Educational change: A never ending story?

Clare McBeath  
*Curtin University*  
Lindsay Nicholson  
*West Coast College of TAFE*

**Abstract**

For most of this decade the Australian National Training Reform Agenda has seen enormous changes in the training sector of education. The major thrusts have been towards corporatisation of training institutions and industry control of curriculum standards, structures and materials. Framing the future, at TAFE college level, is seen in terms of new quality management systems, devolution of control and financial responsibility to amalgamated college clusters, fast track promotion for staff with corporate managerial experience, and all the perceived trappings of competitive big business. At the curriculum level, training courses are expected to be industry driven, competency based, modular, individualised, flexible and, strangely, “just in time”.

This paper looks at some recent research into the effect these changes are having on teachers, specifically in terms of the difficulty of implementing new curricula within a climate of rapid change. Two case studies were conducted within the Electrical and Furniture Trades training areas. Semi structured interviews were held with Program Managers and implementers, and the transcripts analysed for the factors which are making change so difficult.
Educational change: A never ending story?

Clare McBeath  
*Curtin University*  
Lindsay Nicholson  
*West Coast College of TAFE*

---

**Introduction**

For most of this decade the Australian National Training Reform Agenda has been driving enormous changes in the training sector of education. There has been a dual thrust towards corporatisation of training institutions and industry control of curriculum standards, structures and materials.

Framing the future, at TAFE college level, is seen in terms of quality management systems, devolution of control and financial responsibility to amalgamated college clusters, fast track promotion for staff with corporate managerial experience, and all the perceived trappings of competitive big business. At the level of teaching and learning, training courses are expected to be industry driven, competency based, modular, individualised, flexible and, for some strange reason, “just in time”.

Whether the changes have been useful, or whether indeed, any real change has actually occurred, is certainly open to debate. That the attempted changes have caused stress, anger and falling morale in TAFE colleges cannot be disputed.

Certainly as we draw to the end of the decade, there is growing evidence coming from socio-psychological research, that economic rationalism is not the way to a better society. National prosperity, this research contends, is more likely to flow from a belief in the quality of life, based on intrinsic values and goals, and not on the unquestioning pursuit of economic growth and efficiency (Hamilton, 1999). It is possible that the rush to reform in the 1990s will prove to be little more than a painful waste of time.

As the current changes now enter their second decade, and will continue into the next millennium, it is fitting to stand back and have a closer look the change process and what we can learn from it.

**Curriculum change**

This paper will focus on curriculum change in particular. In some ways it is difficult to separate curriculum change from administrative and managerial change, but by examining the process of curriculum *dissemination* from the point of view of the users of curriculum, it is possible to isolate a curriculum perspective.

Dissemination can be described as the process of *informing* teachers about new or revised curriculum ideas, documents or materials, so that they *understand* and *accept* the innovation. It is seen as important at all stages of the change process, but essential
during initiation and implementation (see figure 1).

Figure 1 Stages of curriculum change and the importance of dissemination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
<th>Stage 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>Mobilisation</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Incorporation</td>
<td>Routinisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutionalisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research on the characteristics and difficulties of curriculum change spans 25 years. Changing an education system was identified as problematic as early as the 1970s (Fullan, 1972; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). This early work pointed to important elements missing in the management of change which resulted in widespread misuse or disuse of curriculum innovations in schools. Researchers seeking reasons for the failure of many of the large curriculum projects of the 1960s and 1970s, looked initially to change theories from outside education, (Havelock, 1969; 1973; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). They came up with a variety of personality, organisational, communication and cultural factors thought to be important for the success or failure of implementation of new curriculum products (Rudduck, 1973; 1980; 1991; Olson, 1980; Loucks & Lieberman, 1983; Huberman & Miles, 1984). The concepts of the diffusion, dissemination and implementation of new knowledge and practice were explored and their importance in the change process confirmed through research.

British curriculum scholars in particular, stressed the importance of a strong participative role for teachers in curriculum development and change (Kelly, 1982; MacDonald & Rudduck, 1971; MacDonald & Walker 1976; Olson, 1980; Rudduck, 1991; Stenhouse, 1975). They saw teacher input, collaboration in development and ownership as the most important ingredients for bringing about lasting change.

