Leadership for pedagogical change

A case study of a change initiative in a ‘successful’ high school

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This article reports on a study that analysed an attempt by the principal at a traditional independent boys’ school to change curriculum practices and school policies in order to produce graduates who were independent learners capable of persevering with university study. While the school enjoyed a reputation for outstanding Higher School Certificate (HSC) results, low university retention rates among graduates in their first year out of school were a cause of growing concern for the principal. The study revealed that relatively limited changes in practices and policies eventuated at the school in response to the principal’s attempts. Several factors that appeared to operate as barriers to the curriculum change are identified, including the absence of a shared sense of the ‘problem’ and the means by which it might best be addressed, limited readiness of teachers to alter their classroom practices, tensions between the intended outcomes of the innovation, logistical issues related to the changes, the depth of implementation that occurred and the absence of appropriate evaluation of the initiative. These factors are discussed in relation to a number of general issues, including organisational characteristics of high schools, the complexities of curriculum leadership and the influence of parents on change processes in schools.

Some time ago an article appeared in a suburban newspaper describing an initiative being undertaken at an independent boys’ school. The school enjoyed a reputation as a ‘good’ school which achieved outstanding results in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations. The majority of its students proceeded directly from Year 12 to university study on the basis of their HSC results. According to the newspaper report, a number of the students who graduated from the school ‘dropped-out’ before the end of their first year of tertiary studies. The report proceeded to explain how the principal was hoping to lead a shift in the pedagogical approach employed in the senior years at the school in order to produce students who were independent learners capable of success at university. This concern coincided with the need to upgrade some of the teaching facilities at the school. In planning for the renovations, the school executive decided to instruct the architects to incorporate a small lecture theatre and tutorial rooms so as to enable a teaching approach similar to that which the senior students would encounter at university. The subsequent completion of the facilities had provided an opportunity and fillip for pedagogical change.
The researchers asked the principal if a case study could be conducted to learn how the changes were proceeding and to evaluate their effectiveness. The experiences of a school with a strong academic reputation seeking to radically alter its pedagogical approach in the senior years were anticipated to provide the opportunity for an interesting study, the results of which could be of benefit to both the school and the wider education community.

As the study proceeded, it became clear that very little had changed with regard to teaching practices and school policies. The renovations were completed, the new teaching spaces were being used, but the rhetoric of independent learning had not been translated into practice. While the innovations were not as successful as they were intended the study revealed important issues of potential interest to researchers and other school communities.

In this article we will discuss the methods used to gather and analyse data, the specific context of our school, its culture and type, the problem as defined by the principal, and his solutions. We will them explore apparent barriers to these solutions, specifically relating to staff negotiation and the purpose and meaning of their teaching, as well as parents' motivations for their children.

After explicating our finding from the school we briefly discuss how the nature and historical intention of schools has precluded changes towards independent learning. Further, we draw conclusions in regards to leadership and change, particularly the involvement of department heads in a leadership role.

METHOD
The purpose of the research was to develop a detailed understanding of the origins, nature and processes of the pedagogical change and of some of the key issues arising in its initiation and implementation. An emergent design was employed and the researchers met frequently throughout the course of the study to discuss understandings of the initiative and plan subsequent stages of data-gathering and analysis. The detailed description of the data-gathering and analysis process is offered to enable the reader to make judgements about the trustworthiness of the findings of this study.

Data gathering
Data were gathered from three sources. First, field notes were taken during and after site visits. There were a number of visits to the school, first to meet with the principal and then the school executive and later with teachers and department heads to conduct the interviews described below. During and after these visits, notes were made concerning general observations of the school and regarding issues that warranted further consideration. Documents such as school newsletters, staff handbooks and the school prospectus were also gathered during the school visits. These documents provided further data for the study.

The third and most extensive source of data emanated from interviews with selected school personnel. The first of these interviews was a semi-structured interview with the principal and was conducted by both researchers. The interview schedule is provided as Appendix A. Following this interview the researchers met and conducted a preliminary
analysis of the data. From this analysis it became clear that the perspectives of representative middle-managers/co-ordinators and teachers were needed to bring further understanding to the change process under study. Consequently, ten interviews were conducted with selected participants and the schedule for these interviews is provided as Appendix B.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

As Patton (1990) explained, the challenge of data analysis in qualitative studies "is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating what the data reveal" (pp.371-372). Field notes, school documents and transcripts of interviews provided a large amount of material that needed to be analysed. Before it was analysed, typed transcripts of the interviews were returned to the participants to allow them to attest to their accuracy and exercise standard veto rights over the transcripts. No material was vetoed.

