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ABSTRACT
                Over the last 2 decades, education in Ontario,
Canada, has undergone several changes, including an increased
emphasis on process skills and the learning process itself. This
paper presents findings of a study that examined the role of the
secondary school department head in the change process, particularly
in curriculum implementation, staff development, and the creation of
opportunities for collaborative communication. Data were obtained
from interviews with 35 department heads from 15 secondary schools in
1 Ontario school district. Findings indicate that the department
heads did not totally understand the holistic nature of the
curricular changes. They reported that they wanted to act as change
agents, but needed organizational support structures. Overall, they
said that they had no systematic plan for implementation, had not
been active in designing or implementing staff-development programs,
and had not internalized the new educational philosophies. They
overwhelmingly identified staff attitude as the major barrier to
implementing curricular change. At the minimum, departments must
begin to develop ways to deal collaboratively with integrating
subjects, developing alternative teaching strategies, and embedding
professional development into the school fabric. Eighteen tables are
included. (LMI)

SECONDARY SCHOOL CHANGE:

THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS

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SECONDARY SCHOOL CHANGE:
THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS[1]

Society is changing as we move towards a post-modernist society. This change is similar to the

watershed changes at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Schools -- and what constitutes relevant

knowledge and skills -- will also have to adapt to the basic structural changes occurring in society.

Secondary schools across North America, in particular, have been challenged to address their concepts

of secondary school education.

The means to facilitate such drastic secondary school change has become a topic of discussion

both in the academic literature and in school systems. Often department heads are cited as key players

in facilitating the changes required. Yet little research is reported on how department heads have

perceived or performed a change agent role. This study attempts to address this issue through an

investigation in 15 schools in one Ontario school district. Specifically, we were interested in whether

department heads understood the curricular changes facing secondary schools and what role they

performed in facilitating the change process in their respective departments.

Conceptual Framework

Increasingly the department head role has been targeted as the means to facilitate secondary school

change. The sheer size of most secondary schools and the traditional organization around subject areas

has created school cultures which have often mitigated against change in secondary schools. As Little

(1992) suggests, "In the eyes of most reformers, the impetus to change is weakened in part by the

conservative force of teachers' subject loyalties and schools' departmental structures" (p. 30). Hargreaves

(1988) further argues that secondary teachers' subject specialization can:

> inhibit the development of transferable pedagogic skills, restrict teachers' adaptability and
> responsiveness to educational challenge and innovation, and limit their commitment to

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[1] This paper is derived from the technical report Secondary School Change: Current Practices, Future Possibilities (Hannay, 1992).

children and learning in general as against enthusiasms for particular bodies of content. (p. 223)

Paradoxically while departmental organization is perceived by some to be an obstacle to change, it might also hold the key for facilitating the change process. Successful change is dependent on strong leaders at the school level (Fullan, 1990, 1991; Louis, 1986; Louis & Miles, 1990; Wilson & Corocan, 1988). Traditionally school leadership has been synonymous with principal leadership but even if secondary school principals had the subject expertise to initiate program change in a multitude of different subject areas, they hardly have the time (Louis & Miles, 1990).

Department heads are better positioned to facilitate change than secondary principals. First, the department head has responsibility for and to a much smaller group of people than a principal. The support and pressure necessary for change could be made stronger and more effective by a department head working with a smaller group of teachers than a principal working with a total staff. Second, the department membership is often central to teachers' professional identity (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1990). Departments vary widely, as do individual teachers's perception of them. Often, however, teachers within a department share subject area loyalty and expertise (McCammon, 1992) as well as a political interest when it comes to competition for resources (Little, 1992). Department heads are likely to benefit from a preexisting sense of community and unity of purpose within the department. Third, research indicates that it is often within the department that attempts to influence instructional practices, to date, have been brought to bear on secondary schools. As Johnson (1990) suggests, "To the extent that high school teachers worked together on improving their practice, it was primarily within departments that they did so. . . ." (p. 174).

Although the department head may be in a position to facilitate change, there is little evidence to suggest that they carry out this role. In the few studies that do mention the role of department head, the general consensus appears to be that the role is ill-defined and widely variable (Little, 1990; Little, 1988; Johnson, 1990; Gorman, 1982). Sometimes the role of department head includes teacher evaluation

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(although not in Ontario) or collaboration in the development of curriculum, functions central to bringing about the changes that restructuring implies; in other cases it does not. Indeed, as Little (1990) notes, the department heads' role "is most variable precisely in those areas that have greatest potential import for teachers' classroom performance" (p. 215). Thus while there is a great potential for a department head to become "an agent and promoter of change" (Mildwood & Hillier, 1987, p.5), it is not apparent that necessary awareness and understanding are in place to realize this goal. Indeed, these "microprocesses of change are probably the most neglected aspects of research on high schools" (Fullan, 1990, p. 253).

