Change Dilemmas for Curriculum Leaders: Dealing with Mandated Change in Schools

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Pressure for reform in schools may come from a number of sources, as society demands more of schools. Government efforts for schools to increase student performance in relation to future employment prospects have resulted in a number of national curriculum reforms leading to increased accountability requirements for schools. Although the calls for curriculum reform may be many, successful reforms are far less frequent, and in some cases failure is almost predictable. Factors affecting the success of curriculum reform include the inability of reform makers to accurately diagnose the systemic problems or to correctly evaluate programs before implementation. The factors leading to successful reform in one situation do not necessarily apply to another.

Although the idea of an implementation process that has a systematic, logical progression of steps to follow is attractive to teachers and administrators, the literature suggests that a linear approach does not always work. The process of reform is full of conflict, uncertainty, and ambiguities. It is also apparent that the effects of reform or change are often contradictory, leading to tensions or conflicts. These tensions, or dilemmas, are features that must be managed by those implementing reforms. The way that teachers “craft their own theories and actions” to address these dilemmas has a fundamental effect on the change process, which means that there can be no single solution to any one problem. For example, pedagogical change often results in teachers' having to find their own balance between process and content in teaching—“lecturing and seatwork” versus “preparing students to organize and monitor their own work.” School cultures and curriculum structures are constantly challenged by the demands of school authorities, leading to significant tensions. Many principals, for example, face daily dilemmas as they balance external requirements with decisions made within schools.

This article reports on some of the dilemmas faced by the curriculum leaders in a secondary college in the state of Victoria, in Australia, as they implemented a mandated curriculum
initiative. It examines the curriculum leaders' resolution of these dilemmas as the school faced structural, cultural, and pedagogical adjustments.

**Theoretical Framework**

The literature on educational reform describes many examples of tensions, constraints, or dilemmas. Much of this literature focuses on the dilemmas faced by school leaders and teachers in the context of systemic reforms. A *dilemma* can be defined as "a situation requiring choice between equally undesirable alternatives." Wood and his colleagues have extended this definition and argue that although dilemmas involve solutions that are incompatible, they are also capable of resolution by professional action. This study uses this understanding of a dilemma—as a situation in which the participants are required to manage competing alternatives—as its basis. We have conceptualized three interlinked dilemmas as the basis for the analysis presented in this study.

The first of these dilemmas we have chosen to call the *autonomy* dilemma. For school administrators, the autonomy dilemma involves the choice between using the traditional power and authority inherent in their positions and sharing the decision-making authority. Ball describes the dilemma that existed for principals in the United Kingdom as the system moved toward so-called self-governing schools. Principals faced the contradiction of having autonomy and responsibility for decision making, but at the same time being accountable to systemic authorities and having to allow for "community participation." The principals' dual roles, being responsible to both the education department and the school community, present them with conflicting dilemmas that often hamper their decision making.

The second dilemma, the *focus* dilemma, concerns the issue of where the school reform effort is focused. One issue for schools engaged in systemic reform is whether to make whole-school changes a priority or to focus on change at the classroom level. Whole-school change is often limited to structural changes. As Dunstan observes, tensions are often created as a result of differences between school objectives and those of the system. These tensions can result in schools making largely cosmetic structural changes, leaving the real business of teaching largely unchanged. The focus on the type of reforms may present many interlinked moral and practical dilemmas or "points of tension" (between curriculum structure and pedagogy, for example) for teachers and administrators.

The third dilemma, the *acceptance* dilemma, occurs when teachers and administrators are faced with the alternative of accepting or rejecting changes. Boomer states that teachers have to deal with curriculum constraints such as texts, tests, and staffing, as well as systemic constraints such as curriculum guidelines calling for particular methods of instruction or assessment. The acceptance of change is not always evident, and there can be a considerable mismatch between "what is said and what is done" in schools, as well as differences between the "official line [of the school] and the cultural understandings amongst the entrenched staff." This point is also noted by Acker, who states that because "it is impossible to have total surveillance of every teacher in every classroom, there is plenty of..."
scope to sidestep unreasonable prescriptions." Van den Akker and Kuiper have also reported the discrepancy between the intentions of curriculum developers and the instructional processes that take place in the classroom. In short, teachers and administrators constantly face decisions about the degree to which they choose to accept or reject change.

The three dilemmas are linked by a common theme—control of the reform process. The autonomy dilemma is about who controls the changes. The focus dilemma is about controlling where changes will be made. The acceptance dilemma is also about control, but in this case control over the rate or extent of change. Control is dependent on the power relationships in school systems, schools, and classrooms, and change appears to be primarily about altering these relationships.

**Background**

This study takes place in the context of a systemic curriculum reform initiative in the Australian state of Victoria. In 1993 the Victorian Department of Education released the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) as a response to a set of national documents collectively known as the Statements and Profiles for Australian Schools. The CSF outlined a curriculum framework for Victorian schools in eight major curriculum content areas called Key Learning Areas (KLAs), as well as a set of standards by which student learning outcomes could be gauged. Victorian government schools were expected to fully implement the framework by the second half of 1997.

The school at the center of the study, Golbin Secondary College, is located in a large Australian city in the state of Victoria. The city is the focal point for a number of diverse agricultural industries and is the location of several large food-processing plants. Golbin Secondary College is one of four large government secondary colleges in the area. The school has a student population of about 930 and a staff of about 70 teachers, with 10 integration aides, library staff, and administrative support staff. A large number of the students are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; and lately, with the closure of a local technical college, an increasing number of boys were enrolling at Golbin Secondary College.