The researchers independently analysed the transcripts and other data then met to compare analyses and identify themes. Several of these meetings occurred during the study and each resulted in further refinements. Whereas Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have differentiated between the data analysis that occurs while data are being collected and the analysis that occurs when data collection is complete, the emergent design employed here meant that data-gathering and analysis were iterative. As explained, the method entailed independent interrogation of the data, then meetings at which analyses were refined, followed by further stages of data-gathering and inquiry. Later rounds of inquiry included reference to the literature as the themes and issues became more pronounced. In this manner, the method heeded the advice of recognised authorities in qualitative research (e.g. Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) who have encouraged reference to the literature at these later stages.

CONTEXT

In this section information pertaining to the school, the perceived problem of university retention and how the school attempted to address this problem is presented. This information was gleaned from meetings with people at the school and from pertinent school documents. In presenting this information care has been taken to safeguard the identity of the school and school personnel (Punch, 1994).

The school

The site for this case study was an independent boys’ high school. In New South Wales, non-government schools are registered under the Education Reform Act (1990) (recently renamed the Education Act) as either systemic or non-systemic schools. Independent schools, as the name implies, are non-systemic, that is they deal directly with government authorities and operate with a high level of autonomy at the school level, often being governed by a school board which operates like a board of directors of a public company. Systemic government schools and non-government schools have more limited autonomy, with school operations being directed by policy at regional or state level.
The school that provides the focus for this study is registered as a non-systemic school. A wide variety of schools comprise this sector. Variations are apparent in educational philosophy, structure, administration (at least one is known to the researchers to operate without a principal), curriculum, resource levels, and the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of their students. Since the introduction of the Education Act (1990), a large number of new schools have been established and registered as non-systemic schools. These schools include Christian community schools, Islamic schools and Aboriginal community schools. Included also in this sector are some of the oldest schools in the state, many established prior to the introduction of the government system following the Public Instruction Act 1880 and most of which maintain some form of association with particular Christian denominations (Barcan, 1980; Ryan & Sungalia, 1995). This latter group of schools tend to conform to the stereotypical view of ‘private’ schools in that they charge significant fees and adopt ‘liberal’, conservative (Preston & Symes, 1992) approaches to schooling and the curriculum.

Arguably, the ‘independence’ of schools in the non-systemic sector renders them free of many of the political and material constraints on innovation and change that face systemic government and non-government schools. Further, many of the ‘historic’ independent schools have access to financial and cultural resources that enable them to provide not only an enhanced educational program but also to effect pedagogical change and innovations requiring the employment of such resources. A corollary of these factors and a further feature of traditional independent schools is that parents tend to be more influential in the life of the school and in proscribing the boundaries of the school’s activities than they are in other schools. The characteristics of the school under study approximate, rather than directly fit, this pattern of the historic, pedagogically conservative, church-associated independent school serving students from middle- to high-income families.

The school has adopted a traditional approach to student grouping, timetabling, subject offerings and departmental organisation. Staff are allocated to subject departments and department co-ordinators are responsible for programs, budgets and student learning outcomes. In addition to class work, staff and students are involved in an extensive and varied co-curricular program. Information gleaned from staff interviews suggests that most teachers in the school favoured traditional ‘teacher-centred’ pedagogical approaches.

The problem

The problem that essentially drove the change was that of a low university retention rate among graduates of the school. While 90 percent of Year 12 regularly progressed to university, up to 40 percent of these were dropping out in their first year. Allied to this were the school’s HSC results, which while still commendable had begun to fall in relation to those of other similar schools. The principal believed that the notion of independent learning had to be built into the senior school to address these issues, as well as other issues relating to the education of boys that were increasingly being raised in educational and general community discussions.
The principal indicated that all of these matters were of concern to principals of other independent schools, particularly the issue of university retention. He described a meeting that heads of independent schools had with 'the universities' at which the principals suggested that both they and the universities had a problem regarding retention rates. It was following this meeting that the principal began thinking more seriously about the school's approach to senior schooling and to "look at how we might do education a little differently".