Clearly if department heads are to perform a leadership role in the current wave of secondary school reform, research is needed on the existing role performed by departments heads. Fullan (1991) provides a useful conceptual organization to consider the department head role, he suggests:

> In the process of examining the individual and collective situations, it is necessary to contend with both the *what* of change and the *how* of change. Meaning must be accomplished in relation to both these aspects. It is possible to be crystal clear about what one wants and be totally inept at achieving it. Or to be skilled at managing change but empty-headed about what changes are most needed. (p. 5; italics in the original)

In this study, the nature of the changes and the process of change provide the framework from which to analyze the department heads' role.

Nature of the Changes

The basic underlying assumptions of curriculum for Ontario schools have been changing over the last two decades. Increasingly, the movement has been away from teaching and learning strategies grounded in a transmission orientation (Miller & Seller, 1985) which concentrates more on factual knowledge, rote memorization, and a teacher-centred curriculum. This movement has partially resulted from increasing knowledge on how individuals learn and also the changing needs of society. Instead, Ontario schools are being asked to help their students become "self-actualized self-motivated problem solvers". This means that students not only require certain knowledge but also must be able to access

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information and apply the information in problem solving. The increased emphasis on process skills and the learning process itself is more consistent with a transactional or transformational orientation (Miller & Seller, 1985). This means that some teachers will need to restructure teaching and learning strategies in their classrooms to become more student oriented and process based. In the last decade, these changes have been included in secondary school documents developed under the Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions (OS:IS) Ministry policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984). Since the research reported in this paper was conducted, even more profound changes for secondary schools have been introduced by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

If department heads are performing a change agent role, then it seems imperative that they understand the nature of the changes described above. These are not new changes, but began with the implementation of OS:IS in 1984. In this study, we gathered evidence to what degree the department heads interviewed understood the nature of the changes they had been responsible for implementing over the last decade.

Process of Change

As Fullan suggested (1991), understanding the nature of the change without understanding the process of change would most likely result in little significant change. Consequently, the second focus of this study was the actual role the department heads performed in the change process. Three issues seemed particularly germane: the implementation process; staff development; and opportunities for collaborative communications.

Curriculum Implementation   Over and over again in the literature, there is litany that change and implementation are processes not events. Numerous models of curricular change exist but what seemed crucial in this study was to gain an understanding of how department heads were dealing with the change process. It was not the purpose of this study to determine if department heads were following particular implementation models; rather the intent was to determine whether systematic methods were

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being employed to implement curricular change. Again, the intent was not to collect nor expect written implementation plans but to examine if implementation was a planned process. At the simplest level, planning for implementation might have included an assessment of the curricular changes for teachers, students, and resources. In addition, implementation planning should have some way of determining what needs had to be met in order to facilitate successful implementation. Information was also sought on how department heads monitored the unfolding implementation process.

Staff Development Staff development is a means through which educational systems typically help individuals change. Secondary school departments provide a natural context through which to facilitate change. First, they are typically small allowing for the subjective reality of the individuals to be incorporated into the staff development process. Second, because there is a shared interest in a subject area, it should be easier to develop a shared understanding of the change initiative. Third, the smaller size and common interest has a greater likelihood of providing "conditions for ongoing, interactive, cumulative learning necessary to develop or evolve new skills, behaviours, and conceptions in practice" (Fullan, 1987, p. 214). Seemingly, if department heads are performing a change agent role then they should be developing departmental based staff development programs that assist their teachers in understanding and applying the changes required in Ministry policy.

Opportunities for collaborative communications The department head role is cited in the literature as a change agent role because of the communication networks that have been traditionally instituted within the secondary school department structure. Such a structure provides opportunities to facilitate staff development, enact an implementation plan and build collaboration. In the study, then data were sought on the topics and forms of departmental and department heads meetings. In addition, information was gathered on the formal and informal means of communication between department heads and teachers in their department and with other department heads.

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Summary

The lack of available research on the change agent role of the secondary department head prompted this investigation. Obviously, if individuals in this role are to assume a more active role in facilitating secondary school change then data are necessary on how this role is currently performed. This is not an intervention study as we just gathered data on the existing situation. But an analysis of evidence gathered does suggest some possible interventions as noted in the discussion section of this paper. This paper will describe the understanding of the curriculum changes and the methods to facilitate change currently performed by a sample of department heads in fifteen Ontario schools.

