice that were embedded in "the exercise of self-influence in the service of selected goals and desired outcomes" (Bandura, 2006:165).

Ethical Considerations
Ethical measures of this study were underpinned by consideration of the participants and their spaces and an undertaking to abide by ethical principles that govern the conduct of research. Procedurally, we obtained permission from all relevant institutions before the undertaking of any activities involved with the research context and the participants. Informed consent and voluntary participation of all participants were secured after a thorough briefing of the aims, need and use of the data with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Measures were taken to secure the data and ensure that participants' identities could not be traced.

Quality measures for the study were secured through transferability, credibility, and dependability. Transferability in qualitative studies has always been minimal because of the historically and culturally situated knowledge produced. Therefore, the knowledge "can never seamlessly generalise to predict future practice" (Tracy, 2010:845). However, the framework used for this study can be applied to similar contexts where bureaucratic models of policy change replicate similarly with consideration for the differing political, economic, and social realities. Credibility was also achieved through triangulation of the nuanced interpretations and member checking for any amendments and clarification. Hence, validity in this study was achieved through self-reflexivity, transparency, and an audit trail of all theoretical, methodological, and reporting procedures.

Findings
The findings of this study are distilled under three themes that emerged from the data, namely, reactive voice; compliant voice and balanced voice.

Reactive Voice
Simon and Khumalo demonstrated reactive voice when they spoke about their experiences of the loss of power and status emanating from their descriptions of external mandates. Reactiveness emanates from reflections of their self-efficacy and appropriateness of certain actions (Bandura, 1977). Exclusion from policy development and mediation led them to feel that their agency was suppressed and their voices muted. It became apparent that bureaucratic models of curriculum design and development created a sense of animosity between teachers and policymakers resulting in feelings of marginalisation of teacher knowledge. "*All they do is dictate to you*" (Simon, male, isiZulu speaking, Black teacher, 34 years old). Khumalo (male, Xhosa speaking) voiced his sense of subordination as: "*Decisions are made at the top and we must just implement … we don't have voice … we are implementing something that we did not take part in….*"

The pyramid of constraint starting with the policymakers filters down to the provincial departments, the district managers and finally the school management: "*Management does not support teachers when the might of the DBE* [Department of Basic Education] *is involved …*" (Simon).

The underlying feelings of both participants are reactively voiced (Bandura, 1977) in response to the compliant custom of their respective schools. They highlighted the fact of the school's lack of agency to act in opposition to the compliant climate and endorsement of external mandates. Simon and Khumalo's description of their agency in terms of external stimuli can only be described as bounded agency (Bandura, 1997) as it is negotiated within

certain external limits. In this way a paradox is revealed in terms of the affordances allowed to them in their contexts of practice. Both Khumalo and Simon reported that "*teachers do what they want, but eventually they must submit to authority*" *to meet external demands*."

Intensification of teachers' labour became another motif that strongly brought forth the reactive voices of these participants, as this occurrence also seemed to undermine their status and professional expertise. Simon expressed that paperwork lowered teacher status because, "*the teacher is more of an administrative lady than a teacher these days*." Moreover, he stated that the department's obsession with forms and reports ironically created more issues in teaching because of its infringement on teaching time: "*They are more concerned with random reports than what is happening in the classroom and ...*" (Simon).

Compliant Voice
As the discussions progressed, it became clear that these teachers' strong reactive voices changed to one of passive acceptance of external influence on their teacher agency. It emerged that the curriculum document itself entrenches the teacher's status as a subject of the state who needed to comply with stipulations. Khumalo said: "*Policy says ... we follow ... or I would be seen as non-compliant.*" The inclusion of the word "policy" in the name of the curriculum makes the document seem like an official legislated document mandated by the government (Drake & Sherin, 2009). The teachers came to accept that any alternate action would be perceived as resistance to authority of the state.

Passive agency (Bandura, 1999) is also entrenched by surveillance and censure on the part of district officials who prescribe and monitor teachers' compliance. Teachers report that they dislike the distrust implied in "*optic surveillance*" but comply because they are "*fearful of losing our jobs*" (Simon and Khumalo) and being seen as incompetent, hence Khumalo stated: "*... the facilitator watches how we teach ... I am always behind ... I ensure that I am on par by her next visit. Nobody wants to be seen as a bad teacher.*"

Foresight, planning and goal orientated behaviour that stem from proactive agency (Bandura, 2001) was subordinated to the will of external bureaucrats who monitored the pace and delivery of lessons according to the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). Within this prescriptive climate, teachers reported that they did not have time to get to the core of their teaching, so they spent time appeasing district officials. Khumalo admitted that he had learnt to prioritise covering the curriculum to meet stipulated deadlines: "*I have adopted the prescription because it forces people to work faster....*"