The CSF organizes the curriculum into eight KLAs (English, mathematics, science, languages other than English, technology, the arts, health-physical education, and studies of society and environment). Each KLA is divided into seven levels, with students typically expected to start at Level 5 in their first year (Year 7, or Grade 7) of secondary schooling. By the end of Year 10, students are expected to complete Level 6, with some students working at Level 7. Learning areas usually have a number of curriculum content areas called *strands*, and for each strand a set of expected learning outcomes is described. Teachers are to report student progress by using an assessment scale that grades student performance as “not apparent,” “beginning,” “consolidating,” or “established” for each strand.

At the time of the introduction of the CSF to Golbin Secondary College, the students in the middle school program (Years 8 through 10) were organized in vertical groupings. This vertical arrangement—called the Vertical Curriculum (VC)—was a unique Golbin Secondary College innovation, designed to enable students to pursue specific interest areas, and more able
students to pursue accelerated learning. The VC system operated at three levels for units (courses) of work; these units were set at progressively higher standards. The VC units were originally organized into six learning areas. Classes in Level 1 VC units were mainly composed of students in Years 8 and 9; Level 2 units included students in Years 8, 9, and 10; and Level 3 units were generally composed of Year 9 and 10 students.

The main characters in this study are the school's two assistant principals, who were responsible for curriculum matters. Ellen was a full-time assistant principal in charge of curriculum planning and the management of the school's assessment and reporting procedures. Ann, who had a 0.6 time fraction as a classroom teacher and a 0.4 time fraction as assistant principal, supported Ellen; the staff referred to Ann as the curriculum coordinator.

**Research Techniques**

The study commenced in the second school term of 1998, three years after the introduction of the CSF into schools. The first week of the term was used by the principal researcher (and first author of this article) to become familiar with the school's setting and curriculum structure, to begin making classroom observations, and to determine the duties and roles of the participant teachers and the school's curriculum leaders. The aim here was to collect data at multiple levels of the school's operation in order to tap into the structural, cultural, and pedagogical features of the school. Brief field notes on observations were recorded in a diary, and these were typed up each evening into a broader and more detailed recollection or account of events. In addition, a field journal was maintained to record observations and other field data. Notes on conversations with the teachers being observed, as well as their colleagues, and general observations on events that occurred during the school day were made in the field journal.

In the second week a schedule for observing classrooms was established and implemented. Observations were to focus on science teaching in particular, as a case example of how the CSF was being implemented in the school. The observation schedule was designed to maximize interaction with the five volunteer participating teachers and their science classes. The classes included a spread of year levels (Years 7 through 10) and specific science disciplines (junior science, biology, and physics). Classroom observations continued throughout the 10-week study period. The first four weeks also provided an opportunity to make detailed observations of the school's overall operations and structural procedures, from KLA and staff meetings, through the organization of home groups (a mixed-year and mixed-level classroom arrangement to provide pastoral care), houses, and sporting events.

In the fifth and sixth weeks of the study, we conducted semistructured interviews with the principal and the three assistant principals. The interviews focused on the roles, experiences, and thoughts of participants as they implemented the CSF and other curriculum initiatives. We also held informal discussions and conversations with a range of teachers and some parents at the school about the CSF and recorded field notes. Staffroom conversations at recess and lunchtime provided a further source of data about the school's approaches to teaching and learning and the roles and responsibilities of teachers, the principal, and curriculum leaders in the change process.
The data used for this article are largely based on interviews with and observations of the school's senior administrators. In addition, some material from interviews with the classroom teachers and conversations with other staff, students, and parents at the school have contributed to the data set. Whereas we have made extensive use of the classroom observation data elsewhere, in this article we use them only as an adjunct to other data sources.

Although an interpretive case study formed the basic research unit, the type of research may also be described as narrative inquiry, because of its use of narrative or story to describe events. Carter describes story as a “mode of knowing” that “captures the richness and nuances of meaning in human affairs,” while at the same time accommodating “ambiguity and dilemma as central figures or themes.” Two different kinds of stories are told in the following section of the article. The first story is taken directly from an interview with Ellen, one of the principal characters. Based on Ellen’s recollections of the time, this story relates her experience with the CSF implementation. The second story takes the form of a vignette, calling on multiple data sources, to provide an example of how Ellen and Ann worked through a particular problem related to the introduction of the CSF at Golbin Secondary College. We offer this vignette because it describes an important pivotal incident in the life of the school, illustrating aspects of all three dilemmas. We use these stories alongside other observations in an analysis of narrative to show how the various change dilemmas operated at Golbin Secondary College, as well as the relationships between these dilemmas.

Implementing the CSF: Ellen's Recollections

Ellen was the school's senior curriculum administrator and the first person from the school to be provided with the CSF documentation. She recalled the first meeting she attended and her subsequent experiences with the introduction of the CSF at Golbin Secondary College.

The school's first introduction to the CSF was when all the curriculum administrators were summoned to a meeting with the Department of Education (DoE), where the draft CSFs were distributed. The CSFs were the size of a phone book, and we were given a week or two to have a look at them and provide some feedback. As they were being handed out, mistakes were being pointed out. The concept of consultation was just a farce, and as the person responsible for the school's overall curriculum, I was thinking that this is a top-down, forced curriculum decision and I don't want a bar of it. None of the school's curriculum decision makers had time to have a really good think about whether learning outcomes were a good way of thinking about things. The CSFs were handed out to the learning area coordinators, who did try to respond to it, if only to try and point out some of the flaws in the document. Looking back I wonder how we did all that, but I suppose we said that it [the CSF] is done, and there is no point wasting energy fighting it.

