

***Policy, Politics, Pedagogy and People:  
Early Perceptions and Challenges of Large-scale Reform in Ontario  
Secondary Schools<sup>1</sup>***

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## **Chapter 1 - Setting the Stage**

### ***The Advent of Large-Scale Reform***

Educational reform is not a new phenomenon. During the 70s and the 80s, countries, provinces and states mounted commissions, did studies, wrote reports, held think tanks and developed policies directed at improving the quality of education in their schools (Gidney, 2000). Ontario was no exception. From the ROSE Report (Reform of Secondary Education) in 1982 to the Premier's Council Report in 1986, successive governments focused on education, particularly in secondary schools. (See Appendix A for a chronology of reforms in Ontario.) These world-wide initiatives arose out of a concern that students were not being properly prepared either for the world of work or for post-secondary education. Even entry-level positions demanded more and newer credentials including more advanced literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Secondary school completion was becoming important for all students, not just a few (Gidney, 2000).

For the most part, the vehicle for reform during the 80s and early 90s was the production of state of the art curriculum, with the belief that “good ideas would travel on their own” (Elmore, 1996, p. 18). In Ontario there was a whirlwind of curriculum change. The Ministry of Education released Ontario Schools: Intermediate Senior (OS:IS) in 1984, The Transition Years in 1992 and The Common Curriculum (Grades 1-9) in 1993. With each iteration, the curriculum moved steadily from subject content, teaching strategies and topics of study, to expectations for learning in literacy, numeracy and specific subject areas.

During these years, mountains of curriculum resource material were produced. School boards offered a smorgasbord of professional development opportunities and many school districts and schools elected to participate in school improvement projects from co-operative group learning, to 4MAT Learning Styles, to integrated curriculum, to outcomes-based education.

After a decade of school improvement activities, however, the overall result was disappointing. Research studies in many countries attested to the failure of school reform efforts, with secondary schools being particularly difficult to change (Teddle & Reynolds, 2000).

Neither government policies nor initiatives within schools had produced widespread or sustainable change. Revisiting the United States' Rand Change Agent Study of the 1970s, Milbrey McLaughlin (1990) concluded, "the net return to the general investment was the adoption of many innovations, the successful implementation of a few, and the long-run continuation of still fewer" (p. 12). As Richard Elmore (1996) described it:

We can produce many examples of how educational practice could look different, but we can produce few, if any, examples of large numbers of teachers engaging in these practices in large-scale institutions designed to deliver education to most children. (p. 11)

Putting ideas into practice was proving to be more complex than preparing curriculum documents and delivering them to schools. Successful implementation was sporadic. Change was fragile. Innovations and changes that actually appeared in classrooms and schools faded or disappeared when individuals left or leadership changed or a new idea captured the imagination. At the same time, a shaky economy and unpredictable future kept education in the public eye. Reflecting the prevailing sentiment of the public-at-large, governments in many parts of the world are demonstrating little patience for the usual pace of educational change. One of the primary reasons for this impatience is the link, in the minds of many policy makers, between a globally competitive national economy and the quality of a nation's schools. As one major consequence of this impatience, governments routinely eschew small scale trials, pilot studies and research and evaluation of their preferred policy initiatives, choosing instead to move more or less immediately to large-scale implementation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). The stage was set in many countries for governments to move from general directives meant to stimulate change from within to a more forceful stance of mandated reforms and monitoring of implementation.

During the 1990s, there was a dramatic shift in the nature of educational reform. Education moved to the foreground of many legislative agendas. Governments set their sights on large-scale reform – that is, changing entire systems. Michael Fullan (2000) contends that this move to large-scale reform arose, in part, because prior attempts at educational change had failed.

The educational system and its partners have failed to produce citizens who can contribute to and benefit from a world which offers enormous opportunity, and equally complex difficulty of finding your way in it. (p.2)

Government mandates for large-scale reform during this period were surprisingly similar around the world. Geoff Whitty and his colleagues (1997) studied legislative changes to education in Australia, England and Wales, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States. Each country had its unique history and context, but the governments had all introduced policies that sought to reformulate the relationship between government, schools and parents. All involved increased responsibility for individual schools, a reduction of power for district school boards or local education authorities; more power and responsibility to parents; changes to and centralization of curriculum; the introduction of standards or expectations for student learning and centralized assessment schemes. These changes were accompanied by decreased resources and support for education. Management of reduced resources was shifted to the shoulders of local school administrators and school councils, while central governments retained tight control through prescribed curricula, external assessment schemes and, in some cases, organized school inspections.

Since that time, government positions in a number of places have shifted in a variety of ways. For example, in England, centralized control of curriculum has been maintained. Achievement targets for each school are monitored by central agencies and schools' annual performance reports are published. But, the Labour government has also focused a great deal of attention and invested massive amounts of money in education to raise the importance of quality education for all children and to ensure that all teachers are equipped to move children's learning to higher levels.

In Ontario the current iteration of educational reform began with the Royal Commission on Learning in 1995. This NDP initiative formed the basis for many of the reforms that were announced by the Conservative government that came to power shortly after the commission report was released. The Royal Commission scrutinized every part of the educational system and made 166 recommendations for change under 13 headings. Many of these recommendations directly concerned secondary schools (e.g., secondary school be reduced to 3 years, not more than 24 credits, all courses show on student transcripts, only 2 differentiated levels of courses, mandatory community service, specified subject and skill graduation outcomes, prior learning



assessment, common report card and a mandatory literacy test as a requirement for a secondary school diploma). The government moved quickly to enact legislation and set policy designed to achieve massive educational change. (See Appendix A for a chronology of reforms in Ontario.)

Secondary School Reform (SSR) in Ontario was introduced in 1997 as part of a major education bill - the Education Quality Improvement Act. The reforms were to be phased into schools beginning in 1997/98 with Grade 7 students, preparing them for the new high school program that they would encounter in 1999. The return to streaming in Grade 9, the introduction of the new OSS curriculum, and the 4-year high school program were to be phased in over a period of years with full implementation in place by the 2002-03 school year. At the same time, the government released a new funding model that removed taxation for education from municipalities and positioned it in the provincial purview; amalgamated school boards, established school advisory councils; mandated the amount of instructional time in a teacher's day; and set average class size in districts across the province.

According to the Commissioners from the Education Improvement Commission (2000), the goals of the recent secondary reform mandates in Ontario were "to improve the accountability, effectiveness and quality of Ontario's school system" (p 3). Ontario's educational restructuring mirrors the elements described by Whitty and his colleagues (1997) or the "new orthodoxy" in reform that we have described elsewhere (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore and Manning, 2001). These include centralization of power and funding; defined standards; deeper learning, a focus on literacy and numeracy and science, centralized curricula; indicators and rubrics, aligned assessments and consequential accountability.

### ***Focus of This Study of Secondary School Reform in Ontario***

This particular study is one piece of a tapestry of research that is contributing to an understanding of the nature and impact of SSR, as it is being enacted in Ontario. Many researchers at OISE/UT and elsewhere have been deeply involved in examining the nature and influence of recent waves of provincial reform. Much of the research focuses on the challenge of change and on how various groups of teachers and administrators have experienced the changes and have addressed the issues inherent in major reform.

Andy Hargreaves (1998) found that school change is both a cognitive and emotional process for teachers and principals. He described the central role of teachers' emotions in the

way that change is enacted in schools. The emotions that teachers reported experiencing while implementing change were inextricably intertwined with power dynamics and their beliefs and sense of moral purpose. Teachers overwhelmingly reported feeling positive emotions when they implemented changes they found beneficial to students. This belief in the rightness of their actions sustained and motivated them through initial fears and insecurities. Engaging in collaborative efforts to make conditions in classrooms and schools better brought colleagues together, elicited feelings of empowerment and in general created very positive learning conditions in the classroom. Teachers reported experiencing negative emotions when they felt externally mandated changes were simply political game playing, especially when they felt politicians were not qualified to make the changes being mandated (Lasky, 2001).

Hargreaves et al. (2001) gave a vivid account of the way that a group of 30 Grade 7 and 8 teachers grappled with incorporating integrated curriculum, common learning expectations and alternate modes of assessment into their practice. They described the intellectual challenge faced by these teachers as they moved towards more powerful teaching and learning processes in their classrooms. These authors also suggested that designing education around what standards students should achieve and not what teachers have been used to teaching is essential for preparing young people for the information society. But, these demanding standards should draw out deep learning not be restricted to the narrower concepts of basic skills and technical competence or utilitarian areas of the curriculum.

Lynn Hannay and her colleagues (2000; 2001) have worked with teachers and administrators in schools and districts to chronicle what they are experiencing as they work to restructure core elements of secondary schools in one district. Hannay, Erb & Ross (2000) discovered that, because past structures were deeply embedded in the secondary school cultures, restructuring would require a reculturing of stakeholders. Effective change arose when participants supported constantly evolving and emerging organizational values, involved stakeholders in making the decisions in a collaborative manner, and rethought the functions of the organizations more in terms of processes as opposed to isolated tasks. In the schools they worked with, teacher belief that “the status quo was not good enough” was only the starting point. Teachers also needed opportunities to participate meaningfully in restructuring processes, while being provided with opportunities to question assumed ways of doing things, and then to talk about their ideas, beliefs and practices. They found that the means and ends of the processes

were intermingled. Through creating new school structures, participants created new cultural norms (Hannay & Ross, 2000).

All of these researchers are contributing to the literature related to educational change as well as gathering in-depth images and understanding about reform in Ontario.

Changing education, like anything else, does not occur all at once nor does it happen in an orderly way. As Leithwood (1997) describes it, educational change is a process of creeping incrementalism, with tiny changes, day after day, in many different and unpredictable ways and places. Studying educational change is a difficult and complex undertaking that requires a combination of standing back to see the whole landscape and moving up close to observe the details. As SSR proceeds in Ontario we, and other researchers, are continuing to observe, study, document and analyze the process and the effects for schools, teachers and students.

The current study emerged out of and extends some prior work done by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) with the assistance of a research team from the International Centre for Educational Change (ICEC) at OISE/UT. In those studies, we provided assistance to OSSTF in designing and analyzing a survey, which was distributed to a sample of the membership in both 1999 and in 2000. The survey asked for members' opinions about the impact of each of the 14 government reforms that had recently been put in place. These reforms are listed in the following table.

***Government Reforms To Education (1999)***

- changes to taxation and education funding;
- reduction of professional development days for teachers;
- 1250 minutes of instructional time per teacher per week;
- new definition for the length of the school year;
- school operations based on square footage;
- more student testing and new assessment and reporting mechanisms;
- new curriculum for Grades 1 to 8 and Grades 9 and 10;
- average class size guidelines;
- provincial funding guidelines;
- introduction of teacher adviser groups;
- amalgamation of public school boards (English) and the creation of French Language School Boards;
- new diploma requirements;
- return to streaming; and
- creation of school councils.

The survey listed each of these changes and asked members to rate the impact each change has had on “you and your ability to do your job effectively”, on “overall student learning” and on “schools and communities”, on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. In addition, members were asked to indicate the reform that had the most positive or negative effect on them personally and describe it in their own words. The survey also asked for personal and demographic information; e.g. gender, district and years of service in education. The results from these surveys were tabulated by the ICEC team and formed the basis for reports that were prepared for the OSSTF executive<sup>2</sup>. Briefly, these reports found that a significant majority of OSSTF members felt that most of the fourteen government reform initiatives had negative effects on their own ability to do their job effectively. The top three negative responses were:

- changes to funding guidelines;
- elimination of professional development days for teachers; and
- reduction of hours of work for educational support staff.

Only two reforms received larger positive than negative responses:

- return to streaming; and
- creation of school councils

These studies provided OSSTF with some valuable insights into the responses of their membership to the package of reforms occurring in Ontario at the time. Within this broad framework of reform, however, there was a specific set of initiatives with a particular focus on

secondary schools. These have been defined within the umbrella of secondary school reform, with changes in curriculum, technology across curriculum, focus on school to work transitions, changes in assessment and reporting, the introduction of a required literacy test for graduation, graduated streaming and differentiated diplomas.

At the time of this study, SSR was in its initial year of implementation. The study was designed to explore SSR in Ontario “up close”, particularly through the eyes of staff and students (those directly experiencing curriculum reform and those who are completing OS:IS graduation requirements). This research adds a much needed picture of the way that SSR is being understood and felt in schools. In particular, it adds the voice of students to a literature that is largely based on educators' perceptions.

