Conversing for conversion:
Turning system wide curriculum into local curriculum reform

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The challenge of reforming curriculum within an education system remains as fresh today as it ever was when researchers began to seriously investigate the nature of what resulted from the implementation of innovations which had not been generated by those who were intended to put them into practice, and especially when innovations were being designed to attempt to strengthen educational rigour and outcomes or even bring about never-before-tried outcomes, or use new teaching techniques to represent new ways of conceiving of educational activity and learning processes. In several ways we are living in parallel educational times to those of the 1960s – 1970s since the education system is again being used by governments to seek to achieve economic and social objectives for the good of the nation. Australia has to be seen as a strong global player, and no state of Australia wants to be identified as falling behind in the competition stakes. Educational concerns have become readily identified with political concerns, and schools, teachers and students are being asked to perform for the sake of those concerns.

By the early 1990s, findings in the curriculum change literature were fairly clear:

- Change is accomplished by schools and teachers through self-determined modification or adaptation, problem solving, or even by creating their own curricula as a means of reforming education, with teachers receiving quality assistance from administrators, not by faithful adoption of externally developed innovations separated from the logic, psycho-logic, politics and conditions of individual settings.

- Teachers are an important key to the change process, not as a conduit for automatic change, or a problem to be overcome, nor as deficient in skills which could be rectified through explanatory and demonstrative inservice sessions. Rather, teachers are active decision makers in their own right, implementing innovations in varying ways at varying rates, able to help each other, and the school, to adapt to changes, and acting upon “logical” and reasoned grounds to create a successful and livable classroom environment, seeking security within a complex array of potentially uncontrollable factors.

- There are problems with traditional limited inservice activities, and teachers do not necessarily change their practices as a result of such inservice activities.
• Curriculum change cannot be isolated from the many dimensions of the school as an organisation, all of which influence the fate of the proposed change.

• Schools have “regularities” (Sarason, 1971) within their organisational arrangements, teaching practices and teacher thinking which are highly resistant to change. Stability tends to come through the “local contexts, histories, and organizational cultures” (Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone, 1988, p. 141) of individual schools, and through teachers’ “practical pedagogy” (Cuban, 1992) tailored to unchanging classrooms, the application of labels that represent clear beliefs and expectations about what content students can and cannot learn, and the ways in which subject matter knowledge and related skills are thought of.

• Leadership roles and activity to assist, support and maintain curriculum change are vital.

Whatever the outside-originating imperative for curriculum change might have been, such findings suggest that its school-based manifestation will be of a localised, particularised nature. By the time teachers were taken into account, who Bailey (2000) claims tended to be marginalised by the processes used for attempting mandated change, the summation would be that it is the local circumstances that determine what happens and, as Fullan (1999) points out, local conditions cannot be replicated, however much an attempt may be made to transfer a particular reform. The last decade has brought a greater micro level understanding of the meaning of curriculum change for teachers as teacher work, teacher knowledge, and teacher self and identity have been more closely examined; the concept of workplace or professional communities was seen as a necessary anchor point for teachers during change; and the concept of the culture of a school was elaborated into identification of a number of cultures within or associated with a school, including the culture of a subject, the culture of subject departments in secondary schools, cultures of teaching, and a culture of change.

In 1997 Randi and Corno reviewed what they considered to be four bodies of literature related to changing teachers, by which to consider the view of teachers as innovators. Randi and Corno claimed research showed teachers daily coping with instructional problems, and that “teachers continually and voluntarily changed their practice in response to the contexts in which they worked” (Randi & Corno, 1997, p. 1183) and that curriculum implementation research had confirmed that teachers were always active in curriculum design, making curricular choices. Randi and Corno concluded that, though often not treated as school reform, the practitioner-generated innovations of teachers brought change as
teachers looked to adapt to the daily and ever-increasing changing exigencies of practice. ... [T]eacher-generated innovations are immediate responses to the complex set of circumstances in which teachers work. Through the lens of implementation, teachers’ adaptations are variants from ideal, prescribed practice. Through the lens of innovation, teachers’ adaptations are responses to the unique and varied contexts of teaching. (Randi & Corno, 1997, p. 1213 – italics in original)

However, Elmore (1996), in attempting to explain why it has been difficult to replicate innovation success on a large scale, would dispute that such teacher-generated innovations and teacher adaptations normally concern “the core of educational practice...how teachers understand the nature of knowledge and the student’s role in learning, and how these ideas about knowledge and learning are manifested in teaching and classwork” (Elmore, 1996, par. 3). And Fullan (1993, p. 3) saw the problem – or the challenge – in terms of “the juxtaposition of a continuous change theme with a continuous conservative system” (italics in original). But that challenge has to be met since Australian state education systems continue to produce new syllabus documents, in recent times portraying curriculum within an Australian version of outcomes-based education [OBE], and I believe the challenge can, with difficulty, be met if educators take seriously the need to think in terms not of system-wide reform but of local curriculum reform, and giving attention to ensuring the presence of four forms or locales of “conversation” that will generate

(a) school, teaching, and subject cultural awareness, confrontation and change;
(b) new shared knowledge, skills and professional community through collaboration and collegiality;
(c) professional development centred on processes of professional and organisational learning; and
(d) leadership arising from and working within the professional community.