Methodology

As the purpose of this study was to understand the participants' perspectives of the department head role, a naturalistic research design was employed. This was intended to be a descriptive study that would provide data from which to analyze the current role, and provide information from which to support the department head in facilitating change at the school district level. A school district committee was formed to develop the parameters of the study. The committee spend nine months defining the focus areas and data collection methods. This committee included a teacher, department heads, vice-principal, principal, consultants, superintendent and an OISE researcher. The data reported in this paper was collected by the OISE researcher based on the parameters established by the committee.

Sample

A sample that was both representative and purposive was developed for department heads[2]. All fifteen secondary schools in the school district, various department head roles, and subject areas were represented. The following breakdown of the departmental positions were included in the sample:

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[2] Throughout this report, the term department head will include all roles such as major and minor department heads, subject area responsibilities. assistant heads and secondary school resource teachers.

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Major Department Head	Minor Department Head	Subject Area Responsibility	Assistant Head	Secondary Resource School Teacher
12	6	10	5	2

In total, 35 department heads were interviewed.

Data Collection

The Board Committee developed a specific interview schedule for department heads. The questions were designed to elicit process information from the sample interviewed. As the committee was concerned with gathering descriptive data, the questions remained as open and as unprescriptive as possible.

The individual and open-ended interviews with department heads were conducted by the OISE researcher. Each interview required approximately 1 hour to complete. Each school and interview was individually coded in order to protect the identify of the schools and the individuals involved. As the interviews were being conducted, extensive notes were collected by the interviewer. The participants responses to each question and from each interview were then collated to facilitate data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of several different levels. During the two weeks of data collection, the researcher maintained a reflective log in which emerging questions and insights were noted. Once the data were collected and the responses to each question by each participants were collated, the researcher looked for patterns that included both similarities and difference to each question. Additionally, similar patterns were sought across the different questions. From this analysis a secondary level data summary was created.

This analysis is evident in the tables used in the findings section. The patterns, where identified, have been put in bold print to assist the readers in identifying the pattern. Individual responses are noted and indented below the over-reaching pattern. Throughout the finding section, the numbers will relate

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to the numbers of responses, not the individuals involved. In answering most questions, most respondents provided more than one response, consequently the numbers will vary. Percentages of the responses in each table is included to assist the reader in judging the strength of the response. All responses by the participants are included in the tables.

Findings

There can be no doubt that secondary schools are facing major and significant changes in organizational structures and in teaching and learning strategies. The pace of these changes will mostly increase, not decrease, over the next decade. As mentioned in the conceptual framework, two aspects are key and are used as the organizational framework for the findings section: the nature of the change or innovation, and the process of facilitating change.

Nature of the Changes

Since the initial introduction of OS:IS by the Ontario Government in 1984, and the gradual publication of related subject-area curricula, the philosophy underlying secondary school curricula has changed. As noted earlier, there has been a noticeable movement away from a transmission to a transactional orientation. Most department heads interviewed believed there was a significant philosophical change in the post-OS:IS curriculum from the traditional focus of secondary schools (significant change: 25 responses; not significant change: 3 responses). Additionally, 20 of those responding felt the change was positive while only 7 responses felt the changes were negative (4 department heads did not respond). The respondents did identify some of the components of these changes as noted in Table One:

Table One: Changes associated with OS:IS curriculum documents (n = 44)

	Number of responses	% of responses
Process/content	25	57
De-emphasis on traditional content	8	18
Increased focus on process	7	16
More career focus	5	11
Emphasis on new technology	3	7

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Increased content	2	5
Changing teaching/learning strategies	**14**	**32**
Increased emphasis on collaboration	3	7
Increased emphasis on problem solving	3	7
Increased emphasis on group work	3	7
Increased emphasis on thinking skills	2	5
Independent study introduced	2	5
Focus on learning to learn	1	2
Student centred	**5**	**11**
More student centred	3	7
Looking at student as complete person	2	5

The interview data suggests that while individual department heads were able to identify components of the changes, generally, they isolated the components and had not internalized the philosophical changes included in the curriculum documents. Consequently because they had not perceived the holistic nature of the changes, individual changes were introduced piecemeal. For example, problem-solving activities might be used in one lesson or unit but not form the basis of the whole curriculum.