We talked to teachers, professional support staff represented by OSSTF, and students in several Ontario secondary schools in the spring and fall of 2001. Our findings offer a snapshot of SSR in Ontario at one point in time, but they are not the end of the story. The research team at OISE/UT has recently been awarded a 3-year grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to continue this investigation of secondary school reform in Ontario. In this longitudinal study we will be considering the way that ***curriculum changes, assessment reforms and structural mandates*** are being experienced as local challenges. We intend to investigate teachers' motivation to make the changes, examine their perceptions of their own and their schools' capacity to implement the changes, and describe the nature of the support structures for implementation that are available in their immediate situation. In addition, we are interested in what actually changes in schools, particularly in classroom practice. Finally, we will try to gauge the extent of students' engagement in their schools and in their learning. Taken together, these measures ought to provide a rich and detailed look at large-scale reform through the eyes of teachers and students.

This report focuses on how educators and students were making sense of SSR in its early stages and their perceptions of its impact on schools, teachers and students. The research questions guiding the investigation were:

- How do teachers and students understand Secondary School Reform?
- What is the influence of the policy context on teachers' responses to SSR?

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<sup>2</sup> These reports, entitled “Impact 2000 and Impact 2001 are available from OSSTF.

- What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of the reforms on them professionally and personally?
- What are the perceptions of teachers and students about the impact of the reforms on students personally and academically?

The research team conducted nine focus groups with teachers, eight with students and one with professional support staff represented by OSSTF, in a total of 6 schools from different geographic regions of the province. Overall we talked to 55 teachers, 45 students and 5 professional support staff. (Complete details of the methodology can be found in Appendix B.) The focus groups provided a very rich and human account of the ways in which educators and students were experiencing SSR. We have listened to hours of audio-tapes and examined hundreds of pages of transcripts in order to synthesize the material and develop coherent themes. The themes that emerged from these data have been organized into three chapters - making sense of secondary school reform, influence of the policy context on implementation and perceived impact of secondary school reform on educators and students. In chapter 5, we draw the themes together and consider them in relation to findings from other large-scale reform efforts and chapter 6 provides a summary of what we learned and what comes next.

## Chapter 2 - Making Sense of Secondary School Reform

The dimensions of SSR that are immediate and pervasive for teachers and students are those that have the potential to change what they do in their classrooms. Although teachers and students talked about many other issues, the dimensions that were central to their daily work were changes to curriculum, including the addition of the Teacher Adviser Program (TAP) and changes to assessment. Both teachers and students in this study gave us considerable insight into their perspectives on each of these dimensions.

### ***Changes to Curriculum***

Secondary school reform has restructured curriculum in a number of ways. Ontario Secondary Schools (OSS) Grades 9 to 12 (1999) outlines mandates under the following headings.

<b>Diploma Requirements and Related Procedures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• changes to the configuration of compulsory credits (total of 18),</li><li>• a new .5 credit in civics and .5 credit in career studies</li><li>• optional credits (total of 12)</li><li>• 40 hours of community involvement activities</li><li>• the Ontario secondary school literacy test</li></ul>
<b>Organization of Secondary School Courses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In Grades 9 and 10, three types of courses are offered: <i>academic courses, applied courses</i> and <i>open courses</i>.</li><li>• In Grades 11 and 12, courses are offered to prepare students for their post secondary destinations and include: <i>university preparation courses ...university/college preparation courses..., college preparation courses ... and workplace preparation courses.</i></li></ul>
<b>The Student's Program: Planning for the Individual Student</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The teacher adviser program (TAP)</li><li>• Annual education plans (AEPs) for all students</li></ul>
<b>Achievement and Accreditation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• based on provincial curriculum expectations outlined in curriculum policy documents</li><li>• achievement charts and levels contained in curriculum policy documents</li><li>• the provincial report card</li></ul>

In the focus groups, teachers and students talked about the need for curriculum change; the difficulty and compression of curriculum content; confusion about option selection; and the tension between curriculum expectations and student learning, and curriculum continuity.

## **The Need for Curriculum Change**

In focus groups teachers often made opening remarks about the importance of renewal.

*I think it's needed every five or ten years, a refreshing look at education, bring in some new books, bring in some new vocabulary, make people aware, you rethink what you're doing. I think it's important to re-learn, to be learners, I have no problem with that. I think it's important to refresh education.*

*Change is always good and irrespective of which government you're in. Curriculum should evolve, and our curriculum's evolved to the point where we're making good demands on our students.*

In particular, teachers commented positively on the intent to establish provincial consistency, the return to streaming and the integration of technology.

*The Royal Commission on Learning identified very specific things, and I actually support those changes. I support consistency from school to school from place to place. I agree that the reform needed to be made in terms of making the academic level of the courses higher.*

*The fact that we're streamed again in the Grade 9 level, or that in some cases they're open courses I think is good, a good thing.*

*The Grade 9 and 10 business courses, which are open, are terrific. The difference between the Grade 9 business with the new curriculum, and the way it used to be is like night and day. Teaching a kid how to type on a manual typewriter topics like centring, which would take a couple of days, take thirty seconds with a computer. That is definitely positive.*

## **Curriculum - Content and Compression**

The positive features of curriculum renewal however, were overshadowed by concerns about the content laden nature of the new curriculum and the compressed timelines for both teachers and students. Both groups talked about compression in a variety of ways: compression of course material, compression of time allotted for understanding, practicing and integrating new skills and knowledge and compression of the secondary school program from five to four years.

Teachers expressed concerns over the volume and depth of new curriculum and reported that students were not prepared.

*For one thing there's too much to teach them. We've gone from too little sort of a watered down curriculum to too much.*



For many teachers, the changes to curriculum represented significant challenges in both content knowledge and delivery. Teachers talked about the struggle to learn, plan and execute new materials.

*There's a major, major shift in philosophy. I used to teach specific math tools. The intention of the new curriculum is to make students who can converse in mathematics.*

As teachers were more familiar with what they described as dense and demanding new curriculum, they were worried that students would not be ready for the next level of difficulty.

*When you're teaching Grade 9 or 10 Science, these are prerequisites that are required for senior courses. I feel a real pressure to make sure that students 'get' that material. And the reality of it is that with this curriculum being pushed so quickly on these kids, because they don't have the skills. They didn't get the skills in Grade 8 and Grade 9 in order for me to try to teach them Grade 10, – I'm trying to re-teach them Grade 9. I don't even get close to the Grade 10 curriculum. It's just there's too much curriculum right now for the kids to handle.*

When students talked about moving from one grade level to the next they told us being prepared depended on who had taught them the previous year. In focus group interviews students routinely discussed their teachers' orientation to curriculum.

*And you can tell what teachers are actually teaching the new curriculum and what aren't because you have people who are taking the same class as you, but with a different teacher. A lot of the time they'll be learning completely different things at completely different times. They'll learn things that you never learned in the entire year or, like, you'll do more things than they did, or they'll have completely different homework than you did and things like that. I mean you can just tell what teachers are actually teaching the curriculum like they're supposed to and which aren't.*

Students told us that the differences in course levels were not what they had been led to believe. There was confusion about what was meant by “applied” and “academic”. While curriculum documents suggest that there is a process for transition between the two levels, in practice students reported this was not their experience. This conversation between two students illustrates the point.

*In Grade 8, I remember them sitting me down in this really stuffy room and telling me, “Okay, Grade 9 is going to be different. There's going to be two strands academic and applied. Academic is more knowledge, applied is more technical.” But, when we get here, academic's for smart people, applied's for dumb people.*

*I agree with him. Last year I took a Grade 9 applied because I was having difficulty in Grade 8 with Math and I thought there wasn't that big gap between Grade 9 applied and Grade 9 academic. I took a Grade 9 applied, thinking maybe if I get an 80 or a 90, which I did, maybe I can go to an academic. Since the crossover course was not provided and was not available at that time, I couldn't take that and I had to go from my Grade 9 Applied to Grade 10 Academic, which was a huge gap. I'm having extreme difficulty and the teacher's not helping me. She can't do anything about it. She's basically going on with the whole lesson and I'm just there.*

Both teachers and students said that the relentless pace of curriculum left no time for review or consolidation of skills and concepts.

*There's no time for review. To me a curriculum assumes that students remember everything they've learned before ...*

*You have to remember things and I found we did it so fast that we'd get pages and pages of homework, then I'd go home and do it. I'd do it wrong, and we wouldn't have time - we'd just move to something different.*

For students in the first year of the reform the pressure to keep up academically is coupled with the pressure of graduating in the “double cohort”. In 2003, Grade 12 students will graduate after having completed 4 years of secondary school, along with the OS:IS group who will be completing Ontario Academic Credits (OACs). Both groups were worried about university admission.

*We're graduating with the Grade 11s, so, you have to have good marks if you want to get into something you really want to do. They're not expanding the acceptance rates for any of the colleges or universities - the number of people or number of positions.*

For some students governed by OS:IS requirements the double cohort has meant ‘fast tracking’, to ‘get out’ ahead of time; for others who were less academically confident, the pressure meant getting it right the first time. They worried that should they need to repeat an OS:IS course, it would not be available.

*Unless you want to take the new curriculum. That's going to be difficult. You're not going to get the class that you want; you're not going to get the experience you want.*

### **Options and Course Selection**

Teachers in option areas predicted grave consequences for a well-rounded curriculum. Students governed by SSR have less time and require 18, not 16 compulsory courses, reducing optional courses from 14 to 12. Under OS:IS, students would have chosen an additional Grade

10 course for a total of 4 options from arts, business, family studies, languages, physical education, and/or technological studies; they now choose three.

Faced with the mandate to offer new Grade 9 and 10 curriculum, schools in some instances had to discontinue senior option area courses in order to staff other areas. Students complained they were unable to plan because schools were waiting to confirm staffing formulas and set timetables. Where staffing or enrolment did not generate enough numbers, courses were cancelled. While this was especially true in smaller schools, timetables can also reduce flexibility and the range of choices where only one section of a course is offered in one semester of a year.

*I've had to totally change all my courses four or five times now because of what I want to do and the courses that are offered. I find it really difficult trying to make sure that all the courses are offered that I need, because I didn't know what I wanted to be. I finally just figured it out, and I have to get all my courses in because I graduate next year.*

*The four years takes away the options. Kids are saying "I have to have all my Science; I need Grade 11 Biology, Chemistry and Physics, and if I don't get that in Grade 11, then, I'm screwed for Grade 12 because that's the year I need to get such and such." The brighter academic level kids have to plan and the Tech program is out. Any of the option courses that define the kids, that give them, you know, extra creativity or who they may be, that little taste and the well roundedness is gone.*

Teachers in optional areas were particularly concerned.

*Music is somewhat of an option course once they get through Grade 9, so, they're taking it out of the curriculum. How do we keep students interested in taking our course, yet, still meet the expectations that are very, very demanding, like turning five years now into four and so on? The students are really trying to get all of the credits that they need and have to have. So, they may not be choosing Music. Where will that leave the program that it's taken 15 years to build?*

Option areas were also losing students when OS:IS students made a decision to fast-track.

*I'm one of those who dropped Music because I'm taking Grade 12 English now and I took Grade 11 last semester.*

The Grade 10 students reported that their programs were being defined by their post-secondary exit plans and knowing where they were going. They talked about the pressure to make decisions when they were feeling very uncertain.

*And what happens with this first fork – instead of their being two forks, there's sixty thousand trillion billions and you're, like, "Oh, my god, what am I doing? I don't know where to go," and there are no signs there.*

*They're forcing you to pick what you want to be when you're older, when you don't even know what you want to eat for breakfast.*

This student felt the pressure was exacerbated, not alleviated by the Grade 10 Careers Course intended to help students explore possible pathways.

*I think a lot of the students feel pressure especially around Grade 10 and 11 because you get that Career Studies course where you have to choose the field you want to go into or the career you want to work in. And you have to research it and find out what school it's at. It's just for you to decide; you don't have to stay with that career. I think a lot of people are going to have a hard time with what they want to be and where – what classes they're going to take in university and college. And, like, a year may not seem like a difference, but it actually is, A year can be, like, that much more experience that you think all right, 'I'd rather take this or I'd rather be this in life'. And taking OAC courses when you have that much more time to decide and take different courses that you want to experiment with, and maybe a different co-op or whatever, it's not there anymore. So, you do feel a lot of pressure.*

Some students lamented the loss of courses they would not be able to fit into their timetables.