In presenting the case I wish to make, I will be using several

Theoretical perspectives

1. The concept of teacher identity

Central to a teacher’s professional self is a sense of identity, viewed by Nias (1989) as having a core of self-defining values, but seen by Hall (1996) as always being constructed and re-constructed, and by Grossberg (1996) as relational to other possible identities. Teachers’ identities are produced within a specific discourse, history, or institutional site (Nias, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Spillane, 2000), relate to a number of specific contexts, and are nurtured or supported by the nature of a teacher’s professional community (McLaughlin, 1993). Externally generated change, as in a new curriculum, represents a change of context, which demands a change in or re-forming of teacher identity (Ball, 1996; Drake, Spillane, and Hufferd-Ackles,
2001), but this can only successfully occur if there is the local context of a professional community which is facing up to and itself re-forming its sets of beliefs, knowledge, values and norms as required by the new curriculum. If the knowledge required by teachers to enable new curricular perspectives and practices to be developed is not able to be supplied within the professional community so the teacher can be encouraged and supported, then teacher change is less likely to happen. If the existing ways of thinking about curriculum in a school, norms of acceptable and valued practice, and ways of working together as a staff - elements of culture - do not encourage and support teachers through a process of identity and professional change, then implementation of the new curriculum will be very difficult. The concepts of a school culture, of a specific subject culture, and of a teaching culture are crucial mediating concepts in the implementation process.

2. Teacher contexts
According to the previously referred-to review that Randi and Corno (1997) provide of teachers as innovators, teachers do change according to the contexts in which they work, and according to perceived need. Part of the complexity of teaching, and therefore of curriculum decision making by teachers, is the reality that teachers belong to or are influenced by a number of contexts, of which the following are significant for accomplishing curriculum change:

(a) The changed context of a new mandated syllabus will require a change to a teacher’s teaching identity embedded in the subject concerned because of the character of the curriculum and pedagogy of the new syllabus (Drake et al., 2001; Spillane, 2000). Identity change will not be easy, and may be responded to, as very threatening.

(b) The context of the sets of processes, norms, values and beliefs associated with the till then teaching of the subject in the school - of which the teacher has been a part - will influence the interpretation of, and the response by, the teacher to the new syllabus (Gleeson, 1994; Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994; James, 1997; Roberts, 1995; Spillane, 2000).

(c) The context of the teaching group or groups within the school to which the teacher relates - either the total school staff, or a number of sub-groups in the school, such as year levels - will determine the attitude towards desired curriculum change and the willingness of individual teachers to change (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Gleeson, 1994; James, 1997; McLaughlin, 1993.

(d) The context of the teaching group or groups in the school will also determine the supportiveness provided for individual teachers through any needed process of change, in terms of the individualism or the collaborative relationships that exist, the level of relevant knowledge held by members of those groups, and the nature of the group or groups as a
focus and encouragement for professional learning (Hargreaves, 1997b; McLaughlin, 1993).

3. Teacher knowledge
A mandated syllabus, represents an attempt at curriculum reform. Central to the position of Drake et al. (2001) regarding both the impact of such a new context and teacher identity is knowledge of the reforms, teachers’ interpretation of the reforms, new content knowledge associated with the nature of the reforms, knowledge of how to teach in such a way that the reforms can be implemented, and the range of possible ways in which the personal practical knowledge, the content knowledge, and the pedagogical content knowledge teachers had been using till that point were likely to be called into question. The new subject matter context, associated with attempting to meet the standards of the US National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which Drake et al. portrayed as bringing such a threat to teachers’ identities, would be as intimately bound up with knowledge and teacher knowing as was the previous subject matter context.

The concept of knowledge being situated within, and unable to be separated from, particular activity and situations has been explored as an alternative to the traditional conceptions of largely decontextualised knowledge set for learning within schools (e.g. Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991), and teacher knowledge has regularly been portrayed as inextricably tied to both context and experience, and more recently to identity. Elbaz (1983) proposed practical knowledge as arising from and continuously referenced back to the on-going teaching and curricular experiences and situations of specific teachers. For Connelly and Clandinin (1999), through the concept of personal practical knowledge, teacher knowledge became synonymous with a teacher’s narrative life history, which in turn is tied to context. Leinhardt (1988, p. 146) wrote of situated knowledge as “contextually developed knowledge that is accessed and used in a way that tends to make use of characteristic features of the environment as solution tools...for the solution of very specific problems in teaching”. According to Leinhardt, recognition of the possession of such situated knowledge helps observers understand why teachers are resistant to change since they desire to continue to use such “expert-like solutions” (Leinhardt, 1988, p. 146) in what they perceive have been till then consistent situations. What Leinhardt (1990) later termed craft knowledge was learnt and communicated in “the language of craft and practice – in fact in the language of the particular” (Leinhardt, 1990, p. 18), and was “contextualized knowledge” (p. 19).