The school was required to do a curriculum audit, which we ended up completing ahead of the DoE's time line. One thing in our favor was that we had to look at finishing off the VC units from the school's previous curriculum review. So we were able to evaluate the units and see if they were meeting the outcomes at the same time. The basic process was that each learning
area went and divided up the units among the people who were teaching them. The teachers within the learning areas did the audit, and then we curriculum people had some sort of global or on-balance judgments about what percentage of the CSF outcomes were likely to be met. We found that the school didn't stack up too badly in the end.

The other huge issue for us, as a vertically grouped school, was how to ensure that students were exposed to all of the outcomes in each area. Previous DoE curriculum initiatives, in sports education and languages other than English, had posed serious structural problems for us in the past. However, our school has found that by hastening slowly we could show some progress in the initiative without having to really change much of what we actually did. We have not been prepared to lose the advantages of our VC system because I believe that it is a real winner. The VC involves the kids in their learning, and it involves them in taking responsibility for their learning—in an incredibly tangible way through their counseling, subject selections, and their longer-term projections. The process also involves the parents, much more than anywhere else I have seen. So in terms of the partnerships—the ideal partnership of student, teacher, and parent—the VC is a brilliant way of bringing all that together.

In the school's audit, I found that the school didn't cover all of the outcomes in the CSF, but in reality it never expected to and never could. I said to the learning area leaders that they were in the best position to judge which outcomes were the most important in terms of what the kids should be learning. So that was how the school got around that; it left it up to the professional judgment of learning area coordinators to ensure that if the students were adequately counseled and did the right units that they would have a good balance of outcomes in each learning area.

Once the dust had settled on the writing process, we had the issue of changing from six to eight KLAs. That was another traumatic period for people, because there were a lot of people who were philosophically opposed to it and who still don't believe that it was a good idea to shift to the eight learning areas. Those of us who could see the big picture and see the way it was being structured in terms of accountability, mapping student progress, and reporting couldn't see any other way of meeting all of these administrative requirements, even though these are the wrong reasons for changing. So the staff had a great debate and voted on the change, with about 60 percent or so being in favor of it. We said, this is it, then, and drew a line in the sand and went ahead, even though it meant even more work in terms of creating new learning areas and taking units away from the six and structuring them. The situation still is not a happy mix sometimes, particularly in the health and physical education KLA, which used to be in separate learning areas under our old system. There have been difficulties getting the "jocks and socks" people working with the "pots and pans" people. The technology KLA is still struggling in one sense because it is pulling from all the other areas. You are changing a lot of history to bring them into this new structure; some people have only got a couple of units there and it is not in their comfort zone, so it's making it very hard for that learning area.

Identifying where units had to go was one thing, but reorganizing it was a really big issue, as was moving teachers towards this new concept of outcomes-based education. So the deal was to give each learning area two years to get all their units rewritten; they were due at the end
of last year. I haven’t got all of them yet, but we had to have a deadline in order to get things out of the way in terms of an administrative requirement.

Now the proof is going to be with the people actually teaching the units; understanding more about what the outcomes are going to be, or look like, and how they can assess them and how they can report on them. I think people treat the outcomes as fairly content-based and are reverseengineering to make sure the outcomes are being covered. This rather mechanical approach is understandable when you are not quite sure what you are dealing with. From what I hear in terms of the assessment procedures, people aren’t really comfortable with making the judgments of the assessments yet. While determining a student’s CSF result by making an “onbalance” judgment provides some degree of flexibility, I think it will take a couple of years probably before we get a degree of consensus within learning areas about the expectations of the various levels.

Managing the Change: A Vignette

The CSF implementation process dominated the school’s curriculum agenda for the two years before this study. A major restructuring of the school’s key learning areas was noted by Ellen as a fundamental step in implementing the CSF; but managing this, and allowing the learning areas time to adjust their curricula, required some sensitivity to the school’s prevailing collaborative culture.

Ann and Ellen were responsible for documenting, reviewing, developing, and administering the school’s curriculum. They met in early 1995 to discuss the best approach to the implementation of the CSF. The key issue at this meeting was how the school’s existing curriculum structure of six learning areas could incorporate the eight KLAs suggested by the CSF. What follows are their recollections of the process of negotiating the restructuring of the curriculum.

Ann began the meeting between herself and Ellen by stating that the impression she had gained in her role as a part-time district curriculum consultant was that most schools in the area would be moving to the eight-KLA structure. She continued by proposing that the school should also change to eight KLAs in line with the CSF:

If we don’t change, we are going to have a very confusing type of structure. We will have students trying to do outcomes that are intermingled amongst the learning areas. I have counted up and found that four of our existing learning areas will have technology outcomes in them.

Ellen agreed and noted that the curriculum audit was showing a similar thing. She added that the DoE would require annual reports on student progress in the English and mathematics KLAs and that student outcomes in all learning areas would eventually have to be reported to parents. Ellen pointed out that a lot of teachers were philosophically opposed to any change in the school’s curriculum structure, so what were they to do?

Ann suggested a staff debate on the merits of changing to eight KLAs. She felt that this would give everyone a chance to have their say and hear the arguments for and against. The hope was that the teaching staff would then see that moving to the eight learning areas might be
the best option. She proposed the following format:

We could have two teachers for it, myself as curriculum coordinator and perhaps Julie, as she is most likely to be the technology coordinator next year. On the “against” side we could get Sandra and Mike. Since they are the VC coordinators, they probably have the strongest reasons not to change.