*I find I don't get to take all the classes that I want because they are being compressed into four years. I'd like to take more History, and I'd like to take a Math, I need to still have to have a Science. And I know next year it's going to be hard because everything keeps spreading out more, like, last year we just had Science, and we had Chemistry, Biology and Physics, that's two more periods you take up. ...So, that's why a fifth year would be better because you still get a feel for what you actually like and what you do well on.*

### **Consistency vs. Students' Needs, Preparedness and Continuity**

In every site, teachers reported having difficulty mediating the gap between curriculum expectations and the academic diversity of students in their classes.

*The biggest problem was that the students that are coming into this aren't as prepared as what the government is pretending they are.*

*Given a choice, do you back up and teach that? Or do you not deal with that and teach a curriculum rather than a kid?*

Teachers voiced particular concern for students who had special needs, were academically at risk or were second language learners. Teachers felt that the new curriculum had not addressed these students' needs and they were being put at an even greater disadvantage.

*There's nothing out there for the basic level kid, you know, or anybody who has any kind of learning disabilities. There are too many hoops as a class set up to keep the class moving forward. Those poor kids who don't learn right out front, who are not your average to above average students, they're going to fall through the cracks and there's nothing there set up for them, no safety net in this program.*

In addition to these concerns for specific student populations, teachers contended that curriculum expectations were too rigorous for average students.

*And that's where I think the system is falling behind in what we're seeing as high failure rates. All the applied courses are difficult. They've made them more rigorous and that isn't a bad thing. But they didn't come out with courses to deal with the majority of students who do not go on to college and university. And the whole curriculum is designed for the small group that go on. What about the kids who go to work or the kids who just do a couple of years of college? I don't find there's a lot of focus on those kids, and they're quite often the ones that need the support.*

Teachers expressed concern that "kids are giving up a lot sooner" and that those who failed would probably drop out at 16.

### **Teacher Adviser Program**

The Teacher Adviser Program (TAP) was designed to help students plan for their future. The program is meant to capitalize on the concept of mentorship to link students with a teacher adviser, who works with the guidance counsellor to help students select courses that are most appropriate for them. Teachers with teacher-adviser duties are responsible for:

- helping students complete and review their annual education plan;
- monitoring students' academic progress in all subject areas and the achievement of their goals, as outlined in their annual education plan;
- communicating with parents and keeping them informed about students' progress. (OSS, 1999, pp. 19-20)

The relationships that develop through TAP were intended to provide students with one adult who cares about them, mentors them and advocates for them. Teacher-student mentorship programs had already been in existence in many schools prior to SSR, to varying degrees in different configurations. In the 2000-2001 year the government legislated TAP for all students in

grades 9-12. At the same time teacher timetables were adjusted to meet the mandate for 1250 teaching minutes and teachers were assigned an additional .5 class.

TAP, from our discussions with teachers and with students, was not operating in practice as it had been conceived, in principle. Many teachers describe TAP as a good idea gone wrong.

*If TAP had an intention of being valued, then we would be dealing with the kids for whom the contact with us gives them some level of security and some help in projecting where they want to go. We wouldn't be spending our time with all the kids. When we first implemented it, we implemented it for Grade 9 kids, and each TAP teacher had five kids. So, I had up to five. With two of them, we just met and I said, 'How are things going? Okay, you're well on your way. Goodbye.' And the other three I spent some time talking to, we got maybe feeling pretty good about each other and I think that was useful. Now, I have 14 or something ...*

Teachers reported that they were inadequately prepared to counsel students in terms of course selections and post secondary destinations. TAP, they felt was a concerted effort to reduce professional guidance services.

*The concept itself is flawed. There were, years ago a number of Guidance people who would talk individually with students and plan things. Well, those people are gone now.*

*We're not in counselling, we don't have the latest updates from universities, and it was sort of turning us into little counsellors for an hour every month or something. That's not our background.*

Many teachers also commented that mentorship couldn't be mandated; these kinds of relationships need to be built over shared academic and/or extra-curricular interests and cultivated over time.

*In this school all of a sudden these kids are assigned to you for four years, with the expectation they will bond with you and you will change their lives. You are the parent during the day for these kids and need to be there. I'm thinking, you know what? In the regular school system the kids go through and they find those teachers that they do bond with.*

Generally the students we spoke to dismissed TAP. Some students described it as a "waste of time". In one site they told us that TAP was an additional 15 minutes added to a period one home-form where nothing happened; others mentioned having to listen to teachers "droning on".

*I skip TAP. It's not like we do anything important just talk to our friends.*

*I find that TAP groups didn't go over as well as they wanted them to. People just haven't – the majority of people I think haven't just been attending, they just can't wait for that day. We sometimes do work from a booklet and stuff, but there's not really much that we do.*

The occasional senior student commented that perhaps a TAP program might have been beneficial to them when they were juniors, if it had been for credit, if class size permitted time to get to know the teacher, and time for the teacher to know them, if the teacher had been knowledgeable and if there was interesting material to discuss. In the meantime the current program was in the words of one teacher “a joke, and worse - a structured joke”.

The irony is that the addition of TAP meant to enhance student-teacher relationships may be eroding the informal relationships that often occur. By formalizing these relationships, they become like other formal relationships between teachers and students, predicated on what counts. As one teacher told us:

*It's not a program that any students buy into. The first question they ask is, "Does this count?"*

### ***Changes to Assessment and Reporting***

Although the changes to curriculum raised many questions for teachers and for students, the changes to assessment in secondary school reform posed more complex and philosophical problems. Assessment and evaluation have always been contentious issues. However, confusion about the changes that were being mandated and increased teacher marking loads brought issues of time and of purpose to the surface for teachers and for students.

The OSS document (1999) provides only skeletal information regarding assessment. It indicates that “provincial curriculum expectations and the achievement levels” are outlined in curriculum policy documents. These documents are supplemented by exemplars - examples of student work against which to gauge achievement levels for each subject area. Curriculum documents for example *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10 Mathematics* and *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10 English* list over 60 specific expectations for Grade 9 Academic and Applied Math Courses and over 70 specific expectations for Grade 9 Academic and Applied English Courses. SSR policy documents specify general achievement levels (on a scale of 1-4) with Level 3, 70-79% as “at the provincial standard”, introduce a provincial report card on which

achievement is reported as a percentage and require full transcript disclosure indicating all attempts a student has made in attaining Grade 11 and 12 credits.

It was clear from the comments made by both teachers and students that they were experiencing considerable difficulty understanding and implementing the revised assessment practices. There were complaints that the new process was very time-consuming but more importantly, there seemed to be confusion and incoherence in assessment and reporting. This confusion was evident within the assessment and reporting policies, between the assessment and reporting policies and between the policies and teachers and students own beliefs about what assessment and reporting ought to be.

### **Time Required for Assessment and Reporting**

Teachers found that the new approaches to assessment and reporting consumed more out of class time. This resulted in a longer time to "turn assignments around" and provide feedback to students.

*If you're doing a true Ministry evaluation the way they want you to evaluate, you're evaluating over a range of four performance levels, and then within there you're doing knowledge and understanding, inquiry, communication. So, you're not only just marking something that used to take maybe an hour to get through a class set. If you had a class of 27, it took an hour to go through saying, "Okay, three marks for this question," and then adding it up at the end. Now, you read through it all, well, that's a Level 4 then, well, add that Level 4 – communication was a Level 3, knowledge and understanding, that's Level 4. Then you have to take and record all of your different components that now takes three or four hours to get through a class of 37 or a class of 35. So, you have more students in the class and it's taking longer per assignment to mark them.*

*What I find is I can't get the material back to the students in a reasonable time. I mean, I don't even want to admit to how long it has to be sometimes before I can return work. And I apologize to them, I say that I'm doing my best, but it takes for some assignments 20 to 25 minutes to mark one and you've got 30 of them. That's only one assignment for one class, you may have three or four different assignments for one class that you have stacked up. So, you can have, I mean, do the multiplication, you can have 2000 to 3000 assignments and I'm not exaggerating. It's just overwhelming.*

### **Confusion About Purposes And Procedures**

Teachers indicated being confused even at the most fundamental level of understanding the new assessment terms and acronyms that were introduced in the documents. They talked



about new evaluation strategies like rubrics and achievement charts, or in acronyms like KICA [Knowledge, Inquiry, Communication and Application] that were part of the material that they received, but these discussions were fraught with ambiguity and confusion.

*Strands run through the whole course.*

*Oh whatever.*

*No, we have four separate strands.*

*Strands are in the unit from the start to the end. You have separate units perhaps whatever, but strands apply to all*

*Strands are something that run for the entire unit.*

*No it's required communication and application, the four strands. No, not four strands, sorry four evaluations. Four evaluations, instead of the traditional evaluation, there are tests, there are assignments there are exams, if you have a test, that's divided up into knowledge, inquiry, communication, application you have to have four separate marks on that test.*

The students indicated that they were confused as well.

*I hate it when my teachers say, "Oh, I like this system much better, so, we're going to use it in my class." And it sucks. Like, they have these little forms and they check, they just put checkmarks and, like, there'd be a 1 column and a 2 column and a 3 column and a 4 column and they do a check in the 2 column close to the 3. So, that'd be a different mark than checking in the middle of the 2 column. How are you supposed to determine your marks from checkmarks? It really makes no sense; they should have just the criteria. Whatever's worth five marks, this is worth ten, whatever, and give you a number because numbers are more accurate than little checkmarks. What's a 3? On your report card you're like, "Oh, I see you have all 3s there, very good." I don't know what that means, it seems really stupid!*

*So, you start reading through the little boxes and then you get all these 2s and 3s and you don't know, like, most of the time you don't even know what they mean or exactly what they mean.*

*Especially since English is subjective – a lot depends on if your teacher likes what you're doing. So, they can just kind of traipse their way through giving marks. And, like, if you have some in the 4 column, but you have 4 checks in the 4 column, but five checks in the 3 column, you get a 3. That just diminishes your entire mark, I think it's like 20% maybe because you'll be just slightly in a 3 column. I don't understand that at all and I hated it last year, and I had it in English class.*

*I'd like to know exactly what my mark is, I don't want to think oh, maybe it's an 81 or maybe it's a 90, it could be somewhere in between and I want*

*to know exactly what I'm getting and where I can improve. If I get a Level 4 I'm going to be, "Well, is my mark an 81 or a 91 or is it a 99?" How am I going to improve when I don't know what my mark is?*

*You get a lot of rubrics and you'll compare marks with other people and they'll get the same thing as you. But the checkmarks are all over the place and how do you know if it's a Level 3 when they're in the middle of the box and some are in Level 4 and some are in Level 1, and how do you average that out? You can't do that, like, I just – I don't know, it's very frustrating.*

### **Lack of Coherence Between Assessment and Reporting**

Teachers who had invested time and energy in using rubrics and levels felt that the assessment exercise had been thwarted by the new provincial report card that recorded marks as numerical grades. It got even more confusing when teachers were translating the strands into marks for students for the report card. The teachers felt uncomfortable about what the marks meant and so did the students.

*I don't agree when you say that not everyone is using the new levels. I think teachers are making an honest effort towards using level grading. But when we do a report card, when I did report cards during the last couple of weeks we had to take all those Level 2s, 3s and 4s that we had given to our students on assignments that they'd done, and translate that into a numerical grade. Why in the world are we doing that?*

*And there's no Level 1, 2, 3, 4 in our report cards. Correct me if I'm wrong.*

*That's my problem I've always had with when we do the levels. I see the power in that, whether I agree with it or not, I see the power in it. But what doesn't make sense is why when the reports go out you throw away all that information you've collected.*

*Exactly, because from what I understand the parents want a mark. When I did parent interviews, they wanted to see the mark, and then they want to ask you how you feel their child is doing, and the rest of all of it is too much to read, it doesn't – "Oh, they're doing fine? Good, nice meeting you, great." It's a personal thing they think, and the kids themselves, I find they don't want all of those comments.*

*You get give the test back to the kid and the first thing the kid wants to know is what mark do I have. Then you say the top four marks. "If I add all these up will I get my average for the test?" No. Because you have four marks on your test and they're kept separate.*

This was also a serious issue for students. They no longer felt as if they knew what their grades meant or why it was all so complicated.