Addressing the problem

The problem was addressed in three ways. First, the principal used the long-standing need for renovations to the senior section of the school as a platform for raising his concerns on educational issues with parents, students and staff and how these might be addressed in part by the physical layout of the school. A number of working groups were established to examine matters such as independent learning and the masculine culture of the school. This led to questions about teaching style and organisation, changing technology, school culture and student independence. In turn, this helped to shape the renovations, leading to the refurbishment of facilities for senior students mentioned earlier.

Next, new administrative structures were set in place to facilitate greater co-ordination of programs across the school. Co-ordinators of major programs, as well as the senior administrative staff comprising the principal and assistant principals, formed an executive that turned its attention to these and other problems as they emerged. That the school executive effectively 'defined' the problems to be addressed and then determined the consequent 'solutions' to these problems is mentioned later in a discussion of the micropolitics of the attempted innovations at the school.

Finally, the principal took steps to promote among staff an experiential view of learning in the school that, in his words, seeks to find "what the level of (student) knowledge is, sharing knowledge between teacher and learner, and reflection on that which leads to some form of action" which in turn is evaluated. Further, the principal was clear in his desire to allow the students to "make more of the decisions that we've denied them in the past". In his view, this was seen as placing greater responsibility on both learner and teacher, and in so doing would encourage greater independence of learning. This view of learning became a focus point of orientation activities for staff commencing employment at the school at the start of the year.

APPARENT BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Several factors which appeared to operate as barriers to curriculum change at the school were identified in the study. These 'barriers' are now presented, illustrated in each case by comments made by various interviewees.

Onsite understanding of the innovation

The particular understanding of the innovation varied among those interviewed. The underlying notion of independent learning provided a common point of reference but
the implications of this for teaching and learning processes were not clear to the interviewees. The theme emerging was that of an incomplete process. Specifically, many of those interviewed felt that initial discussions on a change of approach had not been carried forward into commonly agreed positions and operational policies. The following comments from three of the participants are indicative of this finding:

At the start of this whole process, I think the whole philosophy of independent learning ... could have been talked through a little more. We had some focus sessions at the start. But you know we brainstormed, etc, but I never really felt as though we reached a conclusion, that is a common point that we all agreed to.

Yes I think we haven't as a staff become clear. We have this expectation of independent learning but I don't think that we have really come together as a coherent group to decide what that actually means. I don't think we're sending a coherent message as all staff to all students.

I'm quite intrigued, I'd quite like this new system to be defined to me. I mean as far as I'm concerned, really this might sound quite cynical, but at the moment we've built quite a delightful building with lots of resources and moved students into it, but I wouldn't say there's a policy of operation for it ... (A consultant) came to the school and also got a number of interested parties together and put forward a document of recommendation. But to my knowledge that hasn't been set down as a policy as such at this stage. We don't have anything that we are referring to as a mode of operation, teaching styles or any cohesive policy really. ... a coherent mode of operation possibly needs to be set down that everybody clearly understands.

Other participants were concerned that granting the students freedom in their studies in the final two years of schooling was not necessarily the best way to produce independent learners. One suggested that these changes should be first introduced in the junior school while another recounted a conversation with a colleague in the following manner:

I know she made a statement that she felt that for young men to become independent learners there was a process that took a long time ... She also said that she felt that maybe the boys today at our school or any school were not mature enough to accept that and maybe it was a process that had to happen post-school. And maybe by throwing them into this independent, within inverted commas, learning situation in Year 11 that we are not actually doing them a favour. Because they are not succeeding. It might be better to be more prescriptive. She, for example, said in her previous school, free periods were supervised and boys were expected to at least do something in her school. She felt that there if you measured the success of the school on academic results, that's the way you measure it, that they were better than us. I suppose in some ways I'm inclined to agree.

In effect, there were different theories at work in the school as to how best to achieve the goal of producing independent learners.
Commitment and readiness of staff

The varied understanding of the innovation and the means by which the desired outcomes could be achieved was understandably accompanied by variation in staff commitment. While the notion of independent learning was generally endorsed, its feasibility was questioned. A number of staff were not convinced that it was achievable for all students. One staff member expressed this sentiment in this way:

I honestly don’t think that I’ve seen this independent learning type thing really being taken on board by the kids. I still think we get good results ... and to some degree those good results are by virtue of the fact that we push our kids ... The kids need to be accountable. If we move away from that sort of role and leave it to the kids, I think kids will either sink or swim. The better kids will excel possibly. But I’d say a large majority of the kids will probably not achieve the sorts of results that they could be capable of if you push them a little harder.