Within Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concepts of situated learning and peripheral legitimate participation is the notion that, through a process of learning, a person develops the knowledge and understanding required for participation in the community of practice of which he or she has become a member.
Knowing is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artifacts of that practice, and the social organization and political economy of communities of practice. For newcomers, their shifting location as they move centripetally through a complex form of practice creates possibilities for understanding the world as experienced. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 122-123 - italics in original)

Lave and Wenger’s theory can be applied to educational situations by envisioning the circumstance of a new subject matter context for a teacher, such as proposals for a reformed approach to the nature and the teaching of the subject matter, requiring teacher learning in order to be able to appropriately teach within the reform conception. In this situation, Lave and Wenger (1991) would see certain processes at work:

- the previous sense of self and professional identity which was constructed around a certain way of thinking about the curriculum, certain expectations of students and their classroom role, and certain knowing of the “best” way in which to teach for student learning, is called into question;
- the teacher learning required for the development of the knowledge and skills needed to change the teacher’s practices, implies the teacher becoming a different person, “involves the construction of identities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53);
- but if the community of practice that is required to provide the focus for such learning, and for the move by the “newcomer” from the periphery to full participation, possibly does not exist because this is a new curriculum, an innovation, or a reformed practice, and members of the professional community do not possess the knowledge and the skills associated with the reform, it will be difficult for such learning to occur, and the sources of understanding for stimulating such growth may be absent.

Under these circumstances, likely to be found at times of demanding curriculum change, implementation of the innovation, which requires changed teacher practice, will be more difficult. The early work reported by Crandall (1983) had shown the value of those who could demonstrate that innovations worked.

4. The cognitive psychological versus the sociological dimensions of teacher learning, change, and identity

Borko and Putnam (1995) and Ball (1996) provide two other perspectives on this potential problem of the lack of a community of practice, which lend weight to the theoretical position of Lave and Wenger (1991). Working within what they term a cognitive psychological perspective on professional development, which claims that new teaching practices require the development of an expanded individual teacher knowledge base and the learning of new concepts associated with subject matter and pedagogy, Borko and Putnam (1995) recognised the Catch 22 situation faced by
teachers and those attempting to facilitate such change, based on what they claim is the dual role played by teachers’ knowledge and beliefs in teacher learning situations:

Teachers’ knowledge and beliefs affect how they perceive and act on various messages about changing their teaching. It is through their existing knowledge and beliefs that teachers come to understand recommended new practices and activities...powerful filters through which change takes place. (Borko & Putnam, 1995, pp. 59, 60)

But at the same time, the knowledge and beliefs of teachers are themselves the target of the messages about change. Ball (1996) puts things more bluntly. In considering the learning that is required by teachers if they are to effectively enact reformed teaching practices, Ball claimed that a teacher’s past experiences and prior understandings – a large part of what Borko and Putnam (1995) had been referring to – actually act as obstacles. Ball saw schools and their ways of working to that point as offering no images of what it means to teach in the reformed way, and saw the teachers themselves as a product of the very system being reformed. Apart from making the link back to a teacher’s identity, since “deep anxieties about one’s effectiveness and one’s knowledge are likely to surface” (Ball, 1996, p. 505), and “there are...powerful disincentives to engage with this agenda, and some of these are deeply personal and at the heart of the identity one tries to create as a good teacher” (p. 505), Ball stressed that most commonly teachers develop their practice individually and idiosyncratically, “working within a discourse of practice that maintains the individualism and isolation of teaching”(Ball, 1996, p. 505). The consequences of the regular privacy and privatism of teachers and teaching is at work since Ball believes it is common for there to be no community of practice conducive to critique, challenge and debate that can help teachers improve their understandings of the new practices and the ways of understanding the subject matter that needs to go with those understandings. As a result, Ball considered that implementation of such practices would be difficult, and documented that difficulty.

Spillane’s (2000) documentation of a teacher’s varying knowing in two separate subject areas, and varying use of learning occasions associated with professional development for changes in teaching in those subject areas, also underlines the normally individualistic and private nature of teacher learning and change. Earlier on, Huberman (1993, p. 22) had even pessimistically suggested that the work of teachers was so “highly individualistic and context-sensitive” that large scale or school-wide collaboration on curriculum change was unlikely to bring about change in the classroom, “even when such changes are apparently agreed upon or are logically derived from school-level interactions” (Huberman, 1993, p. 25).

These researchers were all stressing what has been called the psychological dimension of teacher change, associated with the individualistic and private nature of teaching and of teachers’ situated knowledge and beliefs. A parallel
perspective was provided by Olsen and Kirtman (2002) in describing seven categories of individual influence on teachers, one of the three “concurrent strands of ‘mediating influences’” (p. 303) which Olsen and Kirtman believe “interrelate to mold each teacher’s disposition to implement the particular reform” (p. 303). I am suggesting that the factors drawn attention to above go further, and make it very difficult for individual teachers to be able to change so as to plan and teach in the desired ways of new curricula. But Ball (1996) and Huberman (1993) were also describing the contextual conditions which heightened the psychological dimension of teacher change. So, if teacher identity is also associated with a number of contexts, as has been demonstrated, then teacher change also needs to be balanced by and understood in terms of a social or sociological dimension. Studies in mathematics education reform in the United States have given attention to this dimension. Jones (1997) presented two faces of context that have a social dimension: interpretation of policy, in which the interactions amongst the teachers in a local school context determine the meaning and what would be the “norms of good practice” (Jones, 1997, p. 135) within that policy in action; and a school’s norms and expectations “which structure teachers’ and students’ interactions and experiences” (p. 137). Secada and Adajian (1997) used the example of Krone Elementary School to highlight the mediating role played by the professional community in teacher change.