Ellen thought that this was a good idea but felt the staff might need some “backgrounding” before the debate. They agreed that staff should be provided with time in the next round of learning-area meetings to discuss the impact of the change on the learning areas and also had it included as an agenda item at the next full staff meeting, where the process would be explained.

Ann felt confident that the staff could be convinced of the need to change. Not only did she see the problem with the technology outcomes as important, but also she strongly believed that changes in the student population profile and the push toward learning technologies meant that some sort of change was inevitable:

You know, Ellen, since the technical school has closed we have been getting a lot more boys here who are not suited by our present curriculum. Some of the rooms that we are trying to run technology units in are not really suitable for technology either. On top of this, we are very limited in our computer area. I really think that we need to push hard for a technology learning area.

The meeting concluded with the two curriculum leaders sharing the task of organizing the debate. Ann had the task of informing the KLA coordinators of the need to discuss the changes at their next KLA meetings and of organizing the speakers. Ellen took on the task of informing the staff through the weekly staff newsletter and agreed she would raise the issue at the next staff meeting.

**Change Dilemmas**

This section considers the way in which the two administrators, Ellen and Ann, attempted to resolve some of the interrelated dilemmas that were apparent at Golbin Secondary College. It has been proposed that dilemmas can be resolved in one of three ways: first, by resolving only one aspect or side of the dilemma; second, by attempting to deal with both ends of the dilemma simultaneously; or third, by reaching a workable compromise between the two alternatives.

**Autonomy Dilemmas**

Autonomy dilemmas involve the choice that school principals and other administrators (and even classroom teachers) have between using the traditional power and authority inherent in their positions and sharing the decision-making authority. The first illustration of an autonomy dilemma involved the management of the structural changes associated with the implementation of the CSF. The dilemma for the school administrators was whether or not to make major changes to their school's curriculum structure in response to the DoE's initiative.
Three possible courses of action emerged: forcing change on the school via a bureaucratic directive, ignoring the broad structure of the CSF and running the school as before, or trying to shape and control those aspects of the CSF implementation that directly affected the school. This dilemma was about who controlled the curriculum structure and organization within the school, at a schoolwide level. In this case the school administrators were faced with a major reform affecting curriculum issues that both the DoE and the school's teaching staff felt they should control.

Although the school administrators and staff wanted to retain control of the curriculum structure, the DoE was proposing an alternative model. However, many of the administrators and teachers regarded the DoE as uncaring and bureaucratic, and its management of the CSF implementation contrasted strongly with the school's consultative internal decision-making processes. This view was evident in Ellen's comment that “the concept of consultation was a farce.”

In their interviews, Ellen and Ann spoke of their frustration with the DoE and the way it implemented the CSF. Ellen was highly critical of what she saw as the “top-down” approach of the DoE and “their total mismanagement of the whole thing.” She was annoyed at the lack of opportunity to provide any significant input into the CSF and have some “ownership” of it. Ann, the school's curriculum coordinator and a district curriculum consultant, was also frustrated with the lack of a clear plan that provided support and direction from the DoE:

> When I look back on how the CSF was brought in I am still really critical of how poorly the DoE planned its introduction. They had no three-year plan or anything, yet were setting deadlines for schools to do curriculum audits and see how well they were covering the outcomes.

Ann felt that the DoE's bureaucratic management of the CSF implementation made it difficult for her to plan for the structural changes at the school that she believed were necessary. Delays in providing support materials and advice reinforced Ann's view of the DoE as being bureaucratic and disorganized:

> I can remember we were hampered by a lack of support from the DoE, who failed to meet their own deadlines for support materials on a number of occasions.

Despite the administrators' concerns with the DoE's management of the implementation process, the resolution of this dilemma appears to show them accepting the mandated changes. Their acceptance of the CSF centered on some major difficulties they and the school would face if the existing six-KLA curriculum structure was retained. These difficulties centered on how the school would manage to teach and report student progress and provide annual reports to the DoE if the existing KLAs remained unchanged. Ann was concerned with the prospect of having a confusing structure for teachers to work within, whereas Ellen couldn't see any other way of meeting all of the administrative requirements.

These practical considerations led the curriculum administrators to accept the overall structure proposed by the CSF, and they decided to put the new structure before the teachers, through discussion at staff and learning area meetings. A subsequent staff debate and vote endorsed
the move from six to eight KLAs. The new KLAs were achieved by rearranging existing subject units (and adding new ones where appropriate), but without making major alterations to the existing teaching program. The school's leaders provided support and resources to enable the restructuring process to take place. KLA leaders were given two years in which to complete the necessary changes and curriculum documentation.

From the school's organizational perspective, this compromise appeared satisfactory. The compromise did not necessarily ensure that the CSF intention of improved student learning was carried out, but it did address the administrative and structural elements of the reform. The school resolved this autonomy dilemma by reaching a compromise between the possible alternatives. Structural changes were made to align the school's curriculum with the learning areas found in the CSF; however, fundamental changes to what the school teaches remained unchanged—thus preserving some of the school's autonomy.