Rudduck (1991) pointed out that, while it remains difficult to define, the term ownership is a word that makes people feel that they are participating in worthwhile communal action. It inspires a “collective confidence” (p.123). Rudduck is supported by United States and Australian scholars (Marsh & Huberman, 1984; Fullan, 1991; Kennedy, 1985 for instance) in contending that teacher ownership can exist side by side with central initiative and direction, and that ownership can legitimately be claimed by both teachers and central administration. The most important element in achieving successful change, according to the literature, is the transfer of “meaning” from the developer to the teacher. Teachers need to reconstruct the innovation in a way which has meaning to themselves and their students before change can occur.
Twenty five years of internationally published research into curriculum change in the schools sector tells us that if teachers do not understand or accept mandated changes, they will not implement them into their classrooms according to the intentions of the reformers. In this case, it is contended that TAFE teachers and industry trainers will not implement the reforms according to the intentions of the Australian National Training Authority. More important still, teachers will be stressed and not producing their best work, and students inevitably will suffer. If students do not benefit from either the old or the new training program, they will enter industry ill prepared and in the long run, Australian industry itself will be the loser.

The earlier research

The issues and difficulties of curriculum change in the TAFE sector have been monitored for much of this decade (McBeath 1997a; 1997b; 1997c). This research included a series of studies into the current wave of curriculum change in VET in Western Australia and a series of reports on the findings were published. It focused on the importance of dissemination as a central strategy in the curriculum change process and how its neglect impacted on the understanding and degree of adoption by users.

As the Australian national training reform agenda gathered strength, the research found that the issue became increasingly important as a factor influencing teacher understanding and acceptance of the changes expected by government and industry.

The research established that VET lecturers needed more and better communication, collaboration, interaction, and opportunities for feedback. They claimed however, that they suffered adversely from poor professional development, lack of funds and few opportunities to become involved in the development process. The problems identified included

1. a lack of information about curriculum development
2. a lack of involvement in curriculum development
3. an unnecessary complexity of change at one time
4. a need for development of teaching materials and resources to support innovation
5. insufficient staff development, time or support structures
6. a lack of formative evaluation and feedback before and during implementation

The areas of greatest concern for lecturers having to cope with innovation were delineated. The majority of lecturers were not strongly concerned with the occupational or training needs analysis stage, or with communicating directly with industry. They believed, however, that it was essential to know in advance when major curriculum development is to begin in their study area, and about any changes planned in course structure, or educational changes such as modularisation, flexible delivery strategies, self pacing or competency based assessment. They needed to know when the course was planned to begin. They wanted inservice development on any new skills needed in teaching the new course, staff meetings to share and discuss course ideas and the opportunity to give feedback on the innovation to senior staff. Finally, they needed to be given release time from teaching to develop resources and teaching materials, and to share and discuss them. These factors were regarded as essential and need to be built
into any model for managing curriculum innovation.

A model was developed using the concepts of coordinated top-down leadership and bottom-up user participation. The model included the provision of information, involvement and support to assist lecturers to understand and accept innovation on their own terms. It removed as many of the known constraints as possible, and endeavoured to work as comfortably as possible within those which could not be removed. It set up strategies and tactics to encourage teacher participation and ownership, to involve them in the study of their own practice, and to break down feelings of alienation and resistance (McBeath, 1997c).

The trial of the model ascertained that good dissemination strategies did facilitate the change process and provide ownership to a greater number of lecturers. On the other hand, the trial indicated that there would always be busy teachers who could not avail themselves of the facilities and would still struggle with implementation when innovation was introduced.

These studies covered a period of intensive curriculum reform in Australia. The results were widely publicised and discussed, and it was hoped that the findings might have had some effect on the change process in the VET system. To ascertain whether the range of administrative, management, financial and quality reforms introduced into TAFE colleges during the last eight years had made any significant difference to the quality of curriculum dissemination, two further case studies were recently undertaken.

