The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. … It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions and compromises that organise and disorganise a people. (Apple, 1993, p. 1)

In the past decade or so struggles over curriculum in public schools at both national and state levels have reached unprecedented levels as successive federal governments have used their control over funding to steer policy-making and implementation at the state level (Meadmore, 2001; Reid, 1999). Many other groups, not the least being business and industry, have also attempted to influence curriculum construction and the content and purposes of state schooling have been reconfigured to serve the needs of the economy more closely. Budget allocations to education have been reduced overall, and under the guise of choice and diversity resources have been siphoned away from public schools and social justice initiatives to create and support independent schools (Meadmore, 2001). Within state school systems a centralization of authority for curriculum policy and construction and devolution of responsibility for curriculum implementation to teachers have accompanied these changes (Apple, 1993). Yet in the debates about curriculum teachers’ knowledge and experience have not been generally respected. Instead these key players in current curriculum struggles have been gradually destabilised by the intensification and devaluing of their work and regressive schemes such as the ‘ten year tenure’ rule in South Australia.

Given this scenario can the South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework be a fillip for middle schooling? In order to contextualise South Australia’s current curriculum struggles this paper will firstly sketch the construction of its predecessors, the Attainment Levels and the national statements and profiles. Then it will trace the process of ‘refining’ the statements and profiles to produce the SACSA Framework, focusing in particular on the ‘middle years band’ of schooling. The paper will draw on Curriculum SA, a bulletin that informed members of the education community about the development of the framework, as an authoritative account of the process. It will also introduce other perspectives, some of which contest the dominant account, to portray some of the struggles that have taken place since early in 1999. These include recent interviews with four middle school teachers who were asked to reflect on the curriculum review process and consider the framework’s relationship to middle schooling. Their responses indicate that they envisage some potential for legitimising the middle schooling movement but they also canvass a range of immediate and ongoing issues that, given the current economic and political context, are unlikely to be resolved with the implementation of the framework.
A context for SACSA

Although the federal government has been involved in numerous aspects of education since the 1970s, its interest in curriculum matters escalated from the late 1980s when the federal Minister of Education, John Dawkins, released *Strengthening Australia’s Schools* (1988). This statement called for a ‘coherent curriculum appropriate to contemporary social and economic needs [and advocated] the development of a common framework that sets out the major areas of knowledge and the most appropriate mix of skills and experience for students in all the years of schooling’ (Dawkins, 1988, p. 4). The resulting national curriculum project has been extensively analysed (e.g. Kennedy, 1988; Marsh, 1994; Reid, 1994). Briefly, the state and territory ministers of education agreed to the National Goals of Schooling in 1989 and from there curriculum mapping projects across the states proceeded apace and debates about the constitution of the major areas of knowledge intensified. In April 1991 the Australian Education Council approved the division of school knowledge into eight key learning areas (KLAs) and construction of the national curriculum began.

Meanwhile the South Australian education department was in the midst of reconstructing curriculum in state schools as part of the ‘Attainment Levels’ project. This was not a democratic process of public debate and local participation. Instead district superintendents, curriculum officers and a few teachers were invited to develop materials to be trialled in schools in 1991 and implemented thereafter. In 1991 Alan Reid wrote:

> Attainment Levels have been produced for each of the seven Curriculum Areas and for LOTE. They are a description of the knowledge and skills to be taught in each Curriculum Area during the compulsory years of schooling and are divided into six levels. For each level there is a general descriptive statement of what it means to be at that level, supported by a series of observable outcomes and exemplars of student work and teacher lesson plans. Near the end of Term II each year, teachers will be asked to use the knowledge that they have about each student in their care, to make a judgement about which level the student is at in each area of study. This information will be collated at the school level and forwarded to the central Directorates of the Education Department.

> It is important to note that the South Australian Attainment Level process does not involve a standard test. Indeed, many of its characteristics are an attempt to surmount the widely recognised educational difficulties associated with traditional standardised testing. (Reid, 1991, pp. 1-2)

However, at about the time the glossy green Attainment Level folders were distributed to teachers the project was overtaken by the national curriculum. The folders, some in pristine condition, are currently gathering dust on many teachers’ bookshelves and basic skills tests in literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7 have subsequently been imposed on South Australian state school students.