A second example of an autonomy dilemma concerned the control of the learning culture of the school. The autonomy dilemma in this instance was whether to adopt the philosophy of the CSF and use student learning outcomes as the basis for planning and delivering the school's curriculum, particularly at the classroom level. The alternative was for the school, and in particular classroom teachers, to maintain control of curriculum delivery at the school. Although this dilemma is linked to the structural arrangements of the school's curriculum, it also challenges the cultural values and beliefs of the curriculum leaders and teachers. There was a huge amount of confidence in the school's existing system for delivering a quality curriculum while at the same time providing students with many opportunities to decide what they would learn. The principals and teachers held the school's unit-based VC model in high regard. Accommodating the CSF's structure and changing from six to eight KLAs was going to take a large amount of time and effort, even without the additional demands of making major changes in classroom teaching.

Ellen was quite convinced of the value of the VC system, having taught in a range of schools over many years, and she summed it up as a “real winner.” Aspects that appealed to Ellen were the “tertiary [college] feel” of the school and the fact that there were fewer classes with behavior management problems. The principal also saw these aspects as important and felt that the home-group system augmented the VC system. Ellen, her principal, and many others at the school believed that the VC was a powerful system for enhancing student learning.

Mandated curriculum reforms with major implications for the VC were not new to the school. Previous curriculum reforms that challenged the integrity of the VC had been delayed or significantly modified. In each case the curriculum leaders and principal worked together to minimize any effects on the VC. Ellen had previously dealt with curriculum initiatives that had threatened to change the VC structure with a policy of “hastening slowly” and making minimal changes. According to Ellen, the “typical” Golbin Secondary College approach to reforms was “to see what will work, modify it if necessary, and ignore the rest.”

The implementation of the CSF appears to have resulted in a rather atypical response by the school. Ellen and Ann's meeting and discussion on how to deal with the CSF led the two curriculum leaders to accept the overall structure and framework of the CSF as presented by
the DoE. Furthermore, they also accepted the need to make some major changes to the organization of units within the VC structure. This significant decision seems to have been made relatively quickly and without much initial discussion within the school.

Although the structural and organizational changes took place relatively smoothly, they came about without any great change in cultural beliefs or attitudes on the part of teachers or curriculum leaders. In part, some of this reluctance to change was caused by a distrust of the DoE and its ability to demonstrate that it had consulted widely and that the philosophy behind the CSF was well grounded. The school was prepared to reorganize the existing curriculum units within the two-year period required by the DoE, provided that the VC structure remained fundamentally the same. In addition, and perhaps more important, teaching and learning activities remained essentially the same as before the CSF.

Although the CSF outcomes were included in the revised curriculum units, classroom observations indicated little use of those outcomes in planning or teaching. Several of the study teachers stated that they did not use the CSF outcomes specifically when planning, arguing that they had been “built in” to the overall topics being taught. Ellen also noted that teachers “were not really comfortable” with assessing students using the CSF standards.

Although the study teachers were relatively comfortable with the idea of rearranging the content in the pre-existing units and including some new units to cover curriculum areas previously not taught, they were less inclined to review their methods of teaching. The classroom autonomy of teachers was largely preserved. The CSF, the DoE, and the school's administration did not affect teachers' control of what happened in their classrooms. The perception at the school was that the VC system was fundamental to student success and that existing classroom practices and arrangements were satisfactory.

Although some organizational and assessment changes were made, teachers were not prepared to accept the CSF as a basis for planning teaching and learning. This autonomy dilemma was resolved with the school and its teachers retaining the existing culture of learning. Although the curriculum leaders won teacher support for some structural changes, they kept the VC approach intact, and the school remained in control of the philosophy of teaching and learning.

**Focus Dilemmas**

Focus dilemmas concern the choice between directing the change effort toward broad, schoolwide changes in schools or toward change at the classroom level. Two related focus dilemmas emerged during the study. The first example illustrates a focus dilemma about organizational or structural reform within the school—in this case whether to reform the school's overall curriculum structure or to focus on reforming the organization of classroom learning. In other words, this dilemma is about the *level* that the change process is to focus on.

To a large extent this focus dilemma was a consequence of the ambiguous language in the various CSF support documents. The CSF described a curriculum structure and framework for each KLA. In addition, the DoE provided schools and teachers with *Course Advice and Support*
Materials for each KLA, to assist the implementation of the CSF. Both sets of documents appear to provide guidelines to schools as to what the new curriculum structures should look like. For example, page 1 of the science CSF states:

The CSF aims to provide sufficient detail for schools and the community to be clear about the major elements of curriculum and the steps towards achieving them without dictating to schools and teachers how they are to exercise their responsibilities.

The document goes on to say that course planning, curriculum organization, and classroom practice would be left to schools and that "it would be impracticable and contradictory for the CSF to quantify time or effort for the various components." However, the documents are also very specific about what students should achieve, with more than 100 explicit learning outcomes in the science CSF alone. These learning outcomes contain numerous examples and suggestions for teaching and learning activities, for instance, "the student prepares and presents a talk on the causes and methods of control of an animal or plant disease." Given these conflicting pieces of advice, what were schools expected to focus on as they implemented the CSF?

The dilemma for the school was how to interpret the DoE's expectations and the CSF documents. The school needed to decide whether to direct its focus toward schoolwide restructuring or to concentrate on teaching and learning within the classroom—or, alternatively, some combination of both. Directives from the DoE explaining its position or approach to implementing the CSF were not always helpful and were sometimes too late to be of use to the school.