The responses also suggested a contradiction between how the individual department heads were viewing the documents. For instance, Table Two outlines the perspective on the forms of the curriculum document itself.

Table Two: Perspectives on the post-OS:IS curriculum documents (n = 24)

	Number of responses	% of responses
More prescriptive	6	25
More societal influence	4	17
Practically oriented	3	13
Improvement for students and teachers	2	8
Dropped the practical orientation	2	8
Requires staff development for teachers	2	8
Guidelines are vague	1	4
Increased flexibility	1	4
Can adapt program for individual needs	1	4
Not good for students	1	4
Don't read documents	1	4

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In these responses, the variety was evident: 6 found the documents to be more prescriptive, 2 found Increased flexibility; 3 claimed it more practically oriented, 2 felt the practical orientation was dropped; or 2 found the documents better for teachers and students while 1 found them worse for students.

In summary, the data generated from 35 department heads suggests they did not have a clear view of the curricular changes which have be underway in Ontario education for the last 10 years. In general, they understood the changes in a piecemeal fashion and were attempting to implement these changes into a traditional curriculum. They had not internalized that the paradigm was shifting and the baseline itself required major changes.

Process of Change

Although the current literature is citing the potential of the department head role in facilitating secondary school reform, few studies have documented the functions performed by department heads. The impetus for a change agent role for department heads already exists in Ontario. The Ontario Education Act includes supervision and curriculum implementation in the department heads' role. The secondary teachers federation has published a monograph, Heads Up (Midwood & Wood, 1987), and has offered workshops across Ontario advocating a more active process role for department heads. However, the difficulty remains that while most department heads are subject area experts, they have often not had the opportunity to gain knowledge in facilitating change nor have school districts always expected them to perform this role. In this study, department heads were asked to describe in detail their role in facilitating change and also to identify what they believed the role should be. The responses suggested three categories related to the process of facilitating change: curriculum implementation; staff development; and opportunities for collaborative communications.

Curriculum Implementation Role As noted below in Table Three, the department heads interviewed stated that curriculum implementation was a major component of their role. Yet additional

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data suggests they did not have a systematic plan nor methods to successfully facilitate an implementation plan.

Table Three: Department heads' role in implementing curricular change (n = 87)

	Number of responses	% of responses
Manage/facilitate curriculum process	41	47
monitors change implementation	7	8
develop curriculum	6	7
knowledge about resources	5	6
implementor	5	6
initiator	4	5
planner	3	3
flexible problem solver	3	3
leader	3	3
wants to get into other classrooms	1	1
help with instructional strategies	1	1
deal with resistance to change	1	1
deal with change process itself	1	1
establish incremental benchmarks	1	1
Work with personnel	25	29
support/coach/cheerleader	7	8
network beyond school	5	6
motivator	4	5
responsible to school administration	3	3
positive approach	2	2
buffer	1	1
know what staff is capable of	1	1
collaborator with department	1	1
release friction	1	1
Knowledgeable	15	17
knowledgeable about the change	8	9
share information with staff	7	8
Deal with organizational issues	4	1
student discipline	1	1
budgeting	1	1
timetabler	1	1
organizational assistance	1	1
No response/no role	2	2
not much	1	1
only person in department	1	1

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Overwhelming, as noted in Table Four, the department heads interviewed identified the attitude

of staff as being their major problem in implementing curricular change. Several comments from those

interviewed provided insight into this difficulty: "tell people something but he will still do what he thinks

is best"; "some people [say] have put in my time, don't need this"; "this is the way we have done it";

or "still have some people in the system using pet units from 1970's". There was some evidence that

change itself was not appreciated by some of the department heads interviewed: "is it worth making

changes before the next document arrives?"; "never really convinced [that] massive changes are needed";

"don't tend to change curriculum unless the Ministry or [school district] wants change"; or "powers that

be love change, will reward that, if you want a promotion get onto a curriculum committee".