The new case studies

The purpose of the new study was to determine if the process had changed or had become any easier since the earlier interviews. A secondary aim was to compare the behaviour of teachers who were going through a second or third wave of reform, that is the Electrical study area, with others who were implementing change for the first time, in this case the Furniture trades area.

A sample of teaching staff and Program Managers from the Electrical Trades and Furniture Trades in a TAFE college were interviewed in depth on their recent experience of curriculum change and its impact on their implementation of curriculum innovation. Both areas of study were implementing nationally accredited, competency based, modular courses. Eight interviews were conducted, four from each study area.

The changes in both study areas were not so much a change of content, rather than a re-arrangement of content. In both cases the fundamental principles of the core training were unaltered. The major change was in the structure of the courses. The two new curricula were modular in structure, built around industry developed competency based learning outcomes, and underpinned with a degree of flexibility and self-pacing.

The Electrical teachers were eight years down the track from the major curriculum change they had experienced with the original introduction of national, competency based, modular courses. They had been one of the first study areas to enter the reform process at the beginning of the decade. In 1998 they had entered a second round of
national reform, with significant restructuring of the course in response to newly revised learning outcomes and the need for new materials to support them.

Staff members from the Furniture Trades were undergoing a far more fundamental curriculum change, similar to that which had occurred in the Electrical Trades in 1991. A new, nationally accredited, competency based training system was being implemented, complete with self-paced, flexible delivery and the requirement of lecturers to facilitate rather than teach.

The lecturers from both study areas were asked about the level and quality of communication they had with the developers, industry representatives and each other. They were asked also about the usefulness of any dissemination strategies used in the change process and what suggestions they might make for improving these if they were to go through curriculum change again. (Appendix A) A Program Manager from each trade area was questioned on the dissemination strategies used and how successful they thought they had been. (Appendix B)

**Communication within the change process**

The researchers were not surprised to hear once again the language of frustration and anger in the responses of the lecturers as they struggled to come to grips with changes which they felt had been thrust on them from elsewhere. Lecturers’ roles were unclear and they were experiencing the ambiguity and stress typical of top-down mandated change. They distrusted the decision makers and resented not being included in the decision making process.

All of the respondents were aware that there was a new curriculum being developed. There was, however, a marked difference in the level of awareness between the two study areas. Staff in the Electrical Trades appeared to have a superficial awareness of the new curriculum. They had become aware largely through informal means, and had only a relatively minor involvement in the development of the new curriculum. One lecturer had been a co-writer for a national module. While there had been a considerable amount of curriculum development undertaken in the electrical section, this did not form part of the national curriculum development. The local development, largely undertaken by one writer, outside of duty time, was in the form of written resource materials and assessment items. These resource materials were produced as an alternative to the nationally produced material, which was deemed to be largely unsuitable.

Conversely, lecturers from Furniture Trades appeared to have been well informed about the curriculum and were either deeply involved in the early development of it, or had been given the opportunity to be involved in the development of it. This involvement included the writing of industry profiles, the writing of national module descriptors, the editing of produced material and the production of national resource material.

In both trade areas, most staff wanted to be involved in the curriculum development. For one lecturer it was a natural occurrence to be involved because of his position as a study area leader, another lecturer did not want a national system imposed on him, so became
involved in order to have some input. Yet another lecturer would like to have been involved in any policies that might have effected the workplace. Of those lecturers who did not want to be involved, reasons related to too many other changes going on at the time and the lack of any work release time in a time of high pressure within the workplace.

The formal means through which information about the curriculum reached lecturers varied markedly between the two trade areas. In terms of the Electrical Trades area, the resource materials were the major method of formal information regarding the curriculum. Lecturers were given resource notes on which to base the delivery of the new curriculum. Dissemination strategies such as staff development, skills training, meetings and planning the implementation were largely absent. Resource notes were either nationally developed materials or, in the majority of cases, locally produced materials. Local materials were written in response to the national learning outcomes. Content was essentially similar to national material, however presentation and expository material was quite different and generally more expansive. Lecturers had a feedback role to play in the curriculum implementation, however, this feedback role was not part of a piloting program. The actual course had been implemented in its entirety. The feedback role was limited to a local level, addressing only typographical or content errors in the locally produced material, which could then be rectified on an ongoing basis. There was no feedback role to the national curriculum, in a structural sense, undertaken by any of the Electrical Trade lecturers.