*So if you do everything that the teacher asks perfectly, you're going to get a maximum of 80%, you have to go above and beyond, and in some cases what is above and beyond we don't really know. I mean, when universities are looking at our marks and we average 81. And all the stuff with levels, what a Level 4 is, what a Level 3 is, (2 and 1?) It just seems kind of silly. Why not stick with the percentages. They're more accurate. If you receive Level 3, you don't know if the person had a 71 or a 79, you see Level 4, you don't know if they had an 80 or a 99.*

*And when it comes out on our report card it's a percentage anyway, so, what's the point of showing us a Level 4? I can kind of see their viewpoint and see what is the best level you can possibly do. Everybody should be doing level 3 but they don't understand all of it.*

Some students mentioned the importance of feedback from their teachers to give them direction about how to improve. The pointed out that assessment is more than grades. It can be a powerful mechanism for learning.

*She gives us valid comments about how we can improve and what we did good and an actual mark and a breakdown of the mark where it makes sense to you, you know, because that's how we've always been, and it doesn't make sense to change it.*

*Sometimes we'll lose track of what a test is really for. A test is just to show what you know, so, even if you get a 70 on a test, then you go back at lunch hour or whenever the teacher says to go back. Some people think that might be sort of giving the marks or things like that, but it's what the test is really for, to show how much knowledge.*

### **Doubts and Cynicism**

Some teachers were cynical about the new evaluation practices. They were sceptical about having assessment approaches that would work across various disciplines and believed that assessment issues were often specific to subject areas.

*There is too much regimentation in trying to keep some uniformity throughout. The reality of it is, is that we cannot assess a shop class as a math class as a phys. ed. class in that manner, and to try to even impose that structure on us I think is ridiculous.*

Some felt that the new procedures wouldn't really change anything for them. They would use what they found valuable and ignore the rest.

*What I decided to do, and I don't know if it's confidential or not, but I've used the government and their stuff, and their great books, and their new stuff, but I'm still teaching to the students. I've decided to bring them the best professional judgement I have, taking what they know or what they*

*want to know or excite them into what I – as far as I can and bring them as far as I can.*

*Some of the music people found out yesterday again, they're just ignoring the KICA. And they're saying, well we're used to having performance, theory, and history, the old categories from years ago, so okay knowledge that's performance, and knowledge is application or performance is application. That's what we're going to do. Theory, that's knowledge. So they're ignoring this completely.*

For some, assessment changes were seen as a challenge to their professional judgement.

*I think the angle was to keep us accountable, and I think they attack the professionalism of teachers and the intelligence that they would have in deciding what would be right or wrong for the students.*

*They don't match, they don't fit, I find the new system to even be more subjective than ever before, the students dislike it, the parents at parent interviews last week hate it. When is someone going to listen to the people on the front lines?*

### **Chapter 3 - Influence of the Policy Context on Implementation**

Context is everything (Stringfield, 2001). Research consistently emphasizes that the political context surrounding reforms as well as the school context affect how reform mandates are received, interpreted and implemented, or not. Where reform initiatives are part of a larger political agenda, the political context can affect responses from educators (Whitty & Seddon, 1994; Broadfoot et al. 1994). Conversely, where stakeholders have had a voice in shaping the reform initiatives there is evidence that dramatic changes can occur in school. However, these are often isolated in schools, departments or classroom and short-lived (Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002).

Governments are interested in visible change. The short and unpredictable tenure of most governments causes them to expect quick and obvious changes within their time in office. Governments are caught in a dilemma, as noted by the Head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit of the Department for Education in England, Michael Barber, "...electorates are fickle and impatient... a long-term strategy will only succeed if it delivers short-term results." (Barber, 2000, p. 5).

But changing education is not a short-term undertaking. In a recent article, Fullan (2000) suggests that it is possible to improve an elementary school in about two to three years; high schools take about five to six years; districts take six to eight years. We do not know how long it takes entire provinces or states or countries (assuming a few big priorities and intensive efforts) because reform has not yet been accomplished on that scale.

Other studies have drawn attention to the difficulties inherent in massive reform efforts. In describing systematic school reform in Philadelphia, Foley (2001) found that one of the main factors impeding successful reform implementation was the core belief that the whole system must be reformed simultaneously and immediately. "Doing it all at once" created reform overload throughout the district, from schools to the central office. It was a strong contributor to school staff's inability to focus their efforts around clearly defined and manageable instructional priorities. There was pressure simply to "roll out" the reforms and move on to the next priority, with little time to support or guide the reforms or to receive feedback from the field and review

or revise policy. Initially, the “new” central office was simply layered over the old, creating two parallel worlds, the reform world and the old world.

The context in Ontario at the time of this study was one of extreme volatility and destabilization. Reforms were being legislated quickly in all parts of education. The government was not only expecting quick changes but at a reduced cost. Additions to teachers' workloads and reductions in funding had resulted in protests and labour action. This political context was front and centre. In many ways the focus groups offered a cathartic experience for educators and for students.

### ***Pace of Implementation***

In almost every focus group, teachers expressed frustration with the speed with which they were expected to implement the reform agenda. Time and again, teachers talked about the impossible pace of this reform. Implicit in many of these statements is a sense of being stretched thin between multiple demands, with less time in a day to attend to them.

*The problem now is that with reform you introduce a whole bunch of changes. They're not implemented properly. They're not planned properly. The pace is so quick that you can't properly plan them. You throw them from the top down to the teachers. You don't give them professional development days. You don't give them time to develop and it's a never-ending process where you're always trying to catch up.*

Even those teachers who supported aspects of the change mandates found the pace and the amount of new material too much.

*Oh, it's impossible to do a good job of it, and I have to say for the years that I've been teaching I have always prided myself on being very, very committed to what I was supposed to be doing. And I know that in the early days of my teaching family studies we had curriculum writing teams. I was on several of them. I felt involved. We felt we could tailor it to meet our community's needs, our school needs and so on. And now we're- it's boom, boom, boom.*

Many teachers also discussed this notion of ‘too much, too fast’ as it affected their ability to serve their students in a way that was consistent with their professional standards.

*Realistically, this work, this process cannot be done in the right manner to serve the kids, in the way they need to be served. We're teaching in areas not in our field, and may not be in an area we're comfortable with, looking at materials that are brand new, and no time to learn that. So, if we had the*

*correct funding, if we had the amount of time, this is a system that could work. But we need sessions for training. There's just too much, too fast, with too little.*

### **Political Context**

The political context in Ontario that has accompanied large-scale reform has not been smooth or pleasant. From the early days of the Conservative government, teachers and politicians have been at loggerheads. In 1995 the Minister of Education made a private statement that became public about his intention to “invent a crisis” in education (1995). In quick succession, the government:

- created the Education Quality and Accountability Office, the Ontario College of Teachers and the Education Improvement Commission;
- passed an omnibus education bill (Bill 160) that included changes to teachers powers within collective bargaining, including staffing, class size, preparation time and instructional time, restricted strike actions and established school councils;
- amalgamated and restructured school boards; and
- changed funding regulations to locate funding decisions provincially.

These actions culminated in a province wide teachers’ walkout in October 1997. In opposition to “the heavy hand of government”, teacher federations took a strong position. The Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation published the following statement:

Since our founding in 1919, this Federation has led the fight to protect the collective rights of teachers and educational workers. We fought for and won the right to equal pay for men and women in education. We achieved the right to negotiate working conditions. We fought and won the right to strike. We have negotiated strong collective agreements with decent salaries and benefits for teachers and educational workers. We have protected the ability of educational professionals to directly influence the curriculum of our students. OSSTF is not about to abandon this history.

Although teachers stayed out for two weeks in protest, many of the changes went forward as planned. Educational funding was placed under the provincial purview, and while Boards would continue to recruit teachers and negotiate contracts with local affiliates, class size, teaching time, professional development and examination days were to be legislated by the province. Principals and vice-principals, who had been members of the Federations, were withdrawn and classified as management. Over the following few years many school districts were subjected to difficult bargaining and a number experienced strikes.

In the spring of 1999 the government mandated that secondary school teachers teach 1250 minutes/week. In many districts responsibilities like “on-call” periods where teachers covered for absent colleagues were considered a part of “teaching load”. In May 2000 the Minister of Education, announced The Education Accountability Act to “ensure that school boards implement the government’s education reform agenda in a manner consistent with the government’s original intent” (Compendium, MET). Among the amendments was the clarification of 1250 minutes. Section 170 of the Education Act, was amended to redefine “courses/classes”. Average teaching time remained 1250 minutes of instructional time per teacher per five instructional days, expressed as at least 6.67 eligible courses. (Compendium) Since TAP could be configured as a part of teaching time, in practice 6.67 amounted to assigning each teacher an additional .5 class. Except in the case of new Grade 10 courses in Civics and Careers, most secondary school courses are full 1.00 credits. To accommodate the regulation, courses were split between two teachers, meaning that for a portion of their timetable, a term in a semestered school, or every other day in a non-semestered school, teachers taught 4/4 classes with only a lunch break. Students had more than one teacher for a course. It was possible for students to have many courses taught by two different teachers. Anticipating any federation response to withdraw teachers’ voluntary services, the Education Accountability Act went on to rename “extracurricular activities”, “co-instructional” and mandated that school boards provide such programs by legislating these as a part of teachers’ duties.

In response to The Education Accountability Act, OSSTF advised its membership that given the breadth and depth of the mandated reforms, teachers should use their professional judgement in taking on duties beyond their professional responsibility to their curriculum and to their students.

With strike votes from all locals in hand, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation has decided that classes will nevertheless begin on September 5.

However, "it will not be business as usual," OSSTF president Earl Manners told local leaders.

There will not be the range of extra-curricular activities... not because teachers boycott them, but because there will be fewer teachers and they will be observing the Minister’s new standard of four hours and ten minutes of instructional time. If you want sports, music, clubs and theatrical activities,



then you will have to fund them. There will be no more bake sales, no more car washes and no more chocolate bar fund-raisers.

Because of the timing of most of the interviews in this study (May/June 2001), the teachers and the students in the focus groups were pre-occupied the immediate concerns of the increase in teaching time and the withdrawal of extra-curricular activities in many locales.

### **Influence of Increases to Teaching Time**

The staff involved in the focus groups discussed the required increase in teaching time in several ways. The quote that follows encapsulates the key issues many teachers discussed around having to teach an extra course or half course.

*I don't know where I stand in the scale of selfishness or unselfishness, but my own personal experience in going to the four out of four made me a more selfish teacher. I have to watch out for myself more, and less – I had less – I was not watching out as much as I'm used to. It impacted in many different ways, my students, maybe the marking, maybe the monitoring, maybe the enthusiasm I had in class. And, so, I consider time that I spent teaching 4 out of 4 as survival style teaching, just surviving it. And if the government is supposed to be caring about what's in the best interests of the students, I know I failed. I did not provide what I should have provided. So, and then, it hits with another sword when you see the advertising on TV about how great what the government is doing is for the children. And we know because we're there, we know what's going on and how much it's hurting. My biggest thing, my biggest problem with it was the enthusiasm I gave during that time. I was not comfortable with myself and what I was providing. I gained a lot of negative energy through that time and I don't think it's good for the kids.*

Teachers consistently told us how implementing the mandate for more hours in the classroom affected their daily teaching. They had less time for students, less time for collaborating with colleagues, less time for preparing lessons, less time for learning the new curriculum, and less time for marking student work. And they worried that they were less effective. Both they and their students were suffering for it.

*The intent was to give students more time with their teacher, more teacher access time. And I think it has effectively taken it away, because it's adding a whole extra class on. To a teacher that just means it's saving people money. They don't want to hire that many teachers to cover that many classes. And you're too busy trying to cover the material and mark and prep for that, so you don't get to work with the kids as much.*

Increased workload course requirements meant that, in many cases, teachers were splitting or sharing a class. Neither teachers nor students found this a reasonable solution.

*They [the students] have to deal with two teachers; that's ridiculous.*

*Getting back to 6.5, now, I can see it's a great way to save money, cut costs. Nobody stopped and said, "What about a percentage of the students." Now you have a course and you have two teachers going in there, one for nine weeks, and then, again one for nine weeks...So, you go into that classroom, and you just teach the class. Now, you forget, because you're not with them all year. They're not really your students, because if you're in the first half, heck, that's nine weeks- "I'm rid of them, they're someone else's problem." And so, you don't take the time to...I'll teach them all the same because that's the easiest way. That's less prep for this extra class that I've been assigned, "to hell with them, they'll have to work, they'll learn by osmosis."...I don't really care, because I don't have time, and I'm only with them nine weeks.*

The additional teaching time meant a reduction in time to plan with colleagues.

*A colleague and I taught the same course and we maybe met twice. We discussed, you know, what we were covering in the content, and we had common final exams. When I was teaching four, I couldn't see her at lunch, because I was too busy.*

Teachers felt conflicted, and sometimes guilty, because they had less time and energy to spend with students and could not meet either their own standards, or their students' needs.