As mentioned previously, one of the early directives from the DoE required schools to carry out a curriculum audit to determine what was included in the existing curricula of schools. The curriculum audit process seemed to indicate to the curriculum leaders at Golbin Secondary College that they should focus on the overall structure of the CSF. Staff support for the audit was gained by tying in an impending review of the school's VC units with the curriculum content audit for the DoE. Ellen was keen to point out that the school had completed its curriculum audit ahead of the DoE's time line. Carrying out the curriculum audit, however, led the curriculum leaders and administrators to focus predominantly on broader curriculum structure issues. The school devoted a large amount of time to determining the KLAs in which units would be placed, as well as the types of units to be offered by KLAs to ensure that all CSF outcomes were included. The CSF was essentially used as a curriculum planner and checklist of the types of curriculum content to be included.

However, the CSF document, with its detailed description of learning activities and specific curriculum focuses, suggested that the focus could also be on student learning within the classroom. Teachers could use the learning outcomes and curriculum focuses to plan specific teaching and learning activities. A focus on classroom changes could have been adopted. The document made it possible for teachers to use the introduction of the CSF as an opportunity to examine and review their existing practices, and the way that classes were organized or
structured, to improve learning outcomes for students. This does not appear to have happened to any significant extent, with several science teachers stating that their classrooms were run essentially as they had been before the CSF. For example, none of the study teachers within the science KLA felt they had changed the way they organized their classroom or used the outcomes in an explicit way. A common view among the teachers was that the outcomes were “built in” to each unit by matching the appropriate existing curriculum materials to the new CSF units. Teachers' lack of familiarity with the outcomes was evident in their approach to assessment, with Ellen conceding that most teachers were not yet comfortable enough with the outcomes to make authoritative judgments on student achievement in the strands for a KLA.

Although teachers were not specifically told to focus on the structural aspects of the new curriculum at the expense of classroom changes, the time and effort needed to review and realign the school's curriculum to match the CSF structure resulted in such a focus. The focus dilemma in this example was clearly resolved by addressing the broader structural issues, and the success of implementation was measured more in terms of how well the existing curriculum content measured up to the CSF, rather than how the CSF changed classroom practices.

The second focus dilemma is an extension, or consequence, of the first and is about the focus on the type of changes that were to occur at the school. The dilemma is about whether the CSF was predominantly about changes in the curriculum structure of the school or about pedagogical changes. At the center of this dilemma is the issue of the purpose of curriculum reform and the notion that pedagogical changes are an expected part of the reform process.

If curriculum reform is about improved student learning it would seem reasonable to expect some focus on making improvements at the classroom level. The CSF offered new opportunities for teachers to focus on student learning outcomes and provided some scope for teachers to investigate innovative teaching and learning strategies. However, the curriculum leaders' concerns about administrative accountabilities and curriculum management were focused on structural issues. They successfully used a consultative approach, which allowed teachers to voice their concerns, to persuade the teaching staff that a curriculum restructuring from six to eight KLAs would be in the school's best interest. Following that decision, considerable time was set aside to establish the new KLAs and rewrite units to align them with the new structure. The focus for professional development days was on rewriting the curriculum units to match the CSF, and a period of two years was allocated for this task. As the school's science coordinator commented:

> At the school level it has been really good; it has given us a fair amount of time to implement the CSF. A lot of our professional development days over the last few years have been dedicated to the CSF.

The school's central focus, it seems, was on making structural changes to accommodate the CSF structure of eight KLAs and incorporating the strands into each learning area. The extent to which teachers were working on changing their teaching practices was less clear, although they were encouraged to undertake some CSF-related professional development. Teachers within the science KLA acknowledged that they had made few, if any, changes in classroom practice as a consequence of the CSF (yet Ann noted the science KLA was the most progressive
group in its approach to implementing the CSF). Ann, as the school's curriculum coordinator, did not believe that teachers had begun to tackle the classroom issues. The following comment by Ann appeared to sum up the choice made by those responsible for the curriculum: “We have put on hold the strategies and approaches to teaching and learning and put more emphasis on putting up the courses according to outcomes-based curriculum.”

This focus dilemma on the type of change appears to have been resolved by working predominantly toward only one alternative—schoolwide structural change. The curriculum leaders did not expect or pursue significant pedagogical change at the classroom level up to this point. Furthermore, the principal noted that other systemic initiatives (learning and information technology, civics, and drug education) were placing new pressures on the school, making it less likely that CSF-driven pedagogical changes would occur. The school's professional development coordinator (responsible for planning and organizing training and professional courses for the teaching staff) noted that these new initiatives had already displaced the CSF from the professional development and curriculum agenda.

**Acceptance Dilemmas**

Acceptance dilemmas arise when teachers and administrators have a choice between either accepting or rejecting change. The introduction of the CSF brought a range of new assessment and reporting procedures that posed some challenges to the school's existing assessment system. Annual school reports to the DoE were required for English and mathematics, and parents were to be informed of student performance on learning outcomes within CSF levels in all KLA's. The dilemma here was whether to accept the CSF performance criteria as the major basis for assessment and reporting to parents, or to retain the existing emphasis on letter grades.

Enthusiasm for the new reporting system among teachers was muted; most teachers believed that the existing system was comprehensive, fair, and meaningful to the school community. Parents interviewed for this study wanted to know “how their kids were doing and whether they were passing everything” and were generally satisfied with the existing reporting format. Several senior staff were doubtful that parents would find any new or useful information in the CSF results, with one commenting that “I don't know what parents will make of them or if they will even notice.”