Linked with this was some questioning as to the readiness of staff to adjust to the different expectations and structures:

I think the levels of expectation have increased but not necessarily the preparedness of the students and teachers for that, to meet that expectation.

As a teacher, as a normal teacher, the tutor group has been a huge impost, to great benefit I’ve no doubt and I’ve got no problem with it. But I don’t think it was anywhere near recognised by the hierarchy of the school who of course are very good at pastoral care. To them that’s second nature, whereas the average teacher who likes (his subject area), cricket and rugby and maybe that sort of stuff, it’s a different way of dealing with people. And to be thrown into that situation, basically there you are, right now do it, it was hard.

A third staff member, while appearing to be questioning the extent of change that had actually occurred, seemed to express reservations about the whole notion of granting the students ‘freedom’ to make unacceptable choices:

The principal had said that he wants them to become independent. I don’t think he’s achieved that at all. I think what has happened is that they need to be taught to be independent learners. Just putting them over there and giving them a common room with a coffee machine and all the rest of it, I don’t think that promotes independent learning. I think a lot of the students actually don’t know how to work independently. And that freedom at this moment is being seen ... not as an opportunity to grow and take on responsibility in a positive way.

Tensions between intended outcomes and other expectations

Pressure to achieve good results in the HSC was a recurring theme in the interviews. This provided some tension for staff in relation to their understanding of the intended outcomes of the initiative. Comments from two teachers, presented here, are illustrative of views that were commonly held by participants:
(At the beginning of the year) basically the principal is reflecting on the HSC results the year before, and it’s a big drive, a big push. The boys hear it at the assembly. You say achieve your potential and in the same breath you will be talking about getting up in the 90s to get that public recognition. The rest of the year we talk about holistic education and I think that’s what we really do, holistic education, in which case you wouldn’t be putting the emphasis on the specific results.

I suppose the biggest limitation is the dilemma between allowing the kids to proceed at their own rate and promote that value of independent learning, and then at the end you are all going to be judged in a sense by the results you get. It’s a creative tension but it’s a real issue to be resolved. And I think what we’re seeing is people trying to balance innovative teaching with ensuring that the boys’ results are still maintained.

Parental support

Several participants in the study referred to perceived variance in levels of support among parents for the initiative. One member of the executive recounted how he suggested that the students be given greater responsibility for how they spent their non-class time. It is common in the final years of high school for students to have several ‘free’ periods due to the number of subjects they are studying and the time-tableing of some elective subjects outside regular school hours. The proposal was that students be allowed to spend this ‘free’ time as they chose, including relaxing the requirement for them to be at the school if they did not have a timetabled lesson. The parents and staff were surveyed and the legal issues regarding supervision were considered. While there were no real legal obstacles to the proposal, the results of the survey ‘came back pretty much that no, they wanted adults (to supervise)’ the students during school hours.

Other participants reported the perception that parents would not support too radical a shift from the standard practices adopted at the school. Some of the teachers said that parents expected the boys to get a high HSC result and this put pressure on them to ensure that the students did well in exams, thus acting as a deterrent to innovation when teaching senior classes. A member of the school executive explained the parental pressure on teachers in the following quote. The mention of the TER results here refer to the number that students are given out of 100, representing their comparative position in regard to HSC results. The TER has since been replaced by a new scale:

We’ve got a real challenge ... there’s pressure on the teachers saying we want the TER results. Because the parents send the kids here to get a good education and be cared for and all that sort of stuff. But ultimately they want the best academic results. Now the pressure is on the teachers in those years to get through the courses to get the best TER. So where do you break in the flexibility?

A third example of the tension between the school and certain parents over the approach the school adopted to the curriculum was evident when the principal was opposed by parents who wished the students to be able to study more than 13 units in Year 11:
I had an argument recently – we had declared that only 13 units of work can be done in Year 11, now parents would like us to give them the opportunity to do 14, 15 and 16 ... A lot of our parents err on the side of wanting 'more done' than rather wanting it 'done better' and I do believe that that's what we're trying to do – we're trying to get kids to really see the outcomes can be done better.

Logistical issues

For staff who were prepared to implement new approaches, logistical factors created some barriers. These centred on time-tabling, class sizes and room space:

We did have aspirations in terms of independent learning to offer like a lecture-type situation ... once a week or perhaps once a fortnight at least, there would be a time when the two classes would be blocked on at the same time. And those two classes are amalgamated and taught in a lecture-style format by one of the two teachers or the two teachers in tandem ... That hasn't come off basically because timetabling at this place precludes that sort of flexibility ... There was talk also of having a lecture/tutorials format, which I think would have been good as well. But once again it requires more flexibility with the timetable.