*There's no time in the timetable for kids that need the remediation or to be challenged...and the kids suffer, that's what's so frustrating, because I deal with the emotions of the children and what's happening. I had to say, "Sorry, I can't give you this time, I have another class now." And yet, I could see that they had needs and they weren't going to get met, and I felt badly that I couldn't meet those needs.*

*Everyone's frustrated and instead of being more relaxed with your students, like you say, getting to know them on a little bit more personal basis, you have to go up there, and you have to be a bitch. Because if you relax it just doesn't work anymore.*

Teachers also felt that they had to make compromises to their teaching as a result of the increased teaching time. They experienced less flexibility in their schedules. Some reported that they were teaching outside of their subject area. In some cases they didn't know their students. All of this led to a general feeling that their classes were suffering, and that they could not provide what was best for students.

*And when you have children and other commitments you find that you take shortcuts at work too. So, you're less prepared for your class than you would like to be just because of the reality of having to deal with certain things at home. Some people just can't spend four or five hours on work every night when they've been working and they've already been there seven or eight.*

Teachers with families were faced with difficult decisions - either compromising on their work responsibilities, or having less time with spouses and kids.

*Something was said about going home and prepping at home, because you have no other time. I'm sorry, I have two small children under the age of six, I don't have time to prep at home. I get home, I have to take care of two small children, and by 8 o'clock when they're in bed, when I'm teaching four, I'm in bed because I'm exhausted. The housework doesn't get done, I mean, it just took over your whole life, and they just don't see. It's like it's just an extra seventy minutes to them. To us it's hell.*

The students that we talked with reinforced the teachers' perceptions. Even though teachers were feeling more stress, and in some instances carrying their anger into the classroom, some of the students in our focus groups expressed compassion and understanding for the teachers.

*It's understandable; they're going to be a little more irritable for some of the things they're dealing with.*

Other students were less charitable and told us that teachers had less time to spend with them and that they had less patience. Student comments also indicated that there was increased tension in the classroom that affected their opportunities for learning.

*The teachers were just struggling and they don't get as mad as they used to. You don't notice it, they're mad like all the time, or something. But you notice that they just don't want to do it. If you ask them something, they're just like, "No," no explanation, just, "No."*

*I fight with some of my teachers, because we're just both stressed out.*

*Well this year - What's the thing teachers had to do - four things for four classes. That's the first thing I heard in the morning. That's all my homeroom teacher was saying to us, right when we got in. And that's the first thing we had to start off the day, was them complaining about it and then, we'd start yelling at them too, because we had no extra curricular activities. They didn't help us after school any more, and so, we'd get into an argument right away, early in the morning.*

Those students who had two teachers teaching one course reported that it was difficult because the teachers did not know them and the students did not know how to meet their expectations.

*We have some classes that are taught half the semester by one teacher, and then the second half is taught by another teacher. I don't like that.*

*You get used to their game play and what they're doing, and then all of a sudden, it's completely new, different settings- so you have to find out what they like, how they like things done. My math grade last year went from an 80 and it...dropped to a 60. And it's not because all of a sudden, I didn't know what I was doing. I couldn't unpack the way the teacher was explaining things. I needed it explained a little more, "Here's the assignment, do it." I couldn't remember it without- it was really difficult. It dropped 20% in one month.*

### **Impact of Withdrawal of Extra-Curricular Activities**

It is important to note that the withdrawal of extra-curricular activities was a political action. Although some of the teachers missed working with students in more informal contexts, they also wanted to make a statement to the ministry. They were also sometimes frustrated with the position taken by the union.

*I think our union did come down and tell us, and I think it was made very clear to everyone that we should be holding back in extra curricular. I think they made it very plain. But they didn't come down and say, "You're not going to do it," because then, that would have had a strike situation, and it was made abundantly clear to everyone, extra curricular was not going to be done.... In the past I did extracurricular activities...last year in the spring we initiated an exchange program...next year I won't do it. It's a great program, and there's nothing that can beat this program. But when the government came down and said "You're working 6.25" I won't do it. All extra curricular activities, I will hold back, because I think that's the only way. It's the only tool that the union has to bargain with the government, to get a reasonable workload - to hold back extra curricular. And I think the government have to realize that for me working as a teacher, I don't hold back extra curricular because I want to punish students, or because I'm not interested in it.*

Some teachers reported that the call to stop extra curricular activities created value conflicts with the union and with their colleagues.

*And I did end up coaching the second semester, and the whole time I was doing it I felt as though I was kind of stabbing my colleagues in the back, you know. I was defending, these teachers, you know, these teachers, not doing extra curricular all the way up, all the way. And then, here I am, the*

*kids started bugging me again, and it seemed like the other rugby programs were going on, so I did it, but the whole time it was like, just give me an excuse and I'll can the whole thing. And- I don't know, I felt like I was put in a very bad situation and I rest the whole blame on the union. If they would, would have just had the balls, the balls to say, "No, we're not doing it, we had a strike vote for crying out loud, let's at least do some kind of work to rule or something- don't do extra curricular." Say it, you know. But, they said it with a wink and a nudge, and they said it again with a wink and a nudge for next year. Well, that's not going to help. Now, we've got people here that have kids coming into the system, they'll do it because they have eight out of eight. We have people who don't have full time positions. They'll do it because they don't know the full effect of teaching four out of four. Those people need somebody to come down from the top and say, "No, you're not doing it."*

A few teachers that we talked to were experiencing concerns and sometimes regrets about what the withdrawal of extra-curricular meant for students and for them. They reported that they had fewer interactions with students outside of class. For some teachers this meant that the fun was gone from their jobs, and they missed working with the students with whom they most enjoyed spending time.

*I wasn't feeling satisfied with my teaching anymore...And I used to- when I had time, I used to coach. I used to do things with the students, and I miss that. I miss having time with students away from teaching.*

*I miss coaching. I really miss coaching.*

A few teachers expressed concerns for students.

*We haven't yet addressed the effects on students who would have been on teams. In this school for example, almost all of the staff were involved in coaching or in clubs, and this year, we're down to a very small fraction of that number. Now, that has a direct effect on certain students. It really does. If staff hasn't got the time to do these things any more, it makes them look bad and makes them feel bad as well.*

*I think the extra curricular activities with kids - because of the lack of; our kids have no place to release energy. And I think, they often say to me there's no fun in school any more. I think I've had more depressed kids or kids that are down this year, than I've ever had...And there's a frustration with the kids. They're always asking, you know, I can't wait till hopefully, you'll get something going.*

One teacher put it in the context of his own high school years.

*My high school years were a big part of my life...and not having that, it just wouldn't be the same. And I'm thinking those kids are going through that*

*right now. And I feel bad, and feel I should be helping. But I can't do more than I can. And I just feel bad that these kids- because they'll be graduating in a couple of years, if things change, but they still won't have those years back.*

Students, even more than teachers felt the loss of extra curricular activities. For the students we spoke with, extra curricular activities were core elements of their school experience. When asked what they liked about their schools, all students discussed the affective aspects of schooling. It was not classes alone that brought happiness, created opportunities for teamwork, developed leadership skills, generated school spirit or produced fond memories. They too, reported that the fun of school was gone. This was particularly true in small schools, where extracurricular activities provided the primary source of recreation and social opportunities for students. For many students, extra curricular activities were the heart and soul of the school.

*I think it's really important, because sports teach you about teamwork. Sure, you can learn about teamwork in the classrooms and stuff, with group work and that, but it just makes it more fun, and it makes school more fun. Like you look forward to going to school and to going to volleyball practice after school, and seeing your friends at volleyball, and having games. And it makes it more interesting. And it makes school more fun. So, it just gives people a reason to go to school. And when you look back on your high school years you'll say, "Oh, I remember this and this and this, and I remember how fun it was." And it's good to have those memories.*

*Well, most people, I find, enjoy school more if there are extra curricular activities but there isn't. I don't find any enjoyment in coming to school.*

*Yeah, there's not the school spirit that's so important. When you don't have extra curricular activities, and that's priceless. You can't just say, "Oh, it's not much," because believe me, it's so much. School spirit just makes your whole day a lot better. It makes you feel so much happier, just being at this school if there are sports.*

*Or, what you mean, like, not being involved in that, you know, extra curricular activity, it's just the whole excitement of cheering, you know, your peers and being there, and actually supporting them, you know, it's a great feeling.*

Extra curricular activities were also a way for kids to alleviate the stress of the day.

*I mean, that was the one thing most people would look forward to. I think if they got stressed out in class, or they felt they had too much to work on, they really had something to look forward to after, you know, ending- and just something to get their mind off, or just clear everything out.*

Students also mentioned that, in some instances, their marks were dropping because they were less involved in school.

*I know my marks have been dropping, too, and school is starting not to be as- because there's no fun things to do...and I guess there's nothing to talk about. You just go to class to pass the class, home, homework.*

*You wake up early, tired, cranky and stressed out. You want extra curriculars; you pay for them after school.... They're not even through the schools.*

Students also told us that there was more 'acting out' because there were no outlets for their energy. They also described feeling decreased school spirit and sadness at having lost one of the main aspects of going to high school.

*There used to be lots of things to do.*

*I couldn't wait to come to school, now there's nothing going on.*

*Assemblies used to be a big thing. Now you need to put guards on the door to make sure no one sneaks off.*

*Students complain - "This sucks".*

*School has no spirit- we used to have packed gyms, now no one comes.*

*We used to have bands, lip sync. I remember Grade 8 and 9. There were good acts, songs, maybe an hour, if we were lucky. We have to put up flyers, advertising. People rip them down. They don't care.*

Students in several focus groups spoke explicitly about increased vandalism or angry student behaviour.

*There's vandalism all over town. Never happened before this year.*

*They'd smash phone booths and smash machines...*

*It involves stress. From having nothing else to do.*

*I also have noticed, like, in the last while, because there's been no sports or activities, we've been getting a lot more stressed out. Some of my friends they're irritable, and well, sometimes violent.*

Not all of the comments from students reflected a negative impact of the loss of extra curricular activities. Some students said that they had taken more leadership roles in the school and more responsibility for organizing school events. In some instances students reported actually being more involved than they had been in prior years because they had to run all the activities, with little teacher guidance and/or supervision.

*I find that this year they've [teachers] been supporting us to try to do things on our own, and to have our own initiative to start things up by ourselves. And I found that even though, this year, there's been a lack of a lot of things, having been through this helped us with our leadership...and I think the teachers have helped in supporting that.*

*It's like he said, they're always trying to push us, to try and make us become leaders.*

### **Political Tone**

As we described earlier, the relationship between the government and schools was not a happy one. Both students and teachers were affected, albeit differently, by the negative tone that accompanied or coincided with secondary reform. Teachers talked about feeling direct effects from several dimensions of political tone: negativity or criticism from the ministry, negative advertising, and lack of understanding and support from the public. Students experienced effects of political tone more indirectly. They talked about teachers willingness or unwillingness to talk about what was happening in their schools. They discussed teachers being more upset, angry or experiencing increased tension in the classroom. Lastly a very few students discussed not having the information to form their own opinions of secondary reform.

Many teachers spoke about government criticism. In some instances this was focused very personally on specific individuals in the government, in others it was a more general expression of anger, frustration, withdrawal of trust, and sometimes sadness.

*I love teaching, I love being in front of the class with the students, but the politics is ruining all that. I've always prided myself on - if I didn't enjoy a job, then I'd quit and move on to something that I did enjoy, and, you know what? Politics is getting - starting to wear nerves a little thin.*

*Basically that this government has put teachers against the public, and they've done it very effectively, and I think we do come across as whining, complaining. That concerns me as a 30-year educator.*

Some teachers could not understand why the government was taking such a negative attitude towards teachers, since they themselves had gone through Ontario secondary schools and had become quite successful.

*Our public system has educated the people who are in positions of responsibility right now, and they're throwing the baby out with the bath water. They've thrown excellent programs out that have been working well. And have worked well for decades and decades, and just saying well you're not doing a good enough job.*



There were a few teachers who felt that they were starting to have more support from the public and the press, even though the government was still being very critical of teachers.