An important facet of [the] teachers’ learning was that it took place as they worked together to solve the problems posed by their efforts to reform their practices. By risking new ideas together, the teachers were able to compare their results across their classrooms and to test new ideas against the standards of their practice…. (Secada & Adajian, 1997, p. 215)

Stein and Brown (1997, p. 159) similarly emphasised the development of new forms of understanding and meaning as teachers work together. “These new meanings and understandings do not exist as abstract structures in the individual participants’ minds; rather they derive from and create the situated practice (or context) in which individuals are coparticipants”. The position of Stein and Brown, characterised by them as viewing learning as transformation of participation, can be related to the already described theory of Lave and Wenger (1991) on situated learning and peripheral participation. But, as was posed with regard to Lave and Wenger’s theory, what if the potential coparticipants in the learning associated with the reforms are not interested in working to develop relevant new understandings and associated practices, or do not have the kinds of understandings about new practices that will provide an appropriate professional community for learning through participation? McLaughlin (1993) had highlighted such a potential context by alluding to data regarding two contrasting professional communities in secondary schools.

Professional communities that are cohesive, highly collegial environments are also settings in which teachers report a high level of
innovativeness, high levels of energy and enthusiasm, and support for professional growth and learning. Teachers who belong to communities of this sort also report a high level of commitment to learning and to all of the students with whom they work. In contrast, stand settings in which teachers report a strong sense of privacy (and thus low collegiality)...[Teachers] say that they see their job as routine, their workplace setting as highly bureaucratized, and their subject matter as static or unchanging...are less likely to innovate and to report support for learning. (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 94 – emphasis in original)

The reference by McLaughlin to privacy was a forerunner to the emphases of Ball (1996) on the problems stemming from individualism and the isolation of teaching.

Therefore it is possible to conceive of two responses to demanded change. One is to leave needed identity change, which will facilitate curriculum change in the individual teacher in response to perceived context change (including external mandated policy initiatives), in the hands of the individual teacher. By contrast, school contexts, especially of the teacher’s professional community, appear to require sets of group norms and a climate that will support and encourage individuals as part of the school collective working towards change.

5. The meaning of educational policy, and accepted responses to system policies at a school level

As noted above, Ball (1996, p. 506) claimed that “a stance of critique and inquiry” was necessary for teacher change in response to reform efforts, but that this could only happen if the emphasis in curriculum change in the individual teacher in response to perceived context change (including external mandated policy initiatives), in the hands of the individual teacher. By contrast, school contexts, especially of the teacher’s professional community, appear to require sets of group norms and a climate that will support and encourage individuals as part of the school collective working towards change.

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This means that policies should, first, create extensive learning opportunities for teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, so that the complex practices envisioned by ambitious learning goals have a chance to be studied, debated, tried out, analysed, retried, and refined until they are well-understood and incorporated into the repertoire of those who teach and make decisions in schools. Secondly, policies should allow for widespread engagement of a school’s constituencies in the process of considering,
developing and enacting changes. For this to occur, communities must have a substantial role in constructing their own reforms rather than trying merely to implement ideas handed down to them by others. (Darling-Hammond, 1998, pp. 654-655)

The introduction of the National Curriculum in England over the last 15 years has demonstrated other perspectives that can be taken to policy implementation in schools. Bowe and Ball (1992) used the term “operational terrain” to designate a school context in which an externally originating policy was to be implemented as not being neutral, unthinking, with a bowing-to-others’-wishes attitude. Bowe and Ball believed that “the differential impacts of contingencies, institutional structures, cultures, histories and environments may produce very different kinds of possibilities of response” (Bowe & Ball, 1992, p. 118), so that these contextual features of institutions in reality produce a number of varying contexts across schools – and possibly even within any one institution – which in turn produce a number of varying responses to a single system policy pronouncement. Ball himself (1994, p. 19) suggested that

> [g]iven constraint, circumstance and practicalities, the translation of the crude abstract simplicities of policy texts into interactive and sustainable practices of some sort involves productive thought, invention and adaptation.

As an extension, Ball (Ball, S., 1996, p. 506) asserted that “a stance of critique and inquiry” was necessary for teacher change in response to reform efforts, but that this could only happen if the emphasis in curriculum reform were to change “from ‘implementation’ of programs to adaptation and generation of new knowledge …. using the broadly outlined reforms as a resource for developing inspired but locally tailored innovations” (p. 506).