Balanced Voice
In the preceding sections the findings show that teachers tended to be both reactive and passive when they reflected or actualised external mandates. However, the data show that teachers' personal characteristics, efficacy and attitude contribute to their ability to find space to demonstrate a balanced voice. Both Simon and Khumalo demonstrated a passion for teaching despite the identified loss of autonomy and status. Simon expresses a passion for teaching: "*I have found my niche in teaching, and I am never going to leave it no matter what!*", while Khumalo stated: "*I love to teach ... I miss my students during the holidays.*"

Khumalo admitted that the prescription helped him to become more efficient, "*I have adopted the prescription ... but I've always stayed within, even if I'm adding or enhancing, I'm always staying within.*" Simon expressed that he first fulfilled CAPS requirements before allowing learners to acquire more important skills: "*I fulfil the requirements of CAPS and add upon that ... I teach learners how to engage with texts and challenge them with the skills they ACTUALLY GOING TO NEED!*"

Personal and behavioural characteristics (Bandura, 1999) demonstrated by the teachers revealed that they were motivated by concern for the learner and, therefore, their actions were motivated by their own values. Hence, they remained positive and found space to add to the already burgeoning ATP: "*I am now teaching for the sake of the child who is looking at me and not for external people ... I just follow ... but find ways to be creative.*"

Having identified that the CAPS curriculum omits the important skill of reading, Simon demonstrated proactive agency by using every opportunity to develop literacy: "*CAPS document does not specify reading ... I have a standing rule in my classroom if your work is finished, you grab a book from the bookshelf....*"

Khumalo expressed proactive agency (Bandura, 1999) by focussing on writing, hence, he gave "*students added opportunities to write essays, and select their own topics*" while he provided feedback: "*I give them many chances to write and I allow them the freedom to choose*", as he wanted them to learn how to think for themselves: "*I don't think we should just focus on passing. I don't want them to go out into the world being narrow-minded and limited....*"

It emerged that maintaining positivity despite external pressure and finding joy in one's work was done in a negotiated space. The participants, motivated by concern for certain omissions, found ways to add to the curriculum even if these actions were not in line with the stipulated ATP. As

expressed earlier, Simon focused on reading while Khumalo introduced his learners to extended writing activities that often meant that they were not "on par" with the other teachers.

Having displayed proactive agency in their practices, they demonstrated that little acts count, as anything bigger may disrupt their jobs or reputation as good teachers. Simon stated the following:

> *One makes a plan to make things better but still one has to be careful that all the other tasks are up to date or the HOD* [Head of Department] *will be on my case ha ha ...* and
> *I do not go too far from what is prescribed but if I think the students need more depth, I go further but make sure I stay within the guidelines and time frames and catch up or else….*

What showed vividly in the data was that negotiating perceptions of their own agency and those of external monitors like the facilitator and the HOD were equally important in the demonstration of teacher agency. Ironically, the HODs of both Simon and Khumalo verified that these teachers were passionate, driven, and efficient but both HOD use the words, "*marches to his own drummer.*" The HODs indicated that Simon and Khumalo did not merely follow passively but, "*... likes to do his own thing.*" Highly aware of this, Simon and Khumalo both said: "*I am often in trouble for not being on par.*" I probed for more examples of this phenomenon and both HODs mentioned that these teachers complicated things by "*doing other work, not listed on the ATP ... therefore, delaying the completion of the task.*"

Discussion of Findings
Aligned with the theoretical framework of this study, teachers' agency was identified in constructed behaviour emanating from continuous interconnecting interactions among environmental, cognitive, and behavioural influences (Bandura, 1977, 1999). Subordination of their sense of professional identity in their organisational contexts emerged as key issues to their sense of self efficacy. How these variables were negotiated and managed became defining points in their demonstration of teacher voice. The findings concur with Kelchtermans' (1993) conclusion that self-image and task perception have strong links between how teachers see themselves and how they see their jobs.

The teachers' voices reflected that reactive agency against the curriculum-making, development and implementation practices led by national, provincial, district organisations and school management converged to mute teacher voice/s. Consequently, teachers felt alienated from the CAPS and its stipulations, but not to the extent that it challenged their ability to find ways to overcome the prescription and "add" to the curriculum. These findings are like those of Kirk and MacDonald (2001) who concluded that large-scale educational change fails because "teachers' voices" are only rooted in the implementation of the reform. Absence of dialogue between both sides of the policy wall sparked subjective beliefs that their input was devalued aligning with Rosenmund's (2000:603) assertion that "curriculum-making processes function to maintain existing power structures through fundamental systemic reforms."