*Our profession is constantly being bashed by the government, or one section of the government. But that is changing. I've been finding a lot of public support and parent support for what we do. People aren't just critical of me, my perception where I live and I have quite a few professional neighbours, is okay enough is enough, the government is just being foolish and bullying and they're not buying into it. My one frustration though is the parents that do come forward and we need the parents; they're the voters, and they come forward to support us. They seem to get shot down as well for supporting a bunch of whining teachers. So I feel like I'm getting some support, I do not feel attacked by the parents any longer. People are speaking locally supporting us, and nothing is changing. I mean the government is going ahead and doing what it wants to whomever it wants, and not just education, across the board. So I mean it's nice to hear the support verbally, but nothing is changing. So all the teachers feel like they're still being attacked, but within my community I'm feeling more support.*

*I would say even in the newspapers, the editorials are finally more pro-teacher than I've ever known them to be. It does feel good to read that.*

Other teachers did not feel there was more public support for teachers. They especially felt that the press was presenting a very negative impression of teachers.

*Yesterday I was stressed out for one reason, for reading the paper, we're under attack; teachers are under attack. And we're under attack, like, the newspaper's full of articles criticizing teachers, actually criticizing integrity, you know? Criticizing your lack of ability, criticizing the fact that you don't understand the concepts here, pretty soon they think you don't want to go with the government, you know, you want to be a reactionary, you don't want to change anything. We want a change for the better, I'm sure that if somebody comes along with something we – we'll accept that. But, we're criticized so much we've become insulated to them, we're going to be like police officers, they hang out with each other, they don't want to have anything to do with anybody else, you know, we're going to get there.*

Other teachers expressed anger and concern because they believed the government was intentionally misinforming and confusing the general public through the media.

*The public really has been fooled here by the province. They don't realize what changes are actually related to funding cuts, and which changes have been the result of trying to improve pedagogies. Because they happened simultaneously, those two changes, and so they've gotten – to the government's, advantage - have gotten mixed up. Okay, they've been able to cut, cut, cut while saying that the new curriculum is being implemented*

*when, in fact, you know, one is cutting to save money and then you've got the new curriculum. But the public isn't aware, I don't think, of what the long-term effects of this kind of curriculum are going to be, the number of kids who are going to fail, I believe there are going to be many students who are not going to graduate.*

Not all teachers by any means expressed negativity, although they saw the decision to reform secondary schools as political.

*The other thing I also see is that the government's in the situation right now where it's trying to attract investment to Ontario to keep our economy strong, and in order to attract investment into our country, you've got to lower taxes. Well, if you lower taxes that means you're going to have cutbacks in money for social services like health care and education, welfare, many of those things I think. And, so, we've got a government that is intent on focusing on the business community, trying to attract, and business is attracted to low taxes, so, obviously, we're going to start getting cuts and, so, we're now implementing something without having any resources.*

Others expressed concern about problems between the government and teachers, specifically in terms of contract negotiations.

*So, I think they've been trying to save money, which makes sense because it is an expensive system. But I think they've been trying to do it using methods that only tend to antagonize the teaching staff. Certainly they continue to talk about envelopes and I'm still not sure what an envelope is. I thought I did, but how can you say when you negotiate contracts and there's a contract that's assumed to be valid, and suddenly there's not enough money in the envelope? I think there's a lot of problems between teachers and the government. If we're going to have fair negotiations, you know, you cannot arbitrarily set limits, that's the whole idea of we don't agree, we can go on strike, but don't tell us what we can negotiate before going in.*

Some teachers talked about leaving the profession and discouraging other from entering the profession.

*My own son has always wanted to be a teacher. My husband and I are both teachers, and we both look at him and talk to him and say, "Think twice, is this the pot that you want to jump into?" And there are not – I don't think – people in droves wanting to enter the teaching profession, and I think that's a very sad thing.*

Others expressed a range of emotions associated with the situation - increased stress, isolation and doubting one's professional worth and a sense that they needed to dig in and defend what they value.

*I don't think there has been any time that teachers have been treated so poorly in the community. And the reality of it is that, yes, we work here, but we all have our friends outside of this establishment, and I guess what sometimes raises my stress level is that I'm trying to justify what we're doing inside the school... I find that's very, very stressful. Sometimes you start to question yourself. You're doing something in school because it's imposed upon you and you're doing it to the best of your ability and, then, you leave here and you know that, not all people, but a lot of people are critical so to speak, and that's stressful.*

*When somebody asks me what I do for a living, I'm afraid to say. I say I work at a school. And I'm a teacher. I try and bow my head because I know what's coming. "Oh, you get all the summers, and you get all these holidays and you make \$80,000 a year for doing nothing, for babysitting." It's getting bad, I agree, that just adds to everything else. You read the papers, you listen to the news, you listen to the radio, and you listen to friends, neighbours, "You guys have it made." And we're sitting here going, "I think I'm going to die because I'm teaching all this time, you know". We're feeling all this pressure and we have no support except each other, yet, we don't get to see each other because we're so over worked.*

*Stubbornness almost... there's a real feeling that when we went out in '97, for a couple of weeks, that we wanted that bill to be stopped. And from that point all the way to where we're at now, things have just got worse, they haven't got better, and there's a real feeling that we need to dig our heels in and make a stand because of what we believe in. Or else, you know more will come. So there's a big you know sort of a unified position. We're saying no, we're not going to do it.*

A few teachers mentioned that students were being affected by the political tone surrounding the reforms as well. They expressed frustration with not being able to answer student questions about secondary reform.

*With any government decision that's made or anything that's been made along the way that affected children, the children see it affecting them; they question the teacher about it. Why aren't you doing this for me, why is this different now? [Do] you see Mike Harris or anybody else coming into a classroom and explaining why these changes are happening to these students? No, we are the messengers, or we're not allowed to talk about it. As a matter of fact I challenged somebody from the ministry to come out and actually tell the truth. What they're saying is not true.*

Students told us that the political tone was something that was part of the change in their schools. They discussed increased tension in their classrooms. They stated that some teachers would talk with them about the reforms, while others would not. There were a few students who felt angry that they only heard the teachers' perspective. Others felt they were not fully informed and could not develop their own positions.

*Yeah, my Math teacher said, "Oh, I can't talk about it because we're not supposed to bring politics into the classroom." So, what's so hard about simply laying out the facts?*

*Okay. Pretty much all my classmates in one particular class know that I'm a Harris supporter and there are some things I like and dislike. But when I go into class and my teacher brings up the subject that has to do with reform, what's going on, my opinion is blank, it is void. Her opinions are expressed, and I think that's really hard for us as teenagers to accept because most of our political information comes from people around us. Most people our age don't go and read and I think a lot of it is negative. We're not getting, like, a two-way story. We're getting a, "Here, this is your opinion on this. We don't like it, you don't like it." That's all you hear, which, for me, who does a little bit of reading on it, I dislike in the class setting. And it causes a little bit of hostility because we're not really being told a lot of things. Most of us don't know really what's going on except from our teachers' point of view.*

*I just wanted to say that I don't think anybody here really knows what's going on, we can't make an opinion for ourselves based on the views that we've been getting. We've been hearing about the teachers who are all mad at him [Harris], and we've been hearing the media from him that he's all great and stuff, so, that's all we're getting. So, we can either go with the teachers or with him.*

Some students used metaphors to discuss what they understood about secondary reform.

*Mike Harris is a golf guy, so, he should know that you can't hit a golf ball without following through, so, he should really be following through on what he's trying to do here. He's hit the golf ball, but it's not going anywhere.*

Students were aware of the teachers who were begrudgingly teaching them, and of those who tried to maintain a positive tone and focus in classrooms so that students could learn.

*Well, actually, I've had a number of teachers complain to our classes just how much they hate it.*

*Yeah, like, "Oh it's the new curriculum for the next class, that's new stuff. I don't like making new stuff. I like the old stuff"...*

*Yeah, like, there are teachers who almost let you know they don't want to be there. They don't want to teach that and they let you now they don't like the curriculum, they don't agree with it.*

*As an OAC student, this is the most discouraging year ever. You don't want to come to school. I'd rather be anywhere but here, bombarded with negative messages all day.*

Other students spoke about teachers trying to keep the classroom tone positive.

*They just – they've just been helping me and all my friends and I don't know, they just been cheerful and trying to make us aware of the effects of the cutbacks and stuff, they're trying not to let it rub off on us, so, we can learn.*

### **Support for Reform**

In this early stage of Secondary School Reform, educators and students had much to say about the lack of support, particularly the lack of resources, both material and human. They reported difficulties securing teaching materials and cutbacks in support staff (including secretarial help, special education and ESL specialists, guidance counsellors, and caretakers). They also mentioned insufficient professional development and the shortage of supply teachers to allow them to attend available professional development.

#### **Lack of Teaching Resources and Materials**

Teachers talked about the lack of funding for basic classroom materials (e.g., textbooks, computers or support for computers such as network connections and money for repairs or software). In all subjects, teachers reported that curriculum guidelines arrived late and often in piecemeal packages so that they could not study the material or understand the larger curriculum framework. In some instances, teachers did not receive these until just before, or even after the school year had begun. What was most frustrating for teachers, especially those who supported the curriculum changes, was their inability to teach the new courses to the new standards.

Teachers consistently commented that one of the most significant barriers to their ability to implement the curriculum was the lack of funding for books and for equipment. In some cases, students had to share books within a class or across classes. They reported that equipment was sometimes non-existent or old, out of date or in need of repairs.

*I agree that the reform needed to be made in terms of making the academic level of the courses higher. There's been a push to change, but no money to support it. For science last year we had only two sets of textbooks, an*

*academic for Grade 9, and an academic for Grade 10. Now we have Chemistry, Physics and Biology at both levels, so we have to get enough money for textbooks. So, we're going to have to find pockets in other areas, and we shouldn't have to do that. So, if the government wants us to implement this curriculum, they should have the money to support it. But, they're just withdrawing money.*

*If they really wanted me to follow the curriculum documents that I'm supposed to follow to teach this program the way it's supposed to be done, they need to spend about \$300,000 or \$400,000 in that [automotive] classroom to give me what I need to teach that program. So, I'm not going to teach the kids the curriculum. That stuff's great, but these are high school kids. What do they want to work on? They want to work on cars. They're in love with cars, so, we work on cars.*

*How can we train a kid on computers, when we can't afford one?*

*There's no repair budget. You can get computers, but you can't fix them.*

*The maintenance of equipment, I mean, right now, I've got two lathes without motors. The motors are burned out.*

Along with not having money for textbooks, equipment or repairs, another factor that impeded successful implementation of the curriculum was the untimely arrival of curriculum guides from the ministry.

*My frustration is that things we need for September, there's no sign of information that we need to teach new courses. So, here we are at the beginning of June, we're going to be here another month, the information's not here.*

In some instances, publishers simply decided that there was not a sufficient market to warrant publishing a book.

*Grade 11 workplace program, and the publishers are not even going to publish, because they think there won't be too many students wanting it. But not in our school, we think lots of students will probably want it, but no textbooks for that.*

In others, the books were published but came late in the year.

*Another issue, as head of the Geography department, when we do start a new courses, we start in September, we didn't get the textbook until the end of June.*

As a kind of final straw, several teachers mentioned there were problems with the software that was necessary for the new report cards.

*Marks have to be recorded electronically, so several boards invested in these wonderful software programs, and they don't function. E-Teacher, there's a whole adjustment package in there, it does not work. The computer experts know it does not work. As a matter of fact, just inputting the final marks, attendance leaves, and learning skills, half the time, it does not work, even if you're computer literate. And with two university courses, I should be.*

### **Reduction in Support Staff**

As a result of revised funding formulas all budgets in districts and schools had been reviewed to set new budgets based on provincial allocations. Funding for special education had undergone careful scrutiny. Students who are individually placed and reviewed (IPRC'd) now generate funding under individual student assessment grants (ISA). In cases where boards have amalgamated, past practice was not necessarily consistent across schools, departments and/or jurisdictions. Amalgamated boards have had to determine processes to ascertain equitable contractual agreements for support staff, negotiate such agreements, study policy implications, apply for provincial funding under new guidelines and reorganize staffing.

Loss of support staff was something that teachers talked about.

*We are losing EAs, librarians, guidance, resources. These are such important parts of a school, and those people have officially been written out of our contract. And EAs in Life Skills, of course, haven't been mentioned in the contract.*

*The other thing was the secretarial; I mean the cutbacks in the secretarial and support in Special Ed. I mean, even care-taking, the cleanliness of the building...and it's really sad what I see happening to the school, and the deterioration of it.*

Several teachers also discussed the shortage of guidance counsellors and cutbacks for Special Education both in reductions in staff and less money for program essentials.