Table Four: Perceived barriers to implementing curricular change (n = 78)

	Number of responses	% of responses
Human	30	38
attitude of staff	17	22
lack of knowledge in subject area for some teachers	3	4
getting people to implement properly	2	3
no SO presence in school	1	1
lots of seconded teachers	1	1
continuity of staff	1	1
staff motivation	1	1
how far you push beyond the comfort zone	1	1
good network	1	1
SO really helps	1	1
communication skills	1	1
Resources	30	38
time for technical chores	9	12
lack of money	7	9
resources	7	9
no money barriers	4	5
professional development	3	4
Physical and organizational structure of the school	8	10
physical structure of school [no break out rooms; space to meet]	3	4
class size	2	3
semestering	2	3
timetabling	1	1

Nature of the change/document itself	7	9
how document is written	2	3
getting consistency across curriculum	2	3
scope of curriculum	2	3
scope of change	1	1
No problems	1	1
no barriers/problems	3	4

Part of the difficulty with interpreting the barriers to change listed by the department heads, was that their general inexperience with the concept of implementation as a process was a major impediment to overcoming the personnel problems they identified. While the department heads interviewed described their role in terms of processes such as implementing, monitoring, developing, or supporting, the evidence collected suggested these processes involved informal interactions. The vast majority of those interviewed had not developed an implementation plan as noted in Table Five. There was evidence that the Board curriculum document was considered an implementation plan which suggests that the "read-and-do" implementation model was dominant.

Table Five: Developing an implementation plan (n = 62)

	Number of responses	% of responses
no implementation plan	30	48
curriculum document is considered implementation plan	17	27
informal plan, not written	5	8
timelines	4	6
resources	4	6
inservice needs	2	3
five year plan	1	2
methodology used	1	2
identify changes in behaviours for teachers	1	2
might have plan if there is a new teacher	1	2

The department heads' interviewed were also asked to describe how they handled specific curriculum changes. They were asked to recount the process they used in dealing with a new curriculum policy or document. This evidence, reported in Table Six, suggested that while the department heads

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perceived they had a process role (Table 3), they had not employed systematic strategies that were consistent with the current knowledge of the curriculum implementation process.

Table Six: Considerations when first looking at a new document (n = 81)

	Number of responses	% of responses
specific changes	12	15
content included	8	10
effect on me	7	9
translate into practical application	7	9
teaching strategies	6	7
degree of change [fit into existing]	5	6
effect on my students	5	6
the mandatory changes	5	6
areas for teacher flexibility	5	6
resources needed and source of	5	6
evaluation	4	5
changes in philosophy	4	5
goals/objectives	2	2
organization	2	2
demands on teachers	1	1
realistic timeline	1	1
whether the curriculum was field tested	1	1
skills	1	1

The information contained in the above table must also be considered in light of the information reported earlier in Table One (page 8) which suggested that the department heads interviewed were not seeing the holistic nature of the changes suggested in the post-OS:IS curriculum documents. The changes included in the post-OS:IS documents have centred on philosophical shifts on what is important for students to learn (process skills) rather than the specific content of the learning process. Yet for the interviewed department heads specific changes, not philosophical underpinnings, were the first consideration. Indeed, comments by several department heads reinforce the interpretation: "too much philosophy, wanted the meat"; "philosophy is heavy reading, don't always read that"; or "only read documents in snatches". If we return to Fullan (1991), then it seems that the department heads might not be understanding the "what" or the nature of the change incorporated into the most recent documents.

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Those interviewed describe their next step in dealing with the new document. As noted below in Table Seven, the majority interviewed started by developing a course outline or units for the new curriculum. Few department heads interviewed reported that they would explore whether a gap existed between existing practice and the requirements of the new policies, and then determine what this might mean for teachers and students.

Table Seven: First action upon receiving a new document (n = 46)

	Number of responses	% of responses
develop course outline/units	12	26
talk to others [school, county, Ministry]	6	13
ask for/identify necessary resources	4	9
tell department	4	9
reviewed previous curriculum to ' ae what need to be changed, revised	3	7
apply information	2	4
think about possible activities to implement objectives and goals	2	4
try out	2	4
talk it over with assistant head	1	2
talk to principal and vice-principal	1	2
decide on whether to do something	1	2
depends on document	1	2
think about how to present it to others	1	2
apply rules	1	2
wait for the consultant to tell us what to do	1	2
turn over document to county committee to develop	1	2
identify expectation for students	1	2
respond to Ministry of Education	1	2
see if philosophy matches	1	2

Again, little planned process was evident in the next step which typically involved an informal meeting with their department teachers as noted in Table Eight:

Table Eight: Sharing the information with the department teachers (n = 42)

	Number of responses	% of responses
informal meetings/discussions	16	38
formal meetings	6	14
only person in department	5	12
pass document around department	5	12

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inservice at Board	3	7
discuss at end of semester after it has been taught	2	5
no response	2	5
monthly department meetings	1	2
shared with whole staff	1	2
share through group teams	1	2

In summary, the evidence collected suggests that the department heads recognized their role in

facilitating change but had very few strategies in their repertoire to facilitate the changes as successfully

and as effortlessly as possible.