We are forced to think about our teaching methods because of the set-up of the rooms ... I find the rooms too small for the classes ... I've actually had to rearrange the room back to the old sort of idea of rows.

DEPTH OF IMPLEMENTATION

In view of the issues above, it was not surprising to hear interviewees reporting that little had changed in relation to approaches to teaching and learning in the school. The refurbished facilities were being used and students were given more control over free time between teaching periods. The changing structures were not sufficient, however, to ensure that the underlying philosophy and intentions were carried through:

The sorts of things that I would have liked to have seen, like this lecture/tutorial-type system, we haven't been able to do. So that's been a little bit frustrating I guess. So in terms of classrooms I think the teaching hasn't really changed from what had been five years ago.

I don't think my teaching style has changed ... (since the refurbishment) ... because I find that the sorts of students I've got need quite a lot of spoon-feeding and everything needs to be clearly set out for them. We don't do a great deal of individual research to be honest. I think the time constraint and because it's quite difficult, I tend to teach the syllabus to the letter and spell everything out for them.

Ongoing evaluation of the innovation

Finally, the absence of ongoing evaluation of the process was recognised by the interviewees. Thus, for example:

This whole process was talked through in a reasonable amount of detail at the start of it all. But unfortunately that issue was talked through quite rigorously and then left. And
we're left with the products of it. And as I say I think that needs to be reassessed as a school. It might have changes we need to make. Things that have worked, things that haven't worked, and in terms of our other goals for the school.

We need to be reviewing it more closely as we go and talking about what's right and what's wrong. Particularly in light of the fact that the HSC results last year weren't that good.

**DISCUSSION**

The principal at this school espoused a coherent philosophy of education, was an informed participant in education debates, and demonstrated a clear concern for current and former students. The changes that he and the school executive have attempted to lead were supported by sound reasoning, a range of management strategies and the investment of considerable material resources. Teachers at the school had generally accepted the need to address curriculum processes in the light of the arguments and concerns put to them. Despite these and other factors supporting the initiatives, a number of constraints were identified that contributed to the changes being less successful than the school executive had hoped. These constraints point to features that apply to varying extents to other high schools, both independent and systemic, and pertain to the culture and organisation of high schools, and the pressures and constraints that are brought to bear on schools from externally imposed curriculum and parental expectations of schools. Following a brief discussion of these broader issues we conclude the article with recommendations as to how this change initiative and others like it might be further advanced in the light of both the specific constraints and broader issues identified in this article.

**Disciplinary features of schools**

Attempts at leadership for pedagogical change in high schools are often confounded by the disciplinary features of schools. The history and evolution of the 'modern high school' has evolved in such a way as to employ a range of means of monitoring, proscribing and measuring student behaviour and policing deviance from widely shared, yet always constructed, norms (Foucault, 1977). The normalisation process is evident in the relationship between the student and the teacher in the classroom. The arrangement of furniture in classrooms, mentioned above, allowing for ease of supervision and orderly conduct of the lesson, is an important element of the unspoken code of teaching in this and many other schools. At this school the teacher closely supervises the study of students in the senior classes, makes decisions about what will be studied and how it will be studied, and measures the extent to which this content has been mastered. The teacher-centred pedagogy was justified by various participants in terms of the pressures of external examinations, parental expectations and the experience of teachers in some subject departments who feel that they are held personally accountable for their students' HSC results.

Data gathered in this study indicated further that the school proscribes and 'supervises' the activity of its pupils beyond normal school hours through the combined effects of the school's homework and co-curricular programs. In this manner the school is seen to exert an extensive influence over the lives of the boys. The effect of the extensive and
mandatory co-curricular program is that close staff supervision of the boys extends from very early in the morning until into the evening, and again over the weekend through the boys' involvement in the mandatory inter-school sports program. Direct supervision is also carried out by senior school students who address student assemblies and take on a 'monitorial' role in the school. In this manner, student leadership is peer supervision and as such it adds to the normalising influence on the boys. The depth and breadth of supervision is supported by the parents. Indeed one of the participants explained how parent opposition had quickly ended plans to eliminate non-classroom teacher supervision of students during the final years of schooling.