Many teachers, too, had questions about what the assessment system might really mean, and science teachers had a mixed reaction to the DoE's concept of “on-balance” or global-type judgments of students' performances in strands within the KLA's. Ann, Ellen, and other teachers expressed some reservations about the prospect of deciding a student's CSF level (usually ranging from 4 to 7) and standard of performance that had been demonstrated at that level (from “not apparent” through “established”). They described their feelings about student assessment under the CSF with comments like “uncomfortable” or “iffy,” and “the whole thing is a bit hit and miss” or “up in the air at the moment.”

Ellen believed that most teachers were using the prescribed learning outcomes to check that the required content was present in the unit. Her impression was that teachers were still
uncomfortable with the idea of using the outcomes as a basis for assessing students. Furthermore, she expected that it would be several more years before teachers would be able to internalize the meaning of CSF performance standards for assessing students and to develop sufficient confidence in them as the basis for student assessment.

In many learning areas the teaching roles of staff and the development of new units were still issues—for example, the drawing together of the physical education and human development teachers into one KLA had caused some problems. The technology KLA was attempting to deliver CSF outcomes that had previously been covered in several separate learning areas, and teachers were still coming to terms with this new and broader perspective.

Ellen alluded to the philosophical differences of staff with the CSF and its outcome-based approach. The way the CSF had been introduced into the school and an apparent emphasis on content over process lay at the heart of these differences. Ann and Ellen had worked hard to prevent this perception from undermining the planned changes and pointed out how the demographics of the school had also changed, with the increasing proportion of boys becoming an issue. Both Ellen and Ann believed that the increased importance of technology in the curriculum would have necessitated some major changes anyway.

In response to a range of concerns and issues still to be clarified, the curriculum committee came to a “temporary resolution” of the acceptance dilemma around assessment and reporting. The curriculum committee's decision to retain the previous system, but to add a small section at the bottom of the student reports where teachers could indicate the student's CSF level, meant few major changes for teachers or parents. Ann said this decision had the support of the parents on the committee, who “still preferred the letter grade system.” At this stage, the acceptance of this decision by the school community indicates a general comfort with the existing assessment system requiring only minimal change to comply with the DoE requirements. In addition, there remains the problem of passing on student CSF results at the end of each semester to a student's next teacher; this issue is still to be resolved. The school seems to be dealing with both ends of this dilemma, having neither completely accepted nor rejected the CSF reporting system.

**Discussion**

Dilemmas may be resolved in three ways: selecting one option only, developing a workable compromise, or attempting to deal with both options simultaneously. We begin the discussion by examining how the resolution of the autonomy dilemmas affected structural and cultural changes. We then explore how the resolution of the focus dilemmas affected structural and pedagogical change in the school before considering issues related to resolving some acceptance dilemmas around teaching practices, assessment, and reporting.

The first example of an autonomy dilemma showed how the curriculum leaders managed some major structural changes. By accepting the overall framework of the CSF, Ellen and Ann opted for a workable compromise as the school moved toward remodeling its curriculum structure. These leaders chose not to retain the existing six learning areas or to force the CSF to fit into the school's structure. Insisting on the school's previous structure would have had them
struggling with both horns of this autonomy dilemma. Remaining independent of the CSF’s structure would have caused a number of problems for teachers reporting on student progress.

A number of studies have shown that teacher administrators and principals often have to contend with curriculum decisions made by government, while at the same time trying to accommodate school community expectations of being included in the decision-making process. Wildy and Louden describe the difficulties faced by a principal in engaging senior staff support for a controversial government policy concerning teacher professional development. These authors argue that the dilemma for the principal was how to exercise leadership that was strong and yet share important decisions affecting the school. Crump contends that politically imposed reforms in leadership, curriculum content, school finance, and staff development in Australian schools during the 1980s were, in many instances, countered by strategies within schools that allowed schools to retain a degree of ownership over leadership and policy outcomes. Ball has also described the dilemmas for principals who were expected to show greater accountability (financially and academically) and provide for community participation on the one hand, while at the same time being given increased autonomy and decision-making powers.

The curriculum leaders at Golbin Secondary College managed to make some substantial changes in line with government policy. However, they were sensitive to teacher concerns regarding changes at a schoolwide level and also allowed classroom teachers to retain significant autonomy at the classroom level.

The second autonomy dilemma was essentially a choice between adopting the philosophy of the CSF and its use of learning outcomes, or maintaining the VC as the school’s defining approach to student learning (put another way, DoE control versus school-based control of the learning culture). The culture of teaching and learning at Golbin Secondary College had revolved around its VC structure for a number of years. In the past the school curriculum leaders had resisted curriculum reforms that could affect the VC, retaining independence or control of all matters affecting the curriculum. In the case of the CSF, changes to the VC were made, but in such a fashion that the values and benefits of the VC were not fundamentally affected. School values such as collaborative and shared decision making were also upheld as the teaching staff had the opportunity to be part of the final decision to change from six to eight KLAs. This situation was similar to that suggested by Lieberman—that teachers should be in the foreground of change but well supported by the principals, who remain in the background. In this instance it appeared that the school (in particular the curriculum leaders and the teaching staff) has retained its autonomy over the teaching and learning culture.

The first focus dilemma was resolved with the school and teaching staff choosing a single alternative—a schoolwide focus on making the required structural changes. Although CSF outcomes were built into the curriculum, there was no suggestion that the learning outcomes should be used as the focus for changing the way the students were assessed or taught. Assessment and teaching strategies were largely unchanged, although the relationship between these and student CSF results was described in most KLA curriculum documents.
A consequence of the effort required in implementing structural reform is that little enthusiasm and few resources existed for making further reforms at the classroom level. Neither the DoE nor the school required significant changes to the pedagogical practice of secondary teachers, and teachers had little reason to question their teaching practices. Given the relatively major structural changes taking place at the school and KLA levels, teachers seem to have had little time or opportunity to consider classroom changes. Similar responses to systemic reform have been noted in the literature, with Ball and Crowther noting that the focus of school administrators tended to be on schoolwide issues rather than those at the classroom level. Acker also has claimed that top-down reforms seldom recognize a classroom focus.