Between 1991 and 1993 tenders were won by various groups of educators to write the national ‘statements’ and ‘profiles’ for each KLA. This process was fraught with controversy as a multiplicity of interest groups, some far more powerful than others,
attempted to incorporate their knowledge in the new framework. The timelines for the
development of KLAs such as Mathematics and English facilitated consultation and
input from a variety of stakeholders. Even so there was trenchant criticism from
academics in Mathematics departments, for example, that students would not be
adequately prepared for tertiary study (Guttman, 1993). However, in some of the low
status KLAs resource allocation was so limited and timelines so absurdly short that there
was almost no consultation with key interest groups. Colin Marsh (1994) has outlined
the construction of the Studies of Society and Environment KLA and his account does
little to inspire confidence in the coherence or quality of its statement and profile.

As with the Attainment Levels in South Australia, however, the national
curriculum did not come to fruition. In mid-1993 the state and federal ministers of
education met in Perth and were unable to agree about the future of the national
curriculum. By this stage coalition governments had been elected in most states and they
were reluctant to embrace a federal Labor Government initiative. The statements and
profiles were referred back to the states and South Australia and Tasmania were the only
states that agreed to use the original documents. By the end of 1993 the South Australian
education department had abandoned Attainment Levels and decided to progressively
implement the statements and profiles over a four-year period.

Both the Attainment Levels and national curriculum projects have been subject to
similar critique in recent years. Alan Reid (1994) claims that progressive educators
shaped both projects and were able to stem the influence of more conservative forces.
Attainment Levels and the statements and profiles were meant to make explicit the
knowledge, understandings and skills required by students across all KLAs. The
resulting documents are full of innovative ideas and good practice and as such they
support teachers to actively engage students in their learning (Collins, 1994). Both were
also created as educationally defensible mechanisms for reporting student achievement
using teachers’ judgments rather than standardised tests (Reid 1991, 1994).

Nevertheless, neither of these attempts to reconstruct curriculum in the early 1990s had a
clearly developed theoretical framework. There was no accompanying explanation of the
learning theory, or justification for the selection and ordering of knowledge in each of
the KLAs (Collins, 1994; Reid, 1994). Furthermore, KLAs were developed individually
with very little consultation between the writing teams. Thus there was overlap in
content and outcomes at some Levels. Cherry Collins (1994, p. 15) argues that ‘the
artificiality of Levels also means that Level three does not mean the same thing across
Strands within one designated area of knowledge, let alone across Areas.’ These
discrepancies would have made it very difficult to chart and compare student, school and
system-wide performance had either project been fully implemented. However, some
South Australians claim that most of these issues have now been resolved in the SACSA
Framework.

**Conceptualising the SACSA Framework**

The appointment of Geoff Spring as Chief Executive, Department of Education,
Training and Employment (DETE), early in 1999 led to a predictable avalanche of
policy statements and promises of new directions in the South Australian state school
system. Prior to taking up the position he predicted that local school management, the
use of multimedia and ‘a focus on accountability, curriculum and standards’ would be priorities (Horsell, 1999, p.3). ‘Partnerships 21’, South Australia’s version of local school management was launched in April 1999. A few days later decisions were made to relegate 90 of the 120 staff from the curriculum development unit to schools (Kemp, 1999) and ‘review’ the curriculum to make it ‘relevant to modern life and industry, as well as being accountable to the community’ (Monk, 1999). A small core of DETE personnel was co-opted to manage the curriculum review process and outsource most of its components. Agreement was also reached with Catholic Education SA and the Independent Schools Board to participate in the exercise.

Senior personnel in DETE decided that the SACSA Framework would be a birth to year 12 continuum, sub-divided into four bands. These are the early years (birth to year 2), primary years (years 3-5), middle years (years 6-10) and senior years (years 11-12). No research evidence has been supplied for these decisions but the General Introduction to the framework states: ‘While these bands are a pragmatic construction, they represent aspects of learners’ physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, appreciating that within each band learners bring with them a great diversity of backgrounds and prior learning experiences’ (Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2000, p.23). Notwithstanding pragmatism and cultural difference, it seems that the architects of the SACSA Framework, like those who worked with the national curriculum, assume that all South Australian children “will go through the same ‘development’ as learners” (Collins, 1994, p.13). In the education community there was significant contestation about the early years band but the construction of the middle years band aroused little comment. No explanation was provided for its nomenclature or the assignment of the last two years of primary and the first two years of secondary school to this band. However, it should be noted that the Report of the Junior Secondary Review (Eyers, Cormack and Barratt, 1992) recommended that middle schooling in South Australia encompass these year levels. Now it seems that the middle years will be institutionalised as a distinct ‘developmental’ stage of learning in South Australia.