The situation in the Furniture Trades was quite different. In terms of staff development, lecturers were involved in the earliest stages of the curriculum implementation. This staff development involved seminars and specific sessions with the Industry Training Council, project managers and selected driving personnel. Staff development occurred only at the initial stages of the implementation not at a later time. One lecturer, who had not received any staff development, noted that lecturers experienced the same problems with the curriculum, whether they had received staff development or not.

There was no skills training acknowledged by the Furniture Trades lecturers. In fact, one lecturer was so frustrated and confused by the information given regarding the curriculum, that a trip to the Eastern states was organised to actually see how the curriculum was delivered.

Informal meetings were the main means through which information regarding the curriculum reached the majority of lecturing staff. One lecturer attended numerous meetings in the Eastern states and relayed information to local staff. These meetings were conducted in lecturers’ lunch breaks, were informal and largely focused on addressing the problems that were already being experienced by lecturers.

There was no involvement in the planning of the curriculum. It had already been established in the Eastern states, with the local implementation based on that model. Operational planning, however, highlighted distinct problems in terms of the self-pacing and flexibility aspects of the curriculum being delivered within the confines of the physical layout of buildings and time allocation to specific areas.
Resource development included the writing, editing and illustration of modules, the development of assessment banks, and generally overcoming omissions in the material provided. Some lecturers had been given specific time allowances for this work, whilst much of the work was left up to the lecturers to fit in with normal duties.

The curriculum was not piloted locally. As a result there was no feedback role, in a piloting sense, for lecturers. A major problem highlighted by the lack of feedback was identified as the lecturers not understanding their role in the new curriculum. There was a lot of confusion, with again, lunch time meetings being the forum of discussion for these problems.

Dissemination strategies

The Electrical Trades lecturers noted an absence of dissemination strategies. The fact that the new curriculum did not largely change in content, more in presentation, meant that the lecturers relied heavily on their experience to overcome delivery problems. It was acknowledged that such a situation would, however, be very difficult for beginning teachers. Staff development was posited as the strategy that might have been most helpful. Comparisons were made between a previous curriculum implementation (pre 1991), where outcomes were specific and easily interpreted, with a considerable amount of time dedicated to implementing the curriculum. In the case of the current curriculum, however, the outcomes were broad and difficult to interpret, with little if any time to implement it.

Furniture Trade lectures acknowledged that the dissemination strategies they experienced helped them understand the curriculum. However, based on a number of reservations regarding the course, it was evident that they had not necessarily accepted the curriculum. One lecturer commented that he accepted it simply because it was a case of having to.

The implementation of the Furniture Trades new curriculum was delayed for 12 months. Even with such a delay, the implementation did not go smoothly. Major problems were identified in terms of the inferior quality of the resource materials and the associated management structure. Until they started using the resource materials, lecturers did not realise how bad they actually were and how much work might be required to rectify them. Management structures and building layouts that were based on the old curriculum model did not allow for the flexibility required in the new curriculum. It was apparent that there was not enough time to address these issues in the implementation process.

How the lecturers felt about the change process

Lecturers were questioned on their personal feelings regarding aspects of the curriculum. Responses were generally on two levels, firstly a section level and secondly a strategic level.

Ownership

Electrical lecturers experienced negative feelings in terms of a sense of ownership and a
sense of participation. One lecturer who had been involved in writing a module had experienced ownership in terms of that specific module, but not in the overall curriculum.

Some of the Furniture Trade lecturers, on the other hand, claimed that they did develop a sense of ownership of the new curriculum. This sense of ownership was expressed from a lecturer who had been heavily involved in the early development as well as a lecturer who had not been involved at all in the early stages of development. From those lecturers involved in the early development, there was an underlying dissatisfaction with the course. One of those lecturers, though having had early involvement did not experience a sense of ownership, instead suggesting that “we seemed to go off half cocked at the start to get hold of the new curriculum”.