Fullan – not referring specifically to the English experiences - particularly saw such a situation likely to arise the more the staff of a school acted collaboratively: “The more the school works collaboratively on improvement at the school level, the more it engages critically with external standards and policies” (Fullan, 2000, p. 25). As if to underline the concept of the “operational terrain” of Bowe and Ball, Roberts (1995) studied the implementation of the same Geography National Curriculum in three secondary schools in England. Beginning with contrasts between the subject departments, the differential effects of thinking about Geography, and what were appropriate instructional practices, led to three contrasting sets of learning experiences and outcomes for students. At a primary level, Croll, Abbott, Broadfoot, Osborn, and Pollard (1994), outlined “four models of teacher roles with regard to education policy and educational change” (p. 334), one of which was teachers as policy makers in practice.
6. Professional development as teacher learning
It took a long time for the full ramifications of the thought that for teachers to change their outlooks and practices in line with proposed curriculum innovations involved a complicated learning process – just as much a learning process as any other form of learning being undertaken by students. Central to the curriculum change associated with any attempted implementation of a mandated new syllabus will be the learning of teachers, as individuals and as a group. This learning will have the purpose of changing teachers’ knowledge in ways appropriate to the new syllabus. But that change in knowledge needs to be under the control of, and from within, the present perspectives of the teachers concerned. The result will be that what becomes “implemented” is likely to be at variance with what appears to be portrayed in the curriculum policy document/s, i.e. as has previously been noted of Ball’s (Ball, S., 1996, p. 506) claim as to what will happen if there does exist in a school and among teachers “a stance of critique and inquiry” - there will be “locally tailored innovations”. The critique and critical discourse advocated by Ball is similar to the processes of reflection as a mechanism for the process of teacher learning whereby teachers, individually or collectively, work from where and who they are into new possibilities. Examples of the use of reflection for professional development associated with changing teachers to bring about curriculum change are Tobin (1995) and Tobin and Jakubowski’s (1992) emphasis on reflection in and on action, and the use of images and metaphors that embed beliefs and epistemologies to explore teacher roles and the possible change of values associated with particular roles; Swain’s (1998) use of reflection to “challenge and clarify [teachers’] thinking” (p. 29) and transform philosophies and teaching practices; and Lumpe and Haney’s (1998) use of reflective activities to identify beliefs that influence teachers’ intentions, and the comparison of those beliefs with those built into or lying behind a proposed innovation.

Fullan (1993), who spoke of the need for inner learning (of individuals) and outer learning (where learning individuals make re-connections with other learning individuals), Hargreaves (1997a), Huberman (1993), and Sarason (1996) all conceived of the necessity for professional community based learning for curriculum change. The concept posited by Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) of knowledge being situated, an inextricable product of the situation producing it, and authentic practices being developed through a form of cognitive apprenticeship, led them to claim that learning “advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 40), with activity and reflection, in a group rather than an individual setting.

7. School culture and curriculum change
If each school has a unique culture, founded on “predominant values embraced by an organisation that determine the guiding policies and provide insiders with distinctive in-house rules for ‘getting on and getting by’” (Prosser, 1999, p. 8), then that culture can be seen to create bonds between participants, to represent meaning and significance, and to provide direction.
In an “in-house” sense, the cultural content allows “members of the group to communicate within a sense of meaning” (Ruddock, 1984, p.66), and “prescribes the way people should act; it normatively regulates appropriate and acceptable behaviors in given situations” (Rossman et al., 1988, p. 5). But from the perspective of culture’s face to the outside world, Stoll and Fink (1996, p. 82) assess culture as acting “as a screen or lens through which the world is viewed”. In a parallel way, Schein (1985- quoted in Owens, 1987, p. 17) talks about culture so as to demonstrate its relevance at a time of curriculum change:

the body of solutions to external and internal problems that has worked consistently for the people in the school and that is therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think about, and feel in relation to those problems.

For Schein, the culture is what ties an individual to the identity of a school. However, beliefs and values, understandings, attitudes, meanings and norms of thinking and behaviour are often implicit, and newcomers to a school need time in which to observe and listen, and to infer from resource materials and from planned programs what those beliefs, values, understandings, attitudes, meanings and norms of thinking and behaviour are that are held in common across the teachers and administrators of the school, to the extent that they can be referred to as the culture of the particular school.

Rossman et al. (1988, p. 10) claimed that some of a school’s cultural norms were sacred, “essentially immutable” and consequently enduring, efficacious, and giving meaning to life. “Attacks on the sacred represent attacks on professional raison d’être, on the cornerstones of teachers’ constructions of reality. Shaking the foundations of these world views renders professional identities implausible” (Rossman et al., 1988, p. 12). If such a culture is existing, there will be a commonality of teacher perception of, and response to, curriculum problems, including how to handle proposed curriculum changes. From their study of the organisational culture of schools in England, Nias, Southworth, and Yeomans (1989) concluded that with this school culture in existence, “normative control limited individualism. Choice was exercised within the parameters set by the school’s central beliefs and values, as these were exemplified in its main policies” (p. 16). From this perspective, culture provides one mechanism to counter the isolation commonly found in schools as a part of the nature of the teaching profession when schools have single teachers teaching a separate single group of students for certain periods of time. Hargreaves (1994), in talking about cultures of teaching, stressed this point:

Cultures of teaching comprise beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of doing things among communities of teachers who have had to deal with similar demands and constraints over many years. Culture carries the community’s historically generated and collectively shared solutions to its new and inexperienced membership. It forms a
framework for occupational learning. Cultures of teaching help give meaning, support and identity to teachers and their work. Physically, teachers are often alone in their classrooms, with no other adults for company. Psychologically they never were. (Hargreaves, p. 1994, p. 165)

The organisational and relational features and characteristics associated with such teaching cultures were seen by Hargreaves (1997a) to have a deep influence on teachers:

It is through cultures of teaching, that teachers learn what it means to teach and what kind of teacher they want to be, within their school, subject department or other professional community. Cultures of teaching, in this respect, form frameworks for occupational learning. Where you are a teacher and how the work of teaching is organised in that place, will significantly influence the kind of teacher you will become. (Hargreaves, 1997a, p. 55-56; emphasis in the original)