Staff Development Role As noted earlier, the nature of the changes being faced by Ontario

secondary schools since the introduction of OS:IS has involved a significant paradigm shift for a majority

of secondary school teachers. Assisting these teachers in understanding the nature of the change and its

impact on their teaching styles and curriculum focus would seem to be best accomplished through a

planned and responsive staff development program. While the school district had some responsibility in

enacting such a program, the department level would provide a natural venue through which the teachers

could explore and develop a shared understanding of the changes as applied to their classrooms.

Consequently, department heads were asked to describe their role in staff development. Again

the evidence collected, as noted in Table Nine, suggested that the department heads had not been active

in designing and implementing ongoing or cumulative staff development for their departments. It is not

surprising that the barriers identified in Table Four (page 12) exist.

Table Nine: Department head's role in designing a staff development plan (n = 34)

	Number of responses	% of responses
no plan	29	85
have a plan	1	3
N/A	4	12

The evidence suggested that department heads tried to help teachers expand their repertoire of

teaching and learning strategies but more in a reactive rather than in a proactive or planned manner as

noted in Table Ten.

Table Ten: Professional assistance to colleagues (n = 55)

	Number of responses	% of responses
encourage dialogue	9	16
send them to conferences;		
share ideas from conferences	9	16
share resources, literature	9	16
model for them	7	13
nothing; left to individuals	7	13
team teaching/planning	3	5
have PD at departmental meetings	2	4
discuss techniques at department meeting	2	4
not much you can change	2	4
N/A	2	4
covered classes so teacher can		
attend meeting	1	2
have teachers observe each other	1	2
one-on-one coaching	1	2

Part of the difficulty was that professional development seemed to be perceived as something that was done for you or at you rather than something that was facilitated at the school or departmental level. This perception is certainly understandable as it is one shared by most school personnel as they struggle with creating alternative conceptions of professional development strategies; strategies which are school based, interactive, ongoing, and cumulative. Additionally, the changing role of the department head position, especially when it includes supervision, causes other difficulties. As one department head said in an interview, "[it is] risky to help others; set yourself up as I'm better than you" or as another interviewee claimed, "can't tell someone what to do".

In summary, then, the evidence collected in this study suggested that these department heads did not have systematic staff development strategies to help their departmental teachers implement new curriculum policies nor new instructional strategies.

Opportunities for Collaborative Communications The potential power of the department head role in facilitating change lies in the institutionalized departmental organizational structure. Such a structure provides a collaborative means to facilitate curriculum implementation and the supporting staff development. Consequently, department heads were asked about the role and frequency of departmental

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meetings. The evidence also suggested that department heads were not taking advantage of department

meetings to address significant curricular change on a regular or systematic basis. Departmental meetings

tended to be informal and not held on a regular basis as documented in Table Eleven:

Table Eleven: Frequency of departmental meetings (n = 45)

	Number of responses	% of responses
meet informally when necessary	14	31
monthly	8	18
only one person in department	4	9
don't have any	3	7
subject/grade groupings once a week	2	4
formally about 3-4 times a year	2	4
when needed	2	4
formal, twice a year	2	4
3 per term, 6 per year	2	4
meet informally once a week with the other teacher because of new course	1	2
every two weeks	1	2
meet socially 2 or 3 times in year	1	2
one-on-one informally	1	2
informally, twice a month	1	2
have lunch together	1	2

Additionally, as noted in Table Twelve, the meetings tended to be of a rather short time duration:

Table Twelve: Time duration of meetings (n = 37)

	Number of responses	% of responses
informal, 10-15 minutes	2	5
15-30 minutes	2	5
half hour	3	8
1 hour	6	16
1 - 1 1/2 hours	3	8
1-3 hours	4	11
lunch hour	2	5
N/A/no response	11	30
depends on situation	2	5
informally, 40 minutes	1	3
informal, 2-60 minutes	1	3

By far, the topics discussed at the meeting tended to be logistical concerns or information sharing as

reported in Table Thirteen.

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Table Thirteen: Typical topics for departmental meetings (n = 84)

	Number of Responses	% of responses
housekeeping	20	24
curriculum	10	12
no response	9	11
professional development	8	10
new information	7	8
student evaluation	5	6
how things are going	4	5
field trips/extra curricular	3	4
strategies	3	4
information from Heads	3	4
guest speakers	2	2
class management	2	2
needs	2	2
use of computer	1	1
cases	1	1
work loads	1	1
free discussion	1	1
philosophy	1	1
review curriculum once (twice a year	1	1

However, as noted in Table Fourteen, departments had not invested a great deal of time discussing curricular issues at their meetings. It is also important to note that the department heads interviewed reported very little discussion was held in departmental meetings on alternative teaching and learning strategies which would be necessary for the implementation of the transactional orientations of the post OS:IS curriculum documents.