**Participation**
In terms of participation in the curriculum development, content and structure, feelings of Electrical Trade lecturers have been quite negative. Where lecturers were involved in the writing of modules, the sense of participation was more positive.

Furniture Trade lecturers generally experienced positive feelings of participation, however at times this was mixed, “…. Positive sometimes and others, this is simply garbage and I’m going through the motions”.

**Planning**
In the Electrical section planning of the curriculum has been met with an overall negative response. A contrast was made between positive feelings at the local planning level and negative feelings at the strategic level, “I mean they were only hoping that we would get on with our job, they don’t want to know”.

Furniture Trade staff experienced distinctly negative feelings, “The whole thing was a botch up from the start”, “The process was back to front”, “No one is prepared to listen”. Such comments reflect the poor level of planning, organisation and co-ordination experienced.

**Student response**
Electrical lecturers experienced negative feelings with respect to students’ responses to the curriculum. For many students the material content level was far too high for their experience at such an early stage in their apprenticeships. General positive feelings were attributed more to young people progressing through their training rather than the impact of the curriculum on that training.

Furniture Trades lecturers generally experienced negative feelings in terms of student responses. Perhaps the top one third of students responded positively, however, the remainder generally did not respond well to the new curriculum. Students who completed work were not able to move to other areas to progress. One lecturer cited students who had completed part of the course on the old and part on the new curriculum, who stated that the new curriculum was markedly inferior.

Electrical lecturers experienced negative feelings in terms of the students suffering.
Lecturers believed students experienced stress, frustration and anguish unnecessarily. Such feelings were a result of an increased workload, less time to deliver modules and complete the work along with a marked increase in testing.

All of the Furniture Trade lecturers experienced negative feelings in terms of students suffering. One lecturer believed that the training was not as good as it used to be, but they were getting better at it because “… we are gravitating back to the old methods.” Another lecturer believed that the present system has “… let the poor performer off the hook and penalised the potential craftsman.”

**Support**

Electrical lecturers experienced positive feelings regarding support, but only from colleagues at the section level. An absence of strategic support was highlighted, along with an enormous increase in testing procedures with little, if any support.

Similarly, Furniture Trade lecturers experienced support from colleagues at a local level. Support at the strategic level and support in terms of the curriculum structure were both associated with negative feelings.

**Resources**

A similar situation occurred in terms of resources. At the local level, in terms of theory notes produced, there were generally positive feelings, but at the strategic level, lecturers suggested there was no funding or resources initially, but that through local arrangements this situation improved.

Furniture trade lecturers experienced negative feelings in terms of the resources. The lecturer who had been heavily involved in the writing of modules, however, suggested that the resources were better than they had ever had before.

**Isolation**

Electrical lecturers experienced a sense of isolation from the drivers of the curriculum. They didn’t know who the people driving the development were, neither did they have confidence that the developers knew what they were doing. At the section level, however, all lecturers were in the same boat, and thus there was not a sense of isolation.

Furniture Trade lecturers also experienced a real sense of isolation. “The staff generally feel that the new system is not as good as the old, but there is absolutely nobody who wants to listen, and there is no forum where you can bring these things out, so we are isolated”.

**Communication**

In terms of communication, there was a distinct lack of communication at the strategic level, with lecturers experiencing negative feelings in this regard. Again, however, there was good communication occurring at the section level, engendering positive feelings.

A similar situation was apparent in the Furniture Trades, where …. “through colleagues it was essentially how are you getting on with this, that etc? Essentially we were stuck
with it and we had to make it work”.

**Time delays**

Time delays highlighted negative feelings with lecturers in terms of a lack of resources and the time it took to get resources for modules. One lecturer noted that while the theory notes for modules were available, they only represented a small portion of the curriculum, the negative feelings were in the time delays for the rest of the curriculum. Another lecturer suggested that for new lecturers “… starting from scratch, going in at the level that the curriculum required would have been dynamite”.

Furniture Trade lecturers experienced time delays in a number of areas. There were time delays at the strategic level, there were delays in finding information that should have been in the resource materials, and there were delays in getting results to students. “There was simply too much assessment, where do you start and where do you stop with your recording. We were trying to develop a system of recording, we didn’t know what was set up in terms of records or examinations etc.”