In common with the national curriculum, school knowledge in the SACSA Framework continues to be divided into the KLAs but a set of ‘Essential Learnings’ (identities, thinking, interdependence, futures, communications) has been woven into the curriculum and made explicit in the outcomes for each KLA. A draft policy document (South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, 1999, p.18) in May 1999 stated: ‘While local sites [will] configure curriculum according to their own needs and priorities, it is a requirement that all sites cover the content outlined in the curriculum.’ The same document discussed the current priority areas for government funding (VET, early years, LOTE, anti-racism, literacy and numeracy) and stated that ‘educators will be accountable for the outcomes of these developmental programs and demonstrate that the government is getting value for money’ (South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, 1999, p.6). To these ends the SACSA Framework includes a raft of accountability requirements. All five-year-olds will be given a ‘School Entry Assessment’ and statewide basic skills testing in literacy and numeracy has already been implemented in years 3, 5 and 7. In addition, ‘curriculum standards will identify core aspects of what learners can be expected to know, understand and do as a result of participation in the curriculum described for each
band. Standards will be clearly connected to the curriculum and will incorporate specific outcomes related to both the essential learnings and learning areas. The curriculum standards will be clear and simple, measurable and manageable’ (South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, 1999, p. 6). Curriculum standard 1 is aligned with year 2, standard 2 with year 4, and so on to standard 6 at year 12. Schools will be expected to report annually on the standards to the central authorities.

These initial stages of the curriculum review process and key decisions about the scope and structure of the SACSA Framework were not open to external scrutiny and the accountability requirements were not the product of widespread community consultation and democratic decision making either. Instead they are evidence firstly of the increasing centralisation of authority in the state school system and secondly of the concomitant circumscription of teachers’ work. However, policy makers were well aware that the SACSA Framework could not be constructed and implemented without at least a semblance of involvement of members of the education community.

Constructing ‘a refined curriculum framework’

Curriculum SA, a bulletin prepared by the DETE Curriculum Group and distributed to schools provides an authoritative account of the construction of the SACSA Framework from mid-1999 to the beginning of 2001. It portrays curriculum making as a relatively tension-free, consensual process, borne of extensive consultation and active involvement by schools and teachers. In the first issue Geoff Spring and the Director of Catholic Education, Alan Dooley, jointly announced that the development of the SACSA Framework would lead to a ‘refined curriculum framework.

In South Australia teachers and other educators will continue to construct and deliver a curriculum designed to best suit the learners in their care. To enable them to do this more effectively, clearer policy directions for the management of curriculum, assessment and reporting will be provided. These directions will be incorporated into one coherent birth to year 12 document, the SACSA Framework. This framework will include clear descriptions of what is to be taught, the standards against which learners’ progress will be assessed, and accountability expectations (Issue 1, June 1999, p. 1).

Further explanation was provided that the national statements and profiles needed to be revised and simplified in order to address ‘the perceived issue of the crowded curriculum’ and to give teachers ‘further guidance as to what learning is appropriate at different levels of education.’ The introduction of the aforementioned accountability measures was justified in terms of ‘increasing public confidence in education through explicit and defensible standards’ rather than giving the government value for money. It was also announced that the SACSA Framework would be ‘fully implemented in all government schools’ from January 2001. (Issue 1, June 1999, pp. 1-4).