Looking beyond the school, the approved syllabus and examination structure in New South Wales appears to have the effect of a disciplinary device. Repeatedly in interviews, teachers attributed their reluctance to actually change anything in the way that they taught in terms of the pressures and demands of the HSC. This was despite the majority view that developing the habits of independent learning were desirable.

These examples point to the clear conflict between the disciplinary features of the school and the stated intention of the initiatives. In a sense, this change initiative — intended to give the students greater responsibility for their own learning, turn the responsibility for the use of designated places in the school over to them, and allow them to decide how they use 'their' time — runs counter to the external examination system, teaching practices, architecture, routines and culture of a high school, particularly one enmeshed in conservative, academic and 'liberal' traditions of schooling.

Subject departments and the micropolitics of high schools

Recent scholarship on the departmental organisation of high schools (e.g. Ball & Lacey, 1995; de Brabander, 1993; Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995; Siskin & Little, 1995) suggests that the subject department is an important and defining organisational feature of a high school. This scholarship suggests that the members of the separate subject departments tend to share common epistemologies that influence the way they see and interpret the world. Moreover, their "micropolitical interests" (Ball, 1987) tend to be shaped within the context of the department.

Department heads can be quite influential in the naming and definition of 'problems' and in the ways solutions to these problems are addressed in high schools. Participants in the study represented several of the major subject department groupings within the school. It was clear from the interviews that different departments understood and evaluated the extent of the problems related to current teaching practices, low retention rates at university and falling academic performance differently. Consequently, the imperative for change was not felt evenly across the school, nor were the means by which the advocated changes to be operationalised sufficiently explicit or sophisticated to motivate all the departments to engage with the change process.
Leadership for pedagogical change

The issues identified above and the specific findings presented earlier in this article render leadership for pedagogical change an extremely difficult prospect. The phenomenology of change in schools (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991) is such that knowledgeable and well-intentioned people working within a high school can 'see' different and often conflicting views regarding the school (Greenfield, 1993). Morgan (1997) has declared that "organisations are many things at once".

The international trend towards devolution in education management (see Caldwell & Spinks, 1988) and specific changes to public school administration introduced in NSW following the recommendations of the Scott Report (1989) are premised on the view that if more decisions were taken at the local level then schools would make better decisions, be more responsive to local concerns and elicit a greater sense of 'ownership' of the programs of a school. The logic of devolution requires a more robust leadership role for the principal, who actively involves the school community in an ongoing process of planning, implementing and evaluating the school's programs and policies. This image of the principal is in marked contrast to that seemingly demanded by centralised, bureaucratic systems in which the principal is the site manager, implementing central policies, supervising staff and responding to the information requirements of the central administration.

Evidence from this study of a pedagogical leadership process at an 'independent' school suggests that many of the constraints on leadership, innovation and local responsiveness are internal to high schools. Even when the external and structural constraints on public and systemic non-government schools are not present, less tangible but equally powerful constraints upon leadership and change persist.

While these constraints on change are powerful, they can be addressed. In this case evidence is emerging that curriculum change is occurring, albeit at a slower rate than many at the school would desire. Leadership and management approaches that have sought to engage the school community in thoughtful analysis of the school's programs and teaching strategies have had some effect. There is an increasingly widespread agreement within the school regarding the desirability of independent learning and allowing students opportunities to exercise greater freedom with regard to how they use their non-classroom time. In addition to employing consultative and collaborative leadership strategies, the principal has followed many of the tenets of transformational leadership in articulating a clear vision for the school and in attempting to influence the cultural and symbolic life of the school. The third leadership approach that has been successfully applied at the school has been the more direct and traditional approach of mandating procedures. While not always popular in the literature or at the school level, so called 'strong leadership' can be effective and may well be required on occasions in order to 'unfreeze' old habits and establish new procedures, as evidenced by this principal's eventual determination to allow the senior students greater freedom with regard to their common room and study times.
Aspects of the principal’s leadership behaviour to date, and the work still required in order to lead the initiative, are captured in the following comments offered by Owens (1998) in relation to the principal as transformational leader:

Vision building is not always a placid process but often requires engagement with different worldviews of people in the group, different temperaments, different personal agendas, different levels of understanding, different hopes and aspirations and different pedagogical approaches to the future. Therefore, whereas the school principal, for example must avoid imposing a prepared mission statement on the teachers for ratification by them, he or she must have developed a clearly thought-out position from which to contribute, unhesitatingly and convincingly to the discussion. (p. 214)