**Complexity**

The complexity of the curriculum also highlighted negative feelings. The curriculum was seen to be too complex for the student, in terms of the high level of work to be covered at the beginning of their training. The curriculum was also perceived to be complex for lecturers in terms of delivering material that was beyond students who did not possess pre-requisite skills, compounded by an insufficient amount of delivery time.

Furniture Trade lecturers experienced negative feelings in three distinct areas with respect to complexity. Firstly, the complexity of the modular system meant that the lecturers ended up selecting the modules in courses, not the industry, as was the original intent. Secondly, “… it is not a complex system, but it is made complex in that… staff are asked to work in a flexible environment within a rock solid [management] system that will not change to cater for it.” Thirdly, “… for the students, much of it is definitely too complex.”

**Resource development**

Electrical lecturers also experienced very negative feelings in terms of resource development, some suggesting that there wasn’t any, others citing insufficient time and money.

... in terms of curriculum, that is not being resourced. Physical resources, field testing, practical testing, that is not being resourced and that is what is missing. ... The curriculum is far more than just the notes, there is much needed in the form of resources. The curriculum must include the resources.

Lecturers from Furniture Trades also seemed to experience negative feelings with regard to resource development. While one lecturer responded positively, it was qualified with “… but there was never enough time to develop all of the resources correctly.”
The dissemination process

When reflecting on how they might improve future dissemination processes, lecturers did not separate the curriculum processes of development, implementation or dissemination. Such a situation indicates the lecturers’ broad concerns regarding the recent curriculum implementation.

Involvement from the beginning of the development was highlighted as lacking. Greater involvement in terms both of the overall organisation of the curriculum development, implementation and dissemination, along with involvement in the development of resources and materials was highly regarded.

Issues related to the curriculum implementation were a lack of resources, insufficient delivery time, unsuitable resource materials, a lack of recording procedures and a lack of a pilot process.

Insufficient time lag between the development of the curriculum and the implementation of it was one dissemination strategy identified as lacking. There was insufficient time to become aware of the new curriculum and develop necessary resources and infrastructure required to manage it. There was also insufficient time to ensure that all of the information being presented was in fact correct. Meetings, where people could discuss problems and develop solutions were seen as important, as was the development of sample materials with explanations. Such materials would illustrate how the curriculum would be used and lecturers would better understand their roles.

Comparing the first and second change

A number of new features had emerged since the earlier research. The first became obvious from the experience of the Electrical trades as they wrestled with their second round of national reform. Their earlier experience of change had had an effect on their level of confidence as they began the next. While they were far from happy, and were still expressing confusion and stress, they appeared to be working more closely with each other. Several of the interviewees referred to the significance of their past experience to help them through the current change. They spoke more trustingly of the Program Manager than the earlier studies had identified. There appeared to be better local support structures and the Program Manager was more concerned. Indeed, in both programs the program managers were more aware of the change process and appeared to be working more closely with the lecturers and more conscientiously to help them through it.

The electrical staff were far more inward looking this time around. They appeared to have erected real barriers of distrust against the writers of the new national outcome statements, those who were doing this to them. On the other hand their self confidence had grown and they were doing far more to support each other, to meet and discuss things. There appeared to be a more distinct sense of “them and us” this time around. The local scene had clearly isolated itself from the systemic and national reform movement. Lecturers were holding frequent informal meetings, often in their lunch breaks, to overcome the problems of implementation. All others outside the college had
become “those people” in the sense that they were unknown, not very clever and probably untrustworthy! This characteristic had definitely strengthened since the earlier research.

A second area of difference was that management issues were confused with curriculum issues, and indeed in conflict with them. Because both administrative and management reforms were occurring at the same time as national curriculum reform, it is not surprising that staff could not easily distinguish between the two sets of issues. From their perspective, both were bringing about changes which had the potential to affect them.

One example was the perceived need for facilitators to teach the new work. This is because management had decreed that lecturers and instructors should become facilitators, without realising that professional teachers were already able to facilitate when facilitation was appropriate, and choose other teaching learning strategies when they were called for.