The following Curriculum SA bulletins recounted the frenetic consultative, curriculum development and trialling procedures which took place in 1999 and 2000. The steering committee directed, monitored and assured the quality of framework. Four curriculum band reference groups advised on the ‘developmental characteristics of
learners’ and considered how the various components of the framework interrelated, and 17 experts working groups provided advice about focus areas of the curriculum. There was an expert working group for each KLA and for areas such as the essential learnings and vocational education. In May 1999 a consultant contacted ‘many hundreds of city and country educators’ regarding the national statements and profiles and her report recommended ‘a simplification and consistency of language across the learning areas, a reduction in the volume of content, and either the elimination of overlap between learning areas or clearer articulation of connections between them to facilitate integrated learning’ (Issue 2, August 1999, p. 2). A team from the University of South Australia and the Council of Educational Associations of South Australia (CEASA) won the tender to write the curriculum and standards components of the framework and they were given about 10 weeks to produce a preliminary draft (Issue 3, September 1999, p. 2). The writers brief instructed the team to address cross-curriculum issues such as equity, Aboriginal and multicultural perspectives, and vocational learning, as well as refining the content and outcomes in the KLAs. The Erebus Consulting Group won the tender to undertake the task of consultation on the preliminary draft. They found ‘general support’ for the key intentions and characteristics for the SACSA Framework’ and ‘the constructivist approach to forming the curriculum’, but identified the need to make vocational education and key competencies explicit, include equity issues and pay more attention to futures perspectives in the form of information and communication technologies (Issue 5, March 2000, p. 2). In order ‘to make sure that the outcomes were in the right order’ the ACER was contracted to conduct a standards calibration process involving 2000 teachers (Issue 4, November 1999, p. 4). Statewide trialing of the Curriculum Scope and Curriculum Standards took place at 125 schools from 27 March to 9 June 2000 (Issue 5, March 2000, pp. 4-5). The writing team produced the penultimate draft in September, there was one more week of consultations and the writing team completed the final draft in October 2000 (Issue 7, August 2000, p. 6). By this stage, however, the timeline for full implementation of the SACSA Framework had been shifted to 2002.

The tenor of the eighth and final issue of Curriculum SA in November 2000 contrasted markedly with the first one. Writers of this issue claimed that the SACSA Framework ‘has universality in that it connects to best practice world-wide especially in relation to life long learning.’ Earlier suggestions that the framework would simply be a ‘refinement’ of the national curriculum were downplayed by references to its ‘unique’ features. It was argued that ‘in response to current knowledge and worldwide trends in curriculum, the SACSA introduced new elements such as the Essential Learnings that will lead South Australian curriculum practice and learners into the future.’ Indeed, the essential learnings and the incorporation of vocational and enterprise education into all bands of schooling were portrayed as key developments of the SACSA Framework, variously giving it a ‘future-oriented focus’ and ‘reflecting national and state priorities in further education training and work’ (Issue 8, November 2000, pp.1-4). Indeed, the framework is more clearly intended to serve the needs of the economy more closely than its predecessors.

Without actually saying so, the final issue also seemed to respond to some of the aforementioned criticisms of the earlier Attainment Levels and national curriculum projects. For example, this issue noted that the SACSA Framework is underpinned
theoretically by ‘constructivist approaches to teaching and learning’ and that the issues of overlapping content and outcomes in the KLAs have been addressed. It also claimed that the KLAs have been streamlined so that ‘the outcomes and outcome sequences in the Curriculum Standards are set at the right level and reflect a valid sequence of development’. However, the teachers involved in the calibration exercise had effectively been asked to decide the order in which school knowledge will be learnt by every child. Cherry Collins (1994, p. 12) argues that such a process assumes the ‘school learning is a natural, single, universal path from the same little knowledge to the same more knowledge rather than as a multitude of cultural paths with varied routes from child to child’. It seems that the scene has now been set to chart and compare student and school achievement in an instrumentalist manner.

Although there was a very positive portrayal of the Curriculum and Standards components in the final issue there was only a passing reference to the accountability dimension of the framework. It had been a focus in the first bulletin but there was little discussion in the following issues aside from an announcement that the accountability component was being developed ‘through consultation with appropriate groups, including an Assessment and Accountability Experts Working Group and the Monitoring Student Achievement Reference Committee’ (Issue 3, September 1999, p. 4). It does not seem that widespread community consultation is a feature of this aspect of the framework. The final issue of *Curriculum SA* (Issue 8, November 2000, p. 6) noted that ‘plans are in place to trial the Learner Achievement Software in the beginning stages of the implementation of the framework.’ Thus far, this software has not been distributed to teachers and the accountability components of the framework remain a mystery.

**SACSA ‘legitimises middle schooling’**

*Curriculum SA* highlighted the education community’s participation in the curriculum making process in ways that implied high levels of involvement and significant agreement with the major directions and emphases of the exercise. However, interviews conducted with four very experienced state school teachers in the middle years band of schooling revealed varying levels of participation, and perspectives which expose many tensions and conflicts surrounding curriculum construction.¹ Mary, a Year 5/6 teacher in a metropolitan primary school, recalled that her school responded to the first draft of the framework but Jill, a Year 8 and Physical Education teacher in a rural area school, was not involved in the review process at all. Both teachers are currently being familiarised with the framework through school based professional development. Sue, the middle school coordinator at a rural high school, worked with colleagues to respond to successive drafts of the framework and also provided individual feedback via the DETE website. Her high school used the curriculum review process to access funding and resources for professional development that would facilitate the implementation of middle schooling. Sue searched for opportunities ‘to help people shift in thinking and the way they were teaching’ and to this end the school successfully applied to become a ‘contracted services school’. Teachers were given some funding to develop units of