Table Fourteen: Types of curricular issues discussed (n = 47)

	Number of responses	% of responses
no discussion/did not respond	21	45
student evaluation	3	6
only with new curriculum	2	4
Ministry philosophy	2	4
presentation styles	2	4
coordinate across grade levels	2	4
doing reviews	1	2
computer usage	1	2
course content and timing	1	2
transition years	1	2
keeping curriculum current	1	2
new textbooks	1	2

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special programs 9/10	1	2
liaison with community college	1	2
Board level information	1	2
hands-on stuff	1	2
classroom management	1	2
safety	1	2
resources	1	2
implementation	1	2
skills in the curriculum	1	2

Seemingly, the department heads in general were not taking advantage of departmental meetings to facilitate change. This can be partly attributed to their focus on subject expertise rather than on the process of change and teacher development.

Department heads also reported other natural opportunities for collaboration were not being used to pursue curricular change. Notably, the department heads' meeting or cabinet, focused mainly on procedural items rather than providing a natural venue through which to plan for implementation and staff development across the school. The department heads interviewed reported regularly scheduled department head meetings with biweekly or monthly meetings of 1 to 2 hour duration being the common pattern. As reported in Table Fifteen, these meetings dealt primarily with administrative matters.

Table Fifteen: Topics for department chairs meetings (n = 90)

	Number of responses	% of responses
housekeeping	21	23
procedures	16	18
budget	13	14
evaluation of students	7	8
school philosophy	6	7
problems	5	6
information from Board or Ministry	4	4
staffing	4	4
discipline	4	4
professional development program	3	3
no response	2	2
more active decision making	1	1
curriculum	1	1
would like more process discussion	1	1
morale	1	1
long-range plans	1	1

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Similar to department heads, secondary school principals in this study were not using department heads meetings to discuss curricular/instructional change. Table Sixteen reports the curricular/instructional issues that department heads reported discussed at heads meetings.

Table Sixteen: Curricular/instructional topics discussed at heads me⁻ ⁻⁻⁻ (n = 55)

	Number of responses	% of responses
no discussion	19	35
no attempt to work cross-disciplinary	8	15
student evaluation	5	9
cross-departmental issues	5	9
all the time about resource centre	4	7
transition years	4	7
collaborative learning	3	5
some effort at common elements	2	3
general statement or mandate	2	3
a lot	1	2
curriculum development	1	2
learning strategies committee	1	2

Given the comments earlier of the similarities of a process orientation in post-OS:IS curricular documents, the heads meetings could provide an useful tool to facilitate secondary school change. This would be particularly powerful if the department head cabinet, in conjunction with the school administration and central office support staff, could identify common elements across subject areas, such as co-operative learning, creative problem solving or alternative evaluation strategies, that they might all address. Certainly, a school-based staff development plan could develop from the common elements.

In summary, the evidence collected suggests that department heads were not generally taking advantage of traditional organizational means of communication to facilitate curricular change. Department meetings and department heads' meetings typically focused on procedural concerns rather than on developing and implementing strategies to facilitate the significant curricular changes that have been faced over the last ten years in these schools. The mechanisms were in place for department heads, in collaboration with other roles, to guide and facilitate change but had not been employed in this manner.

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Desired Role Yet the data suggested that department heads in general wanted to perform more

of a knowledgable, change-facilitator role as evidenced in Table Seventeen.

Table Seventeen: Preferred role of department head (n = 45)

	Number of Responses	% of responses
Process role	31	69
facilitator	6	13
more leadership	3	7
not an evaluator	2	4
initiator	2	4
more time to get into classes	2	4
curriculum specialist in school	2	4
more input into direction of	2	4
networking with others	2	4
increased say in teacher allocation	1	2
more of an administrator	1	2
should attend Board meeting	1	2
better versed in curriculum development	1	2
better versed in strategies changes	1	2
keep current	1	2
increased cooperation between department heads	1	2
assist administration in setting goals for school	1	2
monitor equipment	1	2
more meat and potatoes role	1	2
Revised role	14	31
happy as is	4	9
role description unclear	3	7
more time	2	4
more equity between departments	1	2
have paperwork done centrally, i.e., ordering text for a subject	1	2
remove mundane duties	1	2
back to what it used to be, now curriculum too prescriptive	1	2
some department heads don't do their job	1	2