*There are fewer guidance counsellors. So, you know, more work, fewer people.*

*When I first started, we had four special ed. teachers, no, it was five, right? We had five teachers and forty kids. We've gone down to three. We used to have our students integrated into regular classrooms, but now we don't have the staff to do that.*

*We have a community program to teach them social skills out in the community, and we take the van daily. So, we have to put gas in the van to do the program. I know last year we went way over on our budget for the van, we ran out of money early and the money was taken from other areas.*

## **Lack of Professional Development**

Several teachers stated that they either had not received professional development, or that it was led by people who knew little more than they did. In other places, there appeared to be more professional development opportunities for teachers than in recent years, but the shortage of supply teachers or unqualified supplies meant that teachers were reluctant to leave the school.

*But, again, no training, no one has sat me down and said, “Here’s how you can implement this stuff, here’s how you can make this stuff work.” There’s been no training. There’s been no help. I feel like I’ve been thrown into the deep end, sink or swim.*

*Well, today when I leave here, I’m going to a PD session for all the heads. We’ve been pulled out, and the board has paid for a supply teacher for us to do that. But there is no supply teacher available to come for me today, and so on a guilt level, I think, Oh, my gosh, they’ve pulled in an adult who has come in as an emergency supply person, who is now going to cover my classes. So, there’s reluctance to put myself in that kind of situation where I’m leaving the school for the day, because it means that my students aren’t being supervised to the same level that they should, with a qualified teacher.*

*Even though there are some people who want to go on the supply list, who are qualified, they stopped putting people on the supply list. So, they’ve created a no win situation for us. It’s great that they’re supplying a day for us to get in-service, but it’s a cost to the school, and it’s a cost to the students.*

The predominant themes in students’ comments, when discussing support for reform, had to do with not having enough textbooks, receiving them late in the year, or not having the equipment they needed for their assignments.

*I know last year I had to share, in half of my classes. We had to share textbooks with another class, and we had to leave our textbooks there after we left the class, and then they would be there when we got there the next day because other students had to use them.*

*It’s harder, because then you can’t go home, and learn it at home, or do your homework the way you want.*

*The scientific calculators that they provided, and there’s other instruments that we had to use, and we were sharing the same period with another math class, and it was really hard to understand the concept when you didn’t have the tool to use. It was really difficult.*

*And the thing is, it’s really odd, like, you know, it’s public education, and you shouldn’t be paying. But, well, ok, I can understand the first year of school you could pay \$30.00 as an administration fee and for your*



*yearbook in the end, but later on for various things, like say, in the computer lab for paper, you have to pay.*

*The worse part is that you're paying extra for something you should already be getting for free, and that's just bad.*

Students also discussed not having qualified supply teachers.

*I think we had, the program was called study hall last year and what teachers would run it. Teachers, who would have a prep period or a spare, they'd come in and they'd be like the supply teacher for the class in the auditorium, in the cafeteria. And this year, because the teachers are teaching more, this program couldn't run, and because they haven't been able to get in supply teachers, we've been having, like, I guess you'd call them unqualified people filling in, they're not even teachers, some of them are parents. Parents come in, people who are planning to be a teacher, but there's- not even people who are actually supply teachers come in.*

*In our Electronics class, we have a major assignment due at the end of the week, and our teacher's been away for a couple of days. While our teacher is away, because this person isn't qualified to do anything, all we can do is bookwork, and we need to do practical work, and we can't. They won't turn on the electricity for us to do anything. So, we can't finish this assignment, if the teacher isn't there, and this- a person that doesn't know anything about the class, coming in and filling in. I don't know what the point of having a supply teacher is, you know, it's- they're just basically babysitting us, you know what I mean. It's not that they're filling in for the teacher and actually teaching. I think they should be a lot more serious about situations like this, because it's serious. We notice it, it does affect us, and I think that they don't know that we know that it affects us. I think that they think we're just blind and don't see it.*

## Chapter 4 - Impact of SSR on Teachers and Students

Teachers and students are the front line operators in educational change. The trajectory of change in any school emerges directly from how teachers and students experience, understand and respond to the educational reform mandates. In this study, teachers talked about the ways that SSR was influencing them personally and professionally; students talked about how it was influencing them personally and academically; and both groups talked about its impact on student-teacher relationships.

### ***Impact on Teachers***

Teachers generally are more likely to be motivated to become involved in change if it is consistent with their personal goals and with their beliefs about what is best for their students (Leithwood et al., 2000). Teachers' emotions are inextricably bound up with the basic purposes of schooling — what the purposes are, what stake teachers have (and are asked to have) in them, and whether the working conditions of teaching make them achievable or not (Hargreaves, 1998). In contexts of rapid, imposed and highly rationalized educational reform, teachers can lose their sense of purpose — they can become literally *demoralized* and experience feelings of loss and bereavement for things they once valued (Nias, 1991).

Many of the teachers in the focus groups talked about the increased workload and the negative work environment and told us that they had adopted self-protective coping strategies. They often retreated emotionally, redefining their standards for teaching and even withdrawing from teaching altogether, much as the teachers in Troman & Woods (2000) study of teacher during intense reforms.

*It hit me this morning when I turned on the computer and the network was down. Normally, I would try to fix it, but I'm not – it's not my job. Until somebody actually came and said, "I need that." Normally, I would have gone and done that and no one would have even known that it had been down.*

*I finally told myself I'm no longer going to work on Saturdays. I take one day off a week, finally. We're going to have to, because for my marriage's sake - because it's like, "Hello, you married me."*

The teachers in this study talked about how the conflicts and job action that had occurred in the early stages of SSR could have a lingering impact on both teachers and students. A few

teachers suggested that they would not return to extra-curricular activities, especially if workloads remained heavy and the political tone surrounding the reforms remained negative.

*Here's what I'm talking about. There are a lot of people that have coached for 15 years; they have been neglecting their families. Then all of a sudden they had a taste of going home and seeing what their kids are doing and seeing their families. Do they want to now just jump back and go back to business as usual?*

Teaching is much more than a rational activity. Good teaching is not just a matter of being efficient, developing confidence, mastering technique and possessing the right kind of knowledge. Good teaching also involves emotional work. As Andy Hargreaves (1997) says

Emotions are not an alternative to reason but an essential part of reason itself. If you can't feel, you can't judge. ...Change strategies must be directed towards making schools into workplaces that recognize and support teachers' emotional relationships with their students as a vital foundation for learning, and, in the form of emotional intelligence, as a central aspect of learning itself. (p. ix).

Michael Fullan (1997) contextualized the emotional dimension of reform:

By examining emotions and change from different perspective, we not only gain insights about the dynamics of change, but we also find new understandings of how to make change work more constructively. (p. 217)

Teachers experienced implementation of the reforms in ways that made it difficult to differentiate between professional and personal lives. They talked about how the reforms had increased their workload, made them feel isolated, contributed to stress and sometimes illness, and stripped away their sense of professionalism leaving them feeling frustrated and vulnerable.

### **Increased Workload**

Teachers' workloads had increased dramatically. Learning the new curriculum and working with the new provincial assessment guidelines meant that many teachers were working late into the evening, throughout much of the weekend, and during the summer. This was exacerbated by having to teach four of four periods. At the same time, they were frustrated by their inability to connect with their students and to accomplish all that they believed they should.

*It makes me sick. If anything, you're still trying to make contact with every kid in your class- when you're doing four out of four, and you're juggling all that stuff. A teacher goes into teaching not for the pay cheque. That's never been the reason; you do it because of the kids. And you still go in and*

*do the best damn job you can. And you come out, and you are frustrated because you haven't been able to do the best of your ability, and you're still trying to make everything work for all of those kids, and that's where the frustration is.*

### **Sense of Isolation**

Because of increased workload, some teachers found they no longer had time to collaborate with colleagues and were feeling professionally isolated.

*There's less teacher-teacher interaction, less collegial interaction amongst teachers, less time for people to talk together. You don't realize how much you value your time to interact with other peers until you lose it. All of a sudden now, you're dealing with 200 kids every day, and the only time you see someone is at a sort of semi-lunch when you have to get your photocopying done. That's probably the number one thing that's stressing out a lot of people.*

Teachers also experienced increased personal isolation, in many cases for the first time in their careers.

*I've cut myself off from my other friendships and from my other social groups, I no longer enjoy those because I no longer enjoy going out and hiding, I no longer enjoy going out when somebody wants to talk education then run you down. That's not enjoyable; that's stressful. So, that's what reform's done to me socially; it's made me withdraw from social circles. I used to have friends. I no longer have friends. We don't do anything socially anymore, because I know if I'm in that group somebody – and it might be just a flippant comment, but somebody makes a comment. Then, somebody else that's not a friend just starts jumping in. My God, the next thing you're standing in a corner by yourself, thinking "How can I get across that room and out that door and get home again?"*

### **Increased Stress and Illness**

Several teachers also talked about feeling of stress and stress related sicknesses that often led to higher levels of absenteeism.

*And, yes, the stress is – the stress level in the school is up, the stress level amongst teachers is up, and I think it will only increase even more. It's very stressful because of the timelines because of how the funding works for the province.*

*Just the number of sick days that are taken by teachers has gone way up.*

*Sure, there's a whole bunch of people now that are so stressed out; that are so burned out from this year. This one year has put a lot of stress on them. They don't want to do it anymore. They're going to need time to recover.*

*They're so ticked off at how they've been treated, and they've been portrayed as mindless cattle.*

### **De-professionalism**

The perceived loss of respect for teachers was particularly difficult for many teachers.

*I don't mind being under attack. I think that it gives you an opportunity to ground yourself in your profession, take a stand and approach it with a certain enthusiasm. And just let people know what's really going on, and I think that that's all really great, but people aren't hearing and why is that? Because the media only has one message.*

*Well, the plan was let's beat them down first. Let's beat them down, and after they're beaten down enough, they'll come around to our way of our thinking.*

### **Frustration and Helplessness**

Teachers talked about not being able to meet their own standards of teaching and about watching increasing numbers of students fall through the cracks.

*And the kids are so upset about it. I've had kids in tears, absolute tears, saying: "I haven't even got a high enough mark to go to summer school. You know I need three credits in Math and what am I going to do, and like they need that in order to graduate". And they are good kids. It's not like they're behavioural kids or they're skipping or anything. These are kids who never miss a day of school who are so diligent in all that they're doing, and they just can't jump through that hoop. I have concerns for them on an emotional level, their emotional well being. I've heard more kids say they hate subjects than I've ever heard ever. "You know I hate going to that class". They don't understand anything. They come in after having a class, they just got back a test, and if they blink you know they have tears. It supports what [name] is saying about the number of kids coming in. And, for everyone you have coming in for help there's probably another ten in the school who are feeling the same way.*

*We're not going to be able to have those kids stay because they're going to be so frustrated, because they cannot grasp the concepts.*

*Students have been affected and if the teachers are overworked and stressed, that translates to the students. Students need resources and supplies and help, and they need people who are motivated and getting professional developments and all kinds of things for their school life to be strong and positive. And overall they're not getting it, so the strong academic students will always do well anyway, but the students who are weaker and needed the support aren't getting that support I don't feel, or getting as much support as they should have. And that's where I think the system is falling behind. We're seeing high failure rates in all the applied courses, because the applied level courses are difficult. They've made them*

*more rigorous so it isn't a bad thing, but they didn't come out with courses to deal with the majority of students who do not go on to college and university.*

Overall, teachers reported a range of negative emotional responses - frustration, anger, guilt, sadness and even shame.

*It wasn't until last month and I read something about you know never being ashamed of doing honest work doing important work. And I thought yeah, why am I being ashamed?*

### **Impact on Students**

In the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Edition of *The Meaning of Educational Change*, Michael Fullan (2001) raises an important question about the role of students in educational reform:

Educational change, above all, is a people-related phenomenon for each and every individual. Students, even little ones, are people, too. Unless they have some meaningful, to them, role in the enterprise, most educational change, indeed most education, will stop. ...What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered in the introduction and implementation of reform in schools?

For the students in this study, this is their only time in secondary school. There is no second time around. At a time in their lives when they are particularly vulnerable, they are struggling to find their way without clear direction or support. The personal and academic influences of their time in secondary school are profound as they make critical decisions about their post secondary destinations. They had much to say about how they were being affected by the reforms, both academically and personally. They discussed their anxiety about a curriculum that was both condensed and more difficult, fears about the making decisions that would disadvantage them in the future and for some, worry about the “double graduating cohort”.