An acceptance dilemma was illustrated with the issue of assessment, and the expectations of students, teachers, and parents seemed at odds with those of the DoE. The traditional format for end-of-semester reports to parents was well known and accepted by the school community. Although the school administrators and teachers considered the aims, objectives, and learning outcomes of the CSF, and subsequent assessment and accountability requirements, the acceptance of all these elements for reporting purposes was less obvious. Several of these elements conflicted with existing curriculum materials, beliefs, and values. To comply with DoE assessment requirements the school made some minor changes to its assessment and reporting procedures. However, the school's curriculum committee and teaching staff appeared to have some reservations about fully accepting the CSF as a basis for a reporting system, and few classroom assessment tasks were changed (although the science KLA did link classroom assessment to CSF performance levels). Curriculum leaders did not pressure teachers to examine existing pedagogical or assessment practices. This may have been a strategy used by Ellen and Ann to gain support for the structural changes they were managing. Alternatively, they may have recognized the difficulty in making changes at the classroom level given the general indifference many teachers had to CSF-based initiatives and the significant autonomy that teachers possess in their classrooms. Acker has observed that it is impossible to constantly monitor teachers in their classrooms and that they can easily sidestep assessment issues that they consider inappropriate. Boomer has also noted the possibility of significant differences between what is said and done in the assessment of students when philosophical differences occur. Changing the attitude of teachers and parents would seem necessary if the CSF were to become the basis of the reporting system in this school.

Another impediment to accepting an assessment system based on the CSF is that the school's unit-based curriculum made it difficult to pass student CSF results on to students' second-semester teachers. Furthermore, teachers and parents have yet to internalize an understanding of what CSF levels and performance standards mean. The school appeared to be juggling both ends of this acceptance dilemma, rejecting full-scale adoption of the CSF assessment system and preferring to simply attach CSF results to the end of the existing report forms. Rizvi and Kemmis note similar tensions as school communities and education systems wanting to retain the existing structure and character of an organization struggled with those forces desiring change. Roberts argues that the acceptance of change depends on how well new arrangements match prevailing beliefs and attitudes.
Conclusions and Implications
This study identifies a number of issues with implications for reformers and school administrators who find themselves introducing systemic curriculum change in schools. Reformers should not underestimate the limited time, opportunities, and, in some cases, interest schools have for involvement in systemic curriculum reform. The perception held by administrators and teachers at Golbin Secondary College, for example, was that the DoE had not provided sufficient time for consultation on the curriculum initiative, was poorly prepared for the rollout of its new curriculum materials, and was unwilling to listen to schools. The school was more than satisfied with its existing curriculum structure, and many staff resented having to change this structure. Top-down initiatives need to actively include and support schools and teachers if they are not to be alienated by change. The CSF (like most curriculum reforms) was not introduced into a curriculum vacuum—the school had existing and valued structures and programs in place. Education authorities are likely to continue to be disappointed by the extent of curriculum reforms unless they make an effort to acknowledge, and deal with, the autonomy of schools and teachers and to involve them more fully in the reform process.

There are implications, too, for school curriculum administrators and leaders. In their efforts to minimize the impact of curriculum reform on their school, curriculum leaders should be careful not to undervalue or ignore significant educational initiatives. Those at Golbin Secondary College worked hard to minimize the disruption to the school’s existing curriculum structure and learning culture caused by the CSF. The hectic work schedule, schoolwide focus, expert local knowledge, and satisfaction with the existing curriculum can make it difficult for curriculum administrators to fully evaluate new initiatives and may lead them to discount the potential educational benefits of the change.

A further implication for those responsible for school curriculum matters is that they may need to be more conscious of how the resolution of focus and acceptance dilemmas may affect classroom teachers’ perceptions and actions. The curriculum administrators at this school tended to focus on schoolwide, structural change, and they involved teachers in that process. Consequently, pre-existing teaching and classroom assessment strategies remained largely untouched and unquestioned. School leaders need to be prepared to address the issue of classroom reform, and by their interest and actions indicate to classroom teachers that change at this level is important and necessary.

School curriculum leaders play a powerful role in setting the curriculum direction and philosophy of schools. They are in a position to moderate government initiatives, strongly influence the attitudes of classroom teachers toward reform efforts, and in turn affect the teaching and learning process. However, curriculum leaders have a difficult job in the best of times, and dilemmas such as those faced by the leaders at Golbin are now a regular feature of the educational landscape. Managing these dilemmas in ways that do justice to the entire school community—teachers, students, and parents—is an important and ongoing challenge for those with leadership roles in school reform.

Endnotes


14 *Concise Macquarie Dictionary* (Lane Cove, NSW: Doubleday Australia, 1985).


17 Ibid., p. 225.


20 Ibid.


23 Ibid., p. 282.


32 P. Woods, B. Jeffrey, G. Troman, & M. Boyle, *Restructuring Schools, Restructuring Teachers:*


Author's note: This article is based on John Flett's PhD research dissertation. We are grateful to colleague Helen Wildy, whose work helped us understand how dilemmas operate in the areas of school leadership and reform.

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