¹ This research was undertaken as part of a grant funded by Flinders University. Pseudonyms have been provided for all of the teachers.
work using the essential learnings in the SACSA Framework. The fourth interviewee, Crystal, coordinates a network of middle schools across the state and she formally participated in the curriculum review process as a member of the middle years band reference group. The membership of this group was diverse. There were representatives from all school sectors, parents’ organisations, universities, curriculum superintendents and principals’ associations, and the Aboriginal Education and Gender Equity units. The main purpose of the group was to advise the steering committee.

In particular, the Curriculum Band Reference Group will consider how all of the components of the framework for a particular band interrelate so that the developmental characteristics of learners and the nature of teaching and learning contexts for the band are appropriately addressed (Curriculum SA, Issue 2, August 1999, p. 3).

Crystal was able to provide the reference group with valuable information about innovative teaching and research in middle schooling but there was some disquiet among members about the extent to which the steering committee and curriculum writers heeded their advice. Crystal recalled that time and again the middle years band reference group argued that in order to support one of the key tenets of middle schooling, integrated curriculum, the SACSA Framework should be constructed around the essential learnings rather than the KLAs. The steering committee acknowledged that ‘many’ held to this view but ‘it was concluded that this proposal would constitute too radical a shift to take in one step’ (Curriculum SA, Issue 5, March 2000, p. 3).

In February 2001 the interviewees, along with all state school teachers, were issued with two large SACSA folders containing items such as the general introduction, curriculum accountability statement, band introductions and scope and standards overview charts. Material pertaining to the KLAs was distributed in due course and after six months of coming to terms with the new framework the interviewees are currently positive about its potential to support middle schooling. Crystal argues that the middle years band recognises that ‘the middle years of schooling is a formal and discrete phase of schooling’. Furthermore, it ‘means that the Department has recognised that this middle schooling movement is not a fad and it won’t go away.’ She stated that the existence of the middle years band is ‘very encouraging for teachers who have been working in the area for a long time.’ Two of these teachers, Jill and Sue, agree wholeheartedly. Jill argues that the framework is consistent with her work in middle schooling over the past eight years or so: ‘It’s great … it’s want we want to do.’ For Sue the existence of the middle years band ‘is useful for us because it … legitimises middle schooling. Instead of us saying middle schooling is useful … we can now say SACSA is saying this is the way we will teach young adolescents.’ Mary also acknowledges that middle schooling now has a ‘context’ and that the framework is a credible reference ‘for schools who want to set up a middle school system or methodology.’

Besides giving general support for the middle schooling movement, Jill and Sue highlighted the SACSA Framework’s focus on students. Jill stated that the framework ‘caters for individual students. It’s a curriculum that you look at your students and say what group have I got and what are their needs?’ Sue reflected: ‘all of the emphasis from my reading is that it is student centred, not subject-centred or learning area centred and
so I guess that fits with what we’re aiming for in middle schooling which is student centred, outcome based, emphasis on relationships, constructivist theory … and negotiation with students.’ Nevertheless, Crystal had some reservations that recent research about students at risk did not inform the curriculum writing process sufficiently.

Some interviewees see the essential learnings as an important stimulus for middle schooling because of their potential to direct teachers towards a student-centred rather than subject-centred focus on learning. Sue’s work with the essential learnings as part of the curriculum trials has given her confidence that teachers and students will be able to engage with them meaningfully. Crystal is also supportive of the essential learnings because ‘they represent a non-discipline based view of learning’ and as such they ‘could make the acquisition of knowledge more wholistic’. Nevertheless, she is concerned that the essential learnings are only one set of perspectives that teachers will be expected to weave into the KLAs in the SACSA Framework. These are the equity and cross-curriculum perspectives, vocational and enterprise education and the key competencies. According to Crystal, ‘enterprise attributes, key competencies and the essential learnings are rippling through the framework in a free fall way which is confusing … if this is a truly radical framework why not go with the essential learnings?’ Perhaps the uncertain status of the essential learnings can be gauged from Mary and Jill’s interviews. Mary did not mention them at all and in Jill’s school teachers in the middle years are currently focusing on the key competencies with the view to incorporating them into their programming and planning, and reporting to parents.