The department heads interviewed also identified what assistance they needed in becoming curricular

leaders:

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Table Eighteen: Assistance required (n = 61)

	Number of responses	% of responses
Resources	**24**	**39**
more time	11	18
increased resources	9	15
secretarial help	1	2
follow-up; review	1	2
help/support	1	2
have SATs come in	1	2
Knowledge	**20**	**33**
clear understanding of curriculum		
trends and societal needs	9	15
inservice	2	3
inservice on curriculum process		
(development, implementation, review)	2	3
observation skills	2	3
knowledge on facilitating change	2	3
ways to get students more involved	1	2
inservice on facilitating change	1	2
ways to deal with resistance	1	2
Opportunities for collaboration	**12**	**20**
opportunities to go out of county		
(inter board)	6	10
interactions with colleagues	4	7
monthly meetings of subject		
department heads	1	2
interaction with teachers from		
other schools	1	2
Interpersonal	**5**	**8**
personal characteristics (energy,		
enthusiasm, motivation, patience)	3	5
trust from other teachers	1	2
faith in myself	1	2

Seemingly, the department heads do need assistance in performing an active change agent role

as both the general desire and the organizational structures are in place to encourage such a role.

Summary

The interview data collected from 35 department heads, representing all disciplines, sizes of

department, and 15 secondary schools, suggested that the holistic nature of the current curricular changes

had not been totally understood by the department heads. Further while this group invested a great deal of time in their department head role, their lack of understanding in facilitating curricular change made their task more difficult.

The purpose of this study was to collect descriptive data on the role of secondary school department heads. This data were collected in one Ontario school system and are not necessarily generalizable to other school systems. Certainly, further research is needed on the actual and desired role of secondary school department heads. Even with this caveat, this study should provide rich detail through which other department heads can reflect on their role.

Discussion

The province of Ontario is involved in a substantial restructuring of education in both the elementary and secondary schools. A similar move towards restructuring can be identified across North America. Restructuring involves changes in "roles, rules and relationships" (Sashkin & Egermeier, 1992, p. 13) for everyone in the educational system: students, teachers, and administrators at all levels. While the specifics vary somewhat according to who is advocating the restructuring, there are several changes that are consistently associated with and urged in the literature on restructuring. These changes include devolving authority from the provincial or state level to the school level; an increased community involvement; the development of a more integrated curriculum; the use of methods of instruction which are more student-centred, individualized, and cooperative; and the continuing empowerment of teachers, allowing them increased voice in decision making about their workplace and their work (Sashkin & Egermeier, 1992).

The growing literature on secondary school change has emphasized the role of department heads in facilitating such significant changes. The findings from this study suggest that not only do the department heads need assistance in learning better to manage change but they also need assistance in understanding the substantial nature of these changes themselves.

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The changes proposed for secondary schools are not cosmetic changes that will require minor adjustments but are significant changes that might require a systemic response. It might not be possible to address such major changes through the existing departmental structure. A move towards subject area integration suggests that perhaps the hundred year history of subject domination of secondary schools is nearing an end. Perhaps the school and/or departmental organization might need restructuring to better meet this proposed challenge. One possibility is to move away from a subject-area organization to one that represents the trend towards subject integration. Individuals accepting such a position must be given significant time and have expertise in facilitating curricular/instructional change. These individuals would also have to work with teachers to promote teachers' roles in decision making; to embed interactive, responsive, and ongoing professional development into the daily lives of teachers; and to work with the other units within the school to promote the generic changes required. Such an organizational structure would allow secondary schools to react more holistically to the changes that Sashkin and Egermeier (1992) identified.

The revolutionary changes described above have been proposed as one alternative for restructuring in order that secondary schools can address the changes coming in the next decade and the concern as to whether the existing structure can meet the emerging challenges. Even if such changes are not possible, the necessity still exists to redefine radically the existing structure and methods of interaction. The status quo, without adaptation, cannot implement the radical changes on the horizon. At a minimum, departments have to begin to develop ways to deal collaboratively with integrating subjects, developing alternative teaching strategies, and embedding professional development into the fabric of the school.

The challenges facing secondary schools have already begun and will become even more substantial during the next decade. However, without sustained and substantial support and/or a possible reconceptualization of the department head role, it might prove difficult to meet these challenges.

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