In conceiving of the culture of the school, and a school's teaching culture, in the context of efforts to reform or change the curriculum, then, writers saw culture as giving a stability and sense of continuity to the school and the curriculum, and those aspects of the culture which were most core and least likely to be open to modification, provided identity, the reality within which and by which teachers worked, the teachers' professional raison d'etre, and their evaluative framework for what could or what should be. Tobin (1995) believed that curriculum is embedded in a culture, and because of that culture only certain curriculum features are likely to appear, or certain curriculum possibilities be conceived of. Sarason (1971, p. 12) had suggested this in his initial explanation that “existing structure of a setting or culture defines the permissible ways in which goals and problems will be approached”. At the time Sarason pointed out that any such structure or culture needed to be recognised as only one amongst many possibilities, but the reality tends to be that what presently exists “is a barrier to recognition and experimentation with alternative [realities]” (Sarason, 1971, p. 12). Later in time, Levin and Riffel (1998) saw the relevance of Powell and Dimaggio’s perception of institutions in their similar suggestion that “institutional arrangements are reproduced because individuals often cannot even conceive of appropriate alternatives (or because they regard as unrealistic the alternatives that they can imagine). Institutions do not just constrain options; they set the very criteria by which people discover their preferences” (Powell & Dimaggio, 1991- quoted in Levin & Riffel, 1998, p. 122).

But the strand of school culture that saw it as being important for teachers’ identity, and for the ways in which teachers related to each other, opened the way for Hargreaves’ focus on the varied ways in which schools could be organised in terms of teachers working together, doing their decision making and problem solving, and communally improving their practice. The
presence of such a cultural environment in a school, in providing a supportive professional community context, a context for a non-individualistic approach to teacher learning and teacher knowing, and a counter to the externally generated changed curriculum context which has the potential to threaten teachers’ identity, is important for successful curriculum change. Being the mechanisms by which the life of the institution can continue, both the cultural content and form paradoxically have the power to perhaps impede the possibility of that life being improved.

Thus the relationship between school culture and new ideas or possible alternative ways of thinking, or of doing things, becomes most important when considering what will happen to change proposals within individual schools. Not only does it act as a key mediating influence on whether classroom practice will change, but the norms associated with a school’s dominant culture mean that school cultures act as definers of what it is for curriculum or schooling to be effective.

**Implications for achieving mandated curriculum change**

The above theoretical considerations interact to provide a foundation for certain ‘conditions’ that will in themselves interact, and be most conducive for system initiated and proposed curriculum change to be reflected in curriculum changes at the local school level. I have called these conditions forms or locales of conversation, each of which will contribute to generating a milieu favourable for curriculum change (see Fig. 1).
A. School, teaching, and subject cultural awareness, confrontation and change

Since the kinds of curriculum activity required for such newer directions as outcomes-based education represent alternatives to teachers' conceptualisation, planning, teaching and assessing, Miller's (1998) designation of what is necessary for reforming schools seems to appropriately apply: there need to be changes in how learning is conceptualised and in how learning will occur. Miller asserts that this requires a reculturing of schools, defined as "a shift from one set of assumptions, beliefs, norms, and behaviors" (p. 530). Rather than the application by teachers of the cultural lens and filter, with its inherent and possibly automatic evaluation and judgment of what can happen in this school, and the mutations of features of introduced "changes" into the on-going familiar, ways need to be found to
help teachers be aware of just what it is that lies behind their present ways of thinking and working, and how those ways are representative of just one possible curricular set. Recognition of the existence of a present subject-oriented culture that frames what is considered desirable to teach, how learning will occur, the roles of teachers and students within learning, and how learning is assessed, and, overall, “what we are here for”, along with the possible limitations that this culture brings to conceiving of appropriate or possible alternatives, and the constraining of options (Powell and Dimaggio), becomes a necessary first step. There may well be a need to confront those cultural givens, and to explore a (potentially) begrudging recognition that the change proposals themselves represent an alternative culture that contains features which can be understood, appreciated, recognised as making sense, having a reasonable practical as well as theoretical basis, and so on.

But, unless the school’s teaching culture is itself such that these things are open for discussion, that teachers will be supported in any querying that they do, that it is not expected that teachers have to go it alone, that where teachers feel their identities are threatened then there will be opportunities to talk that through, then progress will not be made. That is why the other locales of conversation are necessary conditions for deciding what needs to be faced, for collaborative problem solving as to what we are going to do here, for dialogue that could lead to new teacher learning, for leadership that allocates time for these activities. Fullan (1999) sees the quality of relationships among the members of a school community, exhibiting not uniformity but collective diversity, as important for the long term success of change forces in action in the school. Reforms may be “transformed as they make their [way] into the culture and political milieu of particular schools” (Oakes, Wells, Yonezawa, and Ray, 2000, p. 90), but it has been the school community which has superintended and given the imprimatur to that transformation.

B. New shared knowledge, skills and professional community through collaboration and collegiality
The theoretical examination has suggested that where curriculum mandates represent substantially new core conceptions and practices, all teachers in a school are placed in the position of needing to learn new conceptualisations and practices, and individual teachers cannot follow a regular practice of learning directly and naturally from participation in teaching activity with the rest of the staff. However, Ball (1996) believed that such collaboration was not a natural way in which teachers related to each other in schools, even when faced with changed curriculum conditions or requirements.