In addition to the leadership behaviours described by Owens (1998), a number of issues need to be systematically addressed during the next few years at the school if the goal of encouraging the development of independent learners is to be further realised. Analysis of the data gathered in this study and a review of the broader literature on high schools, curriculum change and leadership lead to the following further recommendations. First, the school should consider an ongoing evaluation of the initiatives, drawing on a range of sources and measures. Such an evaluation would provide a means whereby the innovation could be judged within its broader context. This in turn should provide a sound basis for decisions about how to progress the innovation. Second, sustained discussion on the nature of learning and the appropriateness of school and parental expectations of the students would be fruitful. This process may reveal the paradoxes that have been glimpsed in the data gathered in this study. Finally, a detailed examination of the cultural practices of the school and specific policies and rules should be conducted. Policies and practices throughout the school should be critiqued in the light of the extent to which they encourage dependent or independent learning behaviours. Age- and stage-appropriate policies and practices for independent learning should be considered across all the years, not just the final two years of schooling.

In all these activities it is clear that leadership for significant change in pedagogy and school culture needs to be shared among the various subject department leaders. Department heads have a clear role to play in operationalising the rhetoric of independent student learning and behaviour in each of the subject disciplines. Clearly, the principal of a high school with a strong departmental organisational structure has to collaborate with subject department heads in the curriculum leadership process. The leadership roles of the principal and the department heads are complementary and interdependent and these differences and dependencies need to be made explicit and valued.

CONCLUSION

This article has described an ambitious curriculum change project at an independent boys’ school. The goals of the change – to promote habits of independent learning and encourage greater student responsibility – were clearly articulated by the principal. The need for the change was generally accepted among the staff of the school. While some
progress had been made in terms of altering teaching practices and revising school policies and procedures, there were a number of constraints that acted to limit the extent and effects of these changes. We have identified several of these constraints and argued that many of them are related to the disciplinary and organisational features of high schools and the inherent limitations on school-wide curriculum leadership by the principal acting alone without the collaboration of the curriculum leaders in each of the subject departments.

A number of questions that have arisen during this study warrant further consideration. First, to what extent are 'successful' schools amenable to change? In this case, the past academic successes of the school seemed to act as a constraint on curriculum change. Logic suggests that schools with a reputation for poor academic results may more easily embrace curriculum change than schools which have had successful academic achievement. Leading from this question, the ways in which change and leadership processes differ in schools with varying histories of success or failure might be fruitfully examined. Third, to what extent might the effectiveness of change in high schools be attributable to leadership or management as opposed to influences that flow from the disciplinary and organisational characteristics of these schools? Finally, the issue of 'distributed' pedagogical leadership for meaningful change in high schools, i.e. the interdependence of the leadership roles of the principal/assistant principal(s) and subject department heads, emerged as an important consideration in this study. Studies of the forms and extent of 'distributed leadership' in high schools would be a valuable addition to the literature.

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REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH PRINCIPAL

*The School*

History

Administrative structure

School mission

Staff

Student

*The Initiative*

Description

History/timeline

Purpose(s)

Components

Detail for each

Rationale for each

Factors which led to the initiative

Comments and concerns from ...

(a) administrator(s)

(b) teachers

(c) students (current and former)
(d) parents (current and former)
(e) others

School mission
Formal evaluation or review procedures

Initial evaluations of the initiatives
Feedback/evaluation to date
(a) whole policy
(b) individual components (from above)

Strengths
Weaknesses
Opportunities
Threats

APPENDIX B: SCHEDULE FOR INTERVIEW WITH SELECTED TEACHERS AND CO-ORDINATORS

Person and their role
1. Please describe your position and role at the school?
2. How many years have you worked here?
3. Previous experience?

Nature of the innovation
4. What changes have occurred with regard to:
   * pastoral care? relationships among students, teachers?
   * teaching? new methods?
   * learning? your assessment of changes in the approach that students have as learners?
   * your role and the work you do in the senior school?

Effects
5. In your view, what effects have these changes had:
   * in the area of pastoral care? growth of the students? (maturity, responsibility, relationships among and between students and staff etc)
   * on teaching?
   * on student learning?
   * your work?

Key factors
6. What factors have:
   * contributed to the success of the initiatives?
   * acted as barriers or hindrances to the success of the initiatives?

Other
7. Is there anything else that you can tell us that may help us in coming to a better understanding of the changes that have occurred in the Yr 11 and 12 program at the school?