Passive agency was displayed when the participants embraced compliance to serve the interests of the state and to avoid certain negative outcomes (Bandura, 1999) while still retaining a small element of control. This finding is in line with Ingersoll (2003) who argues that fear as a mechanism serves as a regulatory factor on teacher agency as it discourages teachers from challenging authority or being seen as non-compliant or, as Kumalo stated, "*a bad teacher.*" Teachers, therefore, perform to the image of a good teacher who has ticked all the relevant boxes in terms of covering the content of the curriculum in line with global scholars such as Winter (2017). Passive agency is an adopted position stemming from teachers' perceptions that noncompliance is tantamount to insubordination thus surrendering their professional teacher authority. The findings show that the school management paradoxically provided support and push for compliance which enabled teachers to passively comply with external stipulations while finding some space to influence their own practices. However, by providing a facilitative atmosphere and bounded freedom, teachers appeared not to be completely silenced. This finding aligns with those by Braun, Ball, Maguire and Hoskins (2011) who concluded that the environment played a role in shaping teachers' perceptions of what actions were possible in their teaching practices. Social persuasion (Bandura, 1977) in the form of positive feedback from superiors seemed to play a significant role in their perceptions about performing to the desired image constructed externally.

Proactive agency was found to be a negotiated stance as teachers managed the tensions between their personal sense of self-efficacy and institutional environment displaying behaviour that indicated resilience and increased motivation in the face of adversity. These actions were motivated by their interests in the quality of learning offered by the focus on covering the curriculum and passing the learner. The emergence of a balanced teacher voice in our study challenged the notion that ownership of reform is only achieved through the affordance of agency, which is argued by Day (1999) and contrasts with Winter (2017) who found that teachers merely complied to protect self-interests. This study revealed that agency, as a catalyst for teacher voice, is given impetus through

reflection, foresight, and intentionality (Bandura, 2001). Khumalo's and Simon's teacher voice emerged from inner conversations which manifested in the expressions of teacher agency. Bandura (1986, 1999) advocates that individual characteristic interacts with external threats to produce behaviour that is unique to the individual.

A dynamic relationship was found between agency, voice, and empowerment. Teachers felt entitled to make adaptations and decisions to fill in the gaps in the curriculum even if they did not feel connected to all levels of curricular decision-making. This level of curriculum ownership elevated them above that of mere implementer in the era of "teacher-proof" curricula. Self-efficacy, agency, and resilience (Bandura, 1999) emerged as strong constructs for proactive teacher voice. The study shows that teachers negotiated and managed their perceived lack of autonomy through a strong sense of self-worth and capacity to instil in their learners that which they found to be crucial for developing learner voice. Simon encouraged critical thinking by encouraging literacy and Khumalo through extended opportunities for writing achieving a balance between external stipulations and personal beliefs. Their strong sense of agency made them less vulnerable to the dominance of power in their work lives. Their agency allowed them to find strategies to come to voice. Proactive agency was found to be influenced by a strong sense of self-efficacy correlating to the awareness of constraining policy expectations and capacity to find space to influence educational change, in alignment with the theoretical framework of this study. Teachers with high self-efficacy can predict certain behaviour and plan accordingly confirming that individuals in constant interaction with the policy environment formulate plans proactively and find ways to achieve them (Bandura, 1999). The analysis indicates that despite the push for sameness, intense monitoring and tick-list accountability which leads to compliance, teachers can neutralise the threats through increased levels of self-efficacy and professional confidence.

In answer to the research question, teacher voice was found to be muted in policy mediation, eliciting reactive, and passive agency from teachers as a form of resignation to the perpetual exclusion and marginalisation of their professional knowledge and expertise. The data therefore reveal many complexities to the achievement of proactive teacher agency even when teachers show that they are fully capable of exercising professional judgement. Diversity in the manifestations of teacher agency can be attributed to that of professional confidence which was found to persist even in the most constricting circumstances – resonating with the conclusion of Edwards (2005).

Proactive teacher agency is, therefore, found in the folds of teachers' ability to take advantage of certain omissions in the curriculum in the interest of learner needs. "Metaphorically the space for freedom from suppression of teacher voice was revealed to exist in the realm of impossibility" (Badal, 2018:259). Olsen and Sexton (2009:12) remind us that "[i]mplementation is not an inert, simple process of putting into practice some chosen educational change." It is processed through various complicated and complex cognitive processes. These complex cognitions result in reactive, compliant, and proactive voices selected to manifest in service to the self, the craft, and the learner as a balancing act in the field of educational change.

Conclusion
With this study we introduced a new construct of teacher voice, one that balances the need to comply and teachers' need to fulfil and satisfy their teaching philosophy. As a sword that cuts two ways, teachers illustrated the capacity to integrate the needs of both external and internal accountability. However, their swords for educational change could gleam brighter. Sharpening their swords for proactive teacher voice requires more commitment to heightened conceptualisation of how teacher voice influences educational change in a broader sense. This understanding would lead to the development of adaptive expertise which does not necessarily mean compliance before self-satisfaction.

The thicket of educational change diverges into two roads which need to be navigated by intrepid explorers whose navigation system is guided by moral and professional obligations to the state, their professional selves and the learner. The pathway decided by the teacher depends on cognitive conversations that reflectively consider the direction of the road chosen through dialogue of possibilities that would make all the difference.
Teach On, But Never Lose Your Voice (Urbanteacher21, 2014:para. 1).

Authors' Contributions
SV guided the writing process of this article. BB conducted the data capture and preliminary analysis for the thesis. All authors reviewed the final article.

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