Explicating complexities

All of the interviewees identified positive features of the SACSA Framework but none of them portrayed it in the same glowing terms as the final issue of Curriculum SA. Instead they were more likely to see it as contiguous with its predecessors, the Attainment Levels and national curriculum. Given that these are very experienced teachers they were able to identify and explicate some of the complexities of the current curriculum struggles for middle schooling and for teachers and education generally.

Some of Crystal’s misgivings relate to the fact that the SACSA Framework is organised around the KLAs. Her activism in middle schooling over a long period has centred on making learning more wholistic for students. ‘During all of that time we thought we were reducing the stranglehold that the subject disciplines had on the construction of knowledge, curriculum and assessment in the middle years. When a new framework comes out and it still has those old-world divisions … it’s a bit disappointing.’ Notwithstanding their support for the essential learnings, both Crystal and Sue are skeptical about the capacity of this new aspect of the framework to impact on the KLAs. Sue is concerned that secondary teachers ‘will just look at their learning area … and ignore the cross-curriculum perspectives and ignore the essential learnings.’ Crystal also pointed out the much of the professional development which accompanies the framework is being carried out by CEASA which is an umbrella organisation for professional associations, many of them representing secondary subject area teachers. Sue and Jill expressed their reservations about some secondary teachers’ willingness and capacity to focus their programming and planning on students’ needs rather than subject
content, and to use methodologies which are consistent with the framework’s recommendations. For Mary, the primary teacher, issues of programming and planning are of a different order. She is not only a generalist teacher but also her current role as a Year 5/6 teacher means that she must implement both the primary years and middle years band in her classroom.

Another significant issue for all of the interviewees is the extent to which the SACSA Framework will be implemented, if at all. Some of their qualms stem from the current economic and political climate in South Australia. In view of the impending state election, Mary questioned the extent to which a change of minister of education or CEO might mediate the process of implementation. Crystal, Jill and Sue drew on their experience to claim that secondary teachers did not embrace the Attainment Levels or national curriculum and ‘were not called to task’ whereas primary teachers grappled with both initiatives. Mary did not mention secondary teachers but wonders whether the SACSA Framework will suffer the same fate as its predecessors and be abandoned ‘a couple of years down the track for something new.’ Finally, Crystal contemplated the opposite extreme, that is that the framework ‘will be so rigidly and so rigorously implemented that it will stultify what is a really innovative and exciting time for students and teachers in the middle years.’

Allied with curriculum implementation is the ever-present concern about the accountability dimension of the SACSA Framework. This new but as yet unknown component featured in each of the interviews in different ways. Mary did not specify her concerns but noted that from the beginning of the curriculum review process accountability has been a significant issue for some of her primary school colleagues. Sue registered a positive note when she said that ‘because the accountability component won’t be released until next year we’ve been able to step aside from that and say we’re not looking at reporting and assessment.’ In 2001 the focus in her high school is on teaching and learning rather than assessing. However, she contends that the standards should not be set at years 6, 8 and 10. She argues that years 5, 7 and 9 provide better ‘endpoints’ at which to assess students’ progress, year 5 being the end of the primary years band, year 7 is the end of primary schooling in South Australia and year 9 is the end of the middle years band. Given that basic skills tests are already administered at years 3, 5 and 7, and could soon extend to year 9, setting the standards at years 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 will necessitate state-wide reporting of student achievement in virtually every year of schooling. Jill’s principal concern about the SACSA Framework relates to student assessment. She would agree with Cherry Collins that all students’ learning does not proceed along the same path and she claims that the standards are ‘too specific … like students must be at the same level by this stage of their development. I don’t agree with that.’ However, along with the other interviewees, she admits that she does not know much about the accountability dimension. Last but not least, Crystal stated that ‘it is very reasonable that teachers should be accountable for the ways they construct courses but it would seem that if they are going to be accountable then they should have more say in how these frameworks look. The frameworks should reflect more of what’s happening in the classroom. And teachers should be given more financial support to have time to read the 250 pages of the framework.’