…..teacher development of their practice is often a highly individual and idiosyncratic matter…..working within a discourse of practice that maintains the individualism and isolation of teaching….Masking disagreements….politely refraining from critique and challenge, teachers have no forum for debating and improving their understandings. (Ball, 1996, p. 505)
For Fullan (1999), the difference is made by the nature of the professional community of that staff. Where it is the professional community’s purpose for student learning, their collective activity to achieve that learning, their taking of collective responsibility for that learning, and their collective examination of student achievements, then the opportunities are provided for knowledge creation within that community, turning tacit knowledge into the growth of explicit knowledge from within trust-based diversity. If there are going to be struggles over competing ideologies, from subcultures within the school or from individuals asserting differing values, beliefs and assumptions, as Datnow (2000) suggests there will be, then a collegial community is the preferable teaching culture for this to be happening within. Although she is writing from within the context of gender politics in school reform, Datnow’s recommendation has general applicability:

[To] thwart the damaging effects of micropolitics, teachers and administrators involved in school change efforts should engage in an open and honest dialogue about the following questions: (1) Whose interests are being served by the current system?…(2) Whose interests would be served by the proposed change? (3) How are professional relationships between teachers influenced by gender, race, and class relations? (4) How might these power relations be addressed by reform? (Datnow, 2000, p. 152)

Having faced the question within the Californian context of why “the same school-wide reform activities at the same school in the same grade under the same reform aegis manifest themselves so differently inside each class” (Olsen and Kirtman, 2002, p. 302), and providing a large degree of an answer from the influence of individual factors on teachers, who are themselves designated as mediators of school reform, Olsen and Kirtman acknowledge that “schools and departments that regularly meet to discuss, monitor, and clarify reform efforts yielded greater numbers of staff who embraced reform” (p. 320). In a parallel kind of way, Nias et al. (1992), from their study of whole school curriculum development in a number of primary schools in England, found that over time there were changes in teachers’ beliefs and practices towards more that was shared, that as teachers worked together they were encouraged to challenge one another’s thinking and practices, so that “whole schools are … built on … individual’s efforts to realise through their actions the beliefs and values that they share with their colleagues” (Nias et. al., 1992, p. 154).

If that kind of collegiality is occurring, then some of the activities that Fullan (1999) envisages as characteristic of desirable collective communities which create effective knowledge to be used by the communities’ members will be occurring:

• intense communication and information sharing
• formal and informal experimentation (with mistakes being allowed)
• mechanisms for shared problem solving
• implementing and integrating new methodologies

Whether it be a matter of a sense of collegiality or collaboration across the whole school in a primary school, or within a subject department in a secondary school, certain conditions will facilitate the processes – working towards shared institutional values, appropriate organisational structures, resources of teacher commitment, time, people and materials, and leadership (Nias et al., 1992). And conversations that occur within this locale need to continually interact with professional development that has a focus on real teacher and organisational learning. Thus, although experiences within Australia and Canada as teachers early on grappled with an outcomes emphasis in curriculum bear out both the importance of collaboration, and even the almost natural way in which its existence became necessary for teachers to be able to cope - the importance of shared problem solving and collaboration (Grundy & Bonser, 1997; Lokan, 1997); the value of teachers working across year levels or subject boundaries (Retallick, 1996; Richards, 1995); the threat to what has been their self-concept as a teacher of a particular subject possibly being exacerbated without a supportive, collegial working climate of teacher relationships (Grundy & Bonser, 1997) – and demonstrated that, through a sense of shared purpose and shared understanding, teachers could solve problems needing to be faced in their own setting, this was not an easy and automatic process. It was particularly a learning process - outcomes and profiles, and the assessment and planning that follow, took time to understand and to apply to specific settings (Griffin, 1998; Grundy & Bonser, 1997); teachers needed to learn the language of the system, and where necessary fashion a new language to enable them to participate, discuss and work together (Griffin, 1998; Grundy & Bonser, 1997; Hargreaves & Moore, 1999); and teacher learning had to take place at the school and the classroom level, not in traditional forms of inservice activity (Retallick, 1996).

C. Professional development centred on processes of professional and organisational learning

With regard to the most prevalent form of curriculum change facing Australian teachers, what form/s of professional learning will arise to assist teachers to develop their understandings of the learning outcomes approach over time, a shared language and shared understandings regarding learning outcomes, planning, learning approaches, and assessment? What control will teachers have over these processes of their own professional learning? Such control is portrayed by Fullan (2000) as part of teachers implementing their own reforms and engaging critically with external mandates, and by Stoll (1999) and Lokan (1997) as part of the reculturing of a school, likely to lead to restructuring, locales of conversation already considered.