Another example was the attempt to outsource the development of new materials to the lowest bidder. This was a management directive, based on principles of economic rationalism and management approaches to efficiency. What was ignored was the curriculum principle which calls for collaboration and ownership of materials within the realm of those who will use them.

There was further inconsistency in the interpretation of, and the need for flexibility. The new materials required students to be able to move between theory and practice as they completed the competencies. It was important that they be able to do this without too much delay or restriction. However, the architecture of the College didn't allow for this. Workshops were separated from theory rooms and staff members were not able to be in two places at once when students needed to be supervised. Occupational health and safety in the Workshops may have been at issue. The curriculum required changes which management could not cope with and implementation of that aspect of the curriculum became impossible.

A third difference was the industrial climate in the training sector in Western Australia at that time. This is related to the previous point, in that the management reforms being put into place during the last few years have been leaving staff members feeling insecure and lacking in career mobility. Staff morale was low anyhow with the extent of curriculum reform required of them, but it occurred at a time when they had to apply competitively for their own jobs and when part time, short term contracts were becoming the normal way in which to employ new staff. This inevitably affected the quality of curriculum reform. As one of the Furniture lecturers expressed it,

There has been a lot of negative vibes in the current working environment. It has been very difficult to engender enthusiasm in colleagues. At times there has been an attitude of “to hell with it”.

**Conclusion**
The title of this paper implies that curriculum change might be a never ending story. Certainly the Australian Training reform agenda has been busy with curriculum reform for nearly a decade, and the process is still in progress. We use the word “reform” with caution, as the research literature indeed warns that much so called reform in education is often nothing more than the banner headline of politicians changing things for change’s sake, and very little actually gets any better (Macdonald, 1991). With strong research evidence of the pain and frustration the current wave of reform is causing in TAFE colleges, we need to step back for a while and ask seriously what actually has changed, how much students may have gained from the changes, and whether the changes indeed have been worth has been worth it to the industry which set them up initially.

References


Appendix A:
Semi-structured interview schedule for users of new curriculum

Curriculum dissemination is the process of informing teachers about a new curriculum so that they understand and accept it before they have to use it. It might include strategies such as involving teachers in development, users participating in trials, staff development activities or even formal marketing strategies.

1. Had you known that a new curriculum was being developed?  
What had you heard?  
Were you involved?  
Did you want to be involved?

2. How did formal information about the curriculum reach you? Describe the strategies.
   - staff development
   - skills training
   - meetings
   - planning the implementation
   - resources development
   - feedback role during pilot

3. Did these strategies help you
   - to understand the curriculum
   - to accept the curriculum
   - give you enough time to plan how you were going to use it?

4. Who played the most significant role in helping you to understand and accept the curriculum?
   - Program Manager?
   - Head of Department?
   - Colleagues
   - Someone else?
   Describe the role played.

5. When you began implementing the curriculum did you experience negative/positive feelings? Describe them.
Cues:

- sense of ownership
- sense of isolation
- participation
- lack of communication
- well planned
- time delays
- students responded well
- too complex
- good support
- students suffered
- good resources
- resources had to be produced

6. How useful do you think each of these dissemination strategies might have been in helping you overcome any problems you had?

- staff development
- skills training
- meetings
- planning the implementation
- resources development
- feedback role during pilot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invaluable</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Frustrating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. Rate the usefulness of the dissemination process overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invaluable</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Frustrating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. What suggestions would you make for improving the dissemination process if it were to happen again?
Appendix B:
Semi-structured interview schedule for Program Managers

Curriculum dissemination is the process of informing teachers about a new curriculum so that they understand and accept it before they have to use it. It might include strategies such as involving teachers in development, users participating in trials, staff development activities or even formal marketing strategies.

1. What curriculum projects have you been involved in during the last two (or three) years? [Specify exactly which project is being discussed in this interview]

2. What did you see as your role in these projects?

3. Please describe how curriculum dissemination occurred in the project(s) under discussion.

4. Which do you think were the most important strategies?

5. Do you think they were successful (enough)?

6. How might you change these strategies if you had to do it again?