Crystal’s reflections on the accountability component are indicative of issues that transcend the current curriculum struggles in South Australia. For more than a decade
teachers’ knowledge and experience have not been used effectively in the process of curriculum policy making or construction. They were marginalised from the construction of the Attainment Levels and the national curriculum, and notwithstanding the rhetoric in *Curriculum SA* (Issue 8, November 2000, p. 5) about curriculum development being a ‘truly collaborative process’, this paper has demonstrated that key decisions about the scope and structure of the framework were made by senior personnel in DETE without widespread consultation. Furthermore, the construction and trialling of the framework occurred at such a pace that few people were given time to engage meaningfully with any aspect of the process. Now in 2001 teachers are being expected to come to terms with its intricacies and begin implementation in the context of, firstly, diminishing support for professional development, secondly, the intensification of their work, and thirdly, a politically uncertain climate.

As noted previously, most of DETE’s curriculum officers were relocated to teaching positions in 1999 so there are very few people whose work encompasses professional development for teachers. Much of this work is now subject to commercial arrangements and each state school teacher is expected to complete 37.5 hours of professional development per year, outside working hours. DETE has provided some funding to district superintendents to familiarise teachers like Mary and Jill with the framework at the school level. In keeping with their proactive stance, Crystal and Sue are conducting professional development for colleagues. Sue acknowledges that her high school has ‘had a lot of support … but not as much as we would like.’ Thus far, Crystal is ‘reserving judgment’ on the extent, utility and significance of DETE’s current initiatives for teachers’ professional development.

If there is one persistent refrain in the interviewees’ comments it is that there is no time to get to know and effectively use the framework. To begin with, all commented that the SACSA folders are cumbersome and that it is difficult to find time for professional reading. Given the context of ‘more and more pressure’, coming to terms with both the primary and middle years bands has been an ‘onerous’ task for Mary. Here it should be noted that primary teachers have less non-instructional time (NIT) than secondary teachers do in South Australia. This anomaly has been ‘huge problem over the years’ for Jill, a primary trained teacher who works in the secondary section of her area school. She stated that ‘some of the senior staff haven’t liked me teaching a secondary subject. It infringes on their NIT.’ Sue pointed out that time was a particularly significant issue in the middle years ‘as we are encouraging teaming, and programming and planning across curriculum areas.’ And Crystal linked the intensification of teachers’ work and diminishing resources with the astute observation that ‘no one is actually supporting teachers with money to take the time to read the framework.’

Last but not least, tenured state school teachers’ working conditions are sometimes unstable and those in contract employment have no long term security at all. These uncertainties are evident in the interviewees’ strategic engagement with the SACSA framework. Jill is the only interviewee who claims to have read the General Introduction thoroughly. She must leave her area school under the ‘ten year tenure’ rule this year and hopes that her well informed stance will be an advantage in the competition for a long term teaching position. The alternative is to be placed in temporary positions ad infinitum. Mary is keen to find an administrative position and Crystal’s current role as a coordinator is a year-by-year placement. Sue is a contract
teacher and must find another job by the end of 2002. She hopes that her dedication to middle schooling and to the SACSA Framework will help her in this endeavour. All of these teachers are committed to their teaching careers and their middle years students in spite of these unsettling situations and their increasing workloads. Perhaps it is time that DETE respected and valued its employees more highly.

**Conclusion**

Given the economic and political climate in which South Australia’s current curriculum struggles are being played out, and the complex issues canvassed by the interviewees, will the SACSA Framework be a fillip for middle schooling? Notwithstanding the claims made by *Curriculum SA*, this paper has demonstrated the framework was constructed in similar vein to its predecessors, the Attainment Levels and national curriculum. In all cases senior personnel made key decisions and teachers were not central to the process of constructing each curriculum project. However, the interviewees see the introduction of the middle years band as an important step in legitimising and strengthening the middle schooling movement in South Australia. The framework’s student-centred focus, advocacy of constructivism and methodologies which are consistent with middle schooling have also been highlighted but interviewees are ambivalent about the potential of the essential learnings to mediate the KLAs, particularly in secondary schools. As state schools move into the implementation phase of the framework, the interviewees’ immediate concerns centre on the uncertain economic and political climate, the yet-to-be revealed accountability dimension of the framework and the minimal support for professional development. At this stage it is too early to provide a definitive answer about the framework’s potential to support middle schooling but each of these very experienced teachers indicate that there are ongoing issues pertaining to DETE policy and practice, teachers’ cultures and work and, last but not least, students as learners which transcend the current curriculum struggles. If teachers’ knowledge and experience were to become central rather than marginal to curriculum review and development perhaps such a framework would support middle schooling more successfully.

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