The set of principles of effective professional development developed by Hawley and Valli (1999) resonate with many of the emphases of this paper’s proposed locales of conversation – a focus on goals of student learning, and
analysis of desired standards of student learning; involvement of the teacher learners in identifying what they need to learn and the development of the learning opportunities and processes to be used; relationship to authentic and immediate school-based problems; collective problem solving; engaging teachers’ beliefs, experiences and habits, with a theoretical understanding of them, as a springboard to their (re)considering both their formal and their practical teaching knowledge; being part of a comprehensive change process; ongoing and continuous. Fullan’s (1999) stress that there needs to be tolerance of diversity recognises that the learning of teachers, and their creation and sharing of knowledge that can be put to use by all, may mean that there will be team building activities and tasks, but also the acceptance of diverse groups. Fullan (1993) sees it as appropriate that individual teachers see each other learning so that they will realise there is a need to learn to increase one’s ability, not because one is inadequate. Individual teachers and the group of teachers will therefore need to co-exist in what he calls “dynamic tension”, with a spirit of inquiry and continuous learning underpinning and characterising all of what the school does. Such attention to teacher development and learning, within the collective, striving for shared understanding about practice, providing “avenues for authentic conversation about teaching and learning” (Miller, 1998, p. 541), is seen by Miller as a part of both a redefining of teachers and a reculturing of schools, with the focus in teacher learning being on making explicit the links between their learning and student achievement. This approach would change teachers’ view of knowledge and its use from what Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1996) call a producer-user perspective to a producer-and-user-as-one perspective.

Just being able to say this so neatly does not mean such an approach to professional development as a learning process is easy. No true learning is easy, and this particular desired learning has to be remembered as occurring within the context of what is described by Earl and Katz (1998, p. 108): the teachers “are in the throes of trying to understand what has to change, why it should change and how they can respond to the forces of change without compromising their personal and professional integrity”. This is why conversation associated with the locale of leadership in the school is so important.

D. Leadership arising from and working within the professional community
All three of the previous locales or forms of conversation would tend to suggest that the kind of leadership which is required to enable curriculum change to occur or be brought about in a school in response to external mandates is that leadership by whoever will gestate cultural confrontation and reculturing, related to the growing of a professional community of collaborative colleagues, and facilitating teacher learning that is central to student learning. This is perhaps not far from the picture of the leadership that Simpson (1990) described as found at DeKeysees School, with the leaders seeing themselves, and acting, as collaborators with a staff who they believed had the capacity to successfully work through innovations, building teams,
seeking and giving recognition to the contributions and efforts of all staff. Empowerment of teachers was “attributed in part to the addition of concerns-based staff meetings, which rank-order and confront issues germane to the organization” (Simpson, 1990, p. 36). If there are going to be structures amongst the staff of a school, then Halsall (1998) conceived of structures associated with a collaborative culture as being ones that the managers of the school have deliberatively created in order to support the work of teachers, rather than the structures that Hargreaves (1994) associated with a contrived collegiality, stemming from administrative perspectives and requirements. Halsall (1998) saw the managers in a school identifying those tasks that are appropriate for teachers to cooperate on. This in turn should provide the opportunity for teachers to take leadership roles, rather than the managers being perceived as the sole ongoing leaders in practice (Macpherson, Aspland, Brooker, & Elliott, 1999). There are therefore two strands to the leadership conversation – managers who have structural leadership but who, rather than acting as if they are the source of vision for the school, use that leadership to ensure the central work of the school can most effectively be achieved; and teachers who, through a redistribution of power, create the “social dynamic in a school that facilitates teachers being proactive as curriculum leaders” (Macpherson et al., 1999, p. 48).

Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) consider there have been three waves of teacher leadership, the first two waves focussing on enabling teachers to move into promotional and therefore management positions through which they can exercise what could be called a traditional notion of leadership. In the third wave, symptomatic of a cultural change in schools, teachers exercise leadership behaviours in enabling “colleagues to improve professional practice by doing things they could not ordinarily do on their own” (Silva et al., 2000, p. 781), sliding open the doors to collaborate with other teachers, discuss common problems, share approaches to various learning situations, explore ways to overcome the structural constraints of limited time, space, resources, and restrictive policies, or investigate motivational strategies to bring students to a deeper engagement with their learning …. to include opportunities for leadership to be a part of teachers’ day-to-day work ..... that makes leadership a part of the work a classroom teacher does on behalf of children. (Silva et al., 2000, p. 781)

Reflecting this third wave of teacher leadership, Wideen et al.’s (1996) case study of Lakeview primary school showed teachers having “a central role in deciding both what needed to be changed and how that change should occur” (p. 200), rather than having this decided for them by others.

Both strands of leadership take responsibility for the ways in which curriculum reform will take place within a particular setting. The leadership has to be contextualised, not working according to a generalised pattern – both management and teacher leaders know their settings, know their colleagues,
and seek to ensure guidance and support (Griffin, 1998), the provision of needed resources (Grundy & Bonser, 1997), a flexibility of structures, timetables and relationships that allow and enable greater collegiality amongst staff for purposeful teacher interaction, and an openness that values professional input. It also recognises issues of micropolitics in schools which simmer along within cultures, representing potentially differing and competing value systems, and issues of power and influence (Stoll, 1999). But teachers have to be supported in developing and strengthening their own cultures in which they are active agents. Such cultures do not automatically work because teachers are allowed and encouraged to be collaborative, particularly since norms, habits, beliefs and possibly long-utilised skills are involved. Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman (1992), out of the experience of the New Futures Initiative to restructure eleven urban schools, reported that “teachers were uncertain how best to use increased opportunities for collaboration....Simply providing time to meet...was no guarantee that teachers would know how to work together in ways likely to result in more engaging curriculum and improved student performance” (p. 76).

REFERENCES