It was interesting to us that a number of students were fairly accepting of the changes. They felt that in several years students coming behind them would not have such a difficult time because they would be better prepared for the new curriculum, and teachers would be more familiar with it.

*I think it'll settle in a few years.*

*We were just kind of unfortunate to get here right as the change is happening because the teachers are going to stop teaching both. I think once the teachers get used to teaching nothing but the new curriculum. When they don't have to teach the old curriculum anymore, they'll get more*

*used to it and the students will be getting more prepared for the new curriculum through grade school.*

*We had to experience the new change, so, it was awkward for everybody, and we kind of got all of that on our heads. It was just bad timing.*

This, however, did not mitigate the effects of the increased pressure they experienced with the new curriculum, or the anxiety that came from teachers' reactions to the changes.

### **Condensed and Difficult Curriculum**

The new curriculum certainly was having an impact on students and some of them were having difficulty understanding why they were the ones being targeted.

*About the new curriculum, I don't see why they didn't start with the Grade 1's? Why did they have to just like start eliminating OACs and cram everything together in Grade 9?*

As previously mentioned, both teachers and students commented on the speed at which the curriculum was expected to be implemented. Compounding this concern was the condensed nature of the new curriculum. Students found the new curriculum both difficult and demanding. They also told us they were quite concerned about the potential negative effects of the upcoming 'double cohort' of graduating classes.

Although many students agreed, in principle, that educational change was indeed needed, they voiced concerns about the pace of the changes to the curriculum.

*I support the idea that we need change. I mean, obviously, he [Premier Harris] has good intentions. He's not doing them in the proper fashion. But, I mean, to change it now, you'd be stuck with somebody brand new coming in with their own views trying to change things only to go through another three years of them. And, then, we'd have to rope them back in again but he needs to slow down.*

Another student simply noted,

*If you have a hamburger, you don't shove it all in your mouth at once; you have to take one bite at a time.*

Students also told us that condensing the curriculum from five years to four years was felt at every grade level.

*They're pushing all the OAC stuff into the Grade 12 course. So, instead of them going in an OAC course when they take their Grade 12, the OAC course is combined with the Grade 12 course, and some of the Grade 12 is*

*combined with the grade level. So, they're spreading five years into four. They're moving half the Grade 12 into the Grade 11 course.*

Students, particularly those in Grade 11, who would be affected by the double cohort, expressed their concerns about competing for fewer university spaces in 2003.

*I want to get into university. Right now with only one year graduating at a time, there's only 15 people accepted into the program. They're not going to change the numbers because they don't have any money. It's going to be twice as many people vying for the same number of positions and no one's going to be able to get in.*

### **Worry About Making Bad Decisions**

Some students felt that they were having to make important life decisions sooner than they were prepared to make them and they were under pressure to take only academic courses if they wanted to be in the college or university track. Students also discussed having little to no support or guidance in negotiating their way through the new course options. This came from a loss of guidance counsellors and, just as importantly, the fact that no one seemed to understand the new curriculum well enough to provide students with solid advice about the courses they should take.

*At the beginning of this year, I didn't like first selection and I didn't take the right courses. I told the Guidance counsellors what I was doing and after the first semester they told me that I needed a Physics but I couldn't fit it into my schedule for the second semester. I could have for the first semester, but they didn't tell me that, so, I had to take night school. That was a bit of an inconvenience for me and I even went into the Guidance office and they just said, "Oh, just keep taking what you're taking."*

Students in all streams expressed experiencing difficulties with their studies, and feeling increased pressure in many different ways. The following comments were made by students who are accustomed to doing well academically.

*It's hard. You're struggling. You get tons more homework than you're supposed to. I spend at least two and a half hours a night doing Math homework trying to understand it.*

*I have four other classes and it just piles up and piles up, and you get so frustrated that you just don't want to do it anymore. You just don't want to do anything; you just give up.*

*We have to graduate no matter what. So, the more you do the sooner you'll graduate. So, that's basically it.*



*The new curriculum is so heavy that I go home and cry because there is so much homework to do. Then, you have to do this for your house and, then, you have to juggle everything...there's a million things running through your head at the same time.*

### **Sense of Abandonment**

In addition to the influence of new and more curriculum content and higher expectations, students talked about the critical role that teachers play, not just in the way they present curriculum but also in their orientation to the material and to the students themselves. The following conversation between several students in one focus group is representative of comments that we heard in several schools about how teachers' attitudes affected students' learning. Their teachers were not as available to them and they felt as if they had been left to sort things out on their own or, worse, teachers made it more difficult for students than it needed to be.

*Last year I remember Math was so difficult because it was just so negative and it stressed me so much. The teacher was unhappy with it anyway because he was retiring that year. He had a whole different curriculum just for us, so he hated our class. He was the most miserable person, and he would tell us every day that, "This the toughest Grade 10 curriculum I've ever seen and blah, blah, blah," and I just felt so small in it and I did so bad. But this year I have a happy teacher and she's always really bubbly and makes it seem so much easier. It's in the same stuff and I'm just like "Why couldn't I get this last year?" It's all because my attitude was so – I already felt like I couldn't do it. This year it just seems like so much easier.*

*Q: So, why was it you thought you couldn't do it?*

*Because he didn't give me a chance to even try really. At the beginning he basically told us that it was so difficult that I couldn't do it.*

*It really doesn't help for the teacher to tell you that the curriculum is too hard for you. I've had Math teachers, all my Grade 9 Math teacher said, "Oh, look, we're learning this today, and I used to teach this to Grade 11, so, I don't think you're going to get it." Okay, they would tell you this is stuff that Grade 11's would normally be doing or this is stuff that you normally didn't even teach in high school. It just really doesn't help.*

*On my first day of Math class the teacher goes, "This is a very hard course, you're not going to get half of it, but if you try maybe you'll pass." I was like, okay, this is fun.*

*Q: So, what does it do to you?*

*It really cuts you in half right at the beginning. It's like you have nothing to work with and it's already like you're already set in your mind like, I'm*

*going to fail. It's totally a mind thing. If you know you can do it or just think you can do it and you're encouraged to keep trying at least, you're going to do so much better. And really, it's only as difficult as you make it.*

Students also told us that some teachers were putting them at a disadvantage by not teaching the new curriculum. This made it hard for students and for the next teacher who was expecting them to be prepared.

*In Math class a lot of people who had the same teacher last year in Grade 9 are struggling a lot because he was supposed to teach them things that would bring them into Grade 10. So, now our new Math teachers have to re-tell everything we were supposed to learn last year because it was supposed to be in the new curriculum. He just didn't follow it at all. So, our teacher this year has to do what we were supposed to do in Grade 9, plus what we're supposed to be doing Grade 10. You can tell that that teacher really didn't care. He was just teaching us what he wanted to teach us and that's affecting us as we keep on going because we're going to have to re-learn and re-learn and re-learn.*

Students in the focus groups were surprised that teachers were uninformed and unable to give them better direction about their choices. In some cases, students felt they had been given incorrect information about course levels and their ability to move from one level to another. They also felt that many of their teachers were unprepared to teach their courses. In some instances, students reported a mismatch between the teacher and the curriculum. For example, experienced teachers were struggling with the new curriculum and new teachers were not prepared for the old curriculum.

*So, we have all these young, inexperienced teachers, and I know you've got to learn sometime, but it's just kind of bad timing I guess. Our new curriculum starts and they flush all the teachers out. ... In my OAC Physics class, the guy was brand new teaching it. It was his first time teaching and that's one of the hardest classes at school. So, it kind of put some stress on me to learn individually and have this new guy up at the board and trying to make up stuff. That's how it seemed. He'd explain something and it's – it doesn't seem like it was organized. Everything goes back to being organized and knowing how to teach it and going over things yourself, and it's like you have to have learn it yourself. Even though I know the teachers know what they're teaching and everything, but they have to go through how they're going to teach it, and they have to learn themselves. Teachers will always be learning and stuff. It was almost like he was confused. I don't know, it just takes a lot of time. They'll explain something to you and you go home and you look in the textbook and then you're like, "Oh, yeah, I get it now." And you go back and ask a question and they confuse you. They don't know what they're talking about either. So, it's just very frustrating. And*

*actually in the period before this we just had a mid-term and it was really hard. I think I failed. I've never had a mark below seventies and this class is bringing the whole average down.*

Others alluded to the fact that they had unqualified teachers “subbing” for their regular teachers. Often these replacements were individuals without teaching credentials such as university students and/or parents.

*And this year because the teachers are teaching more, this program couldn't run. Because they haven't been able to get in supply teachers, we've been having, I guess you'd call them, unqualified people filling in. They're not even teachers; some of them are parents.*

Lastly, students lamented the loss some of their favourite teachers who had been teaching for many years.

*Teachers are kind of a dying breed in our school.*

*Q: Teachers are what?*

*A dying breed.*

*Q: What does that mean?*

*Like, all the good old teachers are disappearing slowly. We lost two of my favourite teachers last year.*

*Q: Why? Did they retire?*

*They both retired. They weren't actually that old, but they were sick of how things were going, they told me.*

*Q: So, tell me about those 'good old' teachers. What made them so good?*

*Like I was saying about before. They were really organized because they had all this experience. They knew exactly what problems kids usually had in the class, so, they would outline that, and help everyone through that. And they knew everything better.*

On a personal level, many students felt lost and abandoned. Rather like shoppers on escalators trying to shop as the stairs move them on, students found themselves making impulsive (and sometimes rash) decisions or leaping off the moving treads, desperate for some stability. The particular irony in this scenario is that teachers, usually the buffers with life rings to haul them back when times get tough, were themselves so destabilized and preoccupied with their own issues that they are unaware or incapable of acting in the students' interests. While teachers expressed concern for the students they felt were less able, the students we talked to,

many of whom were motivated and academically focused, were also experiencing high levels of anxiety.

### **Reduced Engagement**

Considerable research has identified student engagement as a precursor to student learning. Students' engagement in school life and in their own learning is important in developing willingness to continue learning and to remain in school (Newmann, Wehlage & Lamborn, 1992; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1997). In fact, much of the research related to student engagement is focused on the conditions of disengagement and the characteristics of students, programs and schools associated with 'dropping out' of school (Smith et al., 1998).

We asked students in the focus groups to rate their involvement in school on a scale from one (low) to four (high) for two academic years, 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. Despite the fact that there hadn't been any extra-curricular activities sponsored by teachers (or in some cases, very few), the students indicated similar involvement in school in both years. They also indicated that, as they progressed through high school, they felt they could identify with the institution and this identity brought with it a feeling of comfort.

*When you're in Grade 9 it's scary but when you've been at the school for a while you're not so nervous and you feel like you want to go out and get involved in things.*

At first glance, our data confirm findings elsewhere that identification to school comes in many forms (Finn, 1989; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997; Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace, 1996). Despite reporting a somewhat stable involvement in school, the students had much to say about how the loss of extra-curricular activities was affecting their sense of connection to the school.

*I noticed last year students were in the school earlier in the mornings and they stayed later after school because of these extra things, and this year I've noticed students start arriving at 8:45 and the school's pretty much empty by 3:30. Last year you'd have people lingering for an hour, two hours....doing extra things, hanging out with friends and stuff, they don't even do that anymore.*

Students stated that the "extra's" in school provided an outlet to relieve the stress of academic work.

*Extra-curricular activities were the one thing most people would look forward to. I think if they got stressed out in class or they felt they had too*

*much to work on, they really had something to look forward to and something to do to get their mind off or just clear everything out.*

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

Andy Hargreaves (1997) reminds us that:

All too often change efforts have been so preoccupied with skills and standards that they have not gotten to the heart of what a great deal of teaching is all about: establishing bonds and forming relationships with students, making classrooms into places of excitement and wonder, ensuring that all students are included and no one feels and outcast. (p. ix)

Teachers in other studies have identified caring about and for students as a fundamental purpose in teaching (Hargreaves, 1998; Lasky 2000). Job satisfaction for teachers comes from the core business of teaching - working with students, and seeing them achieve; as well as increasing their own professional skills and knowledge (Dinham & Scott (1996a, 1996b, 1997a). Hargreaves (1998) found that teachers expressed negative emotions when their involvement with students was jeopardized. He suggests that:

These kinds of emotions occur when people are obstructed from achieving their goals, when they are compelled to realize other people's goals and agendas that they find inappropriate or repugnant, when they pursue or are required to pursue goals or standards that are beyond their reach, or when they are unable to choose between multiple goals.

Jean Rudduck and her colleagues (1996) found that relationships between teachers and students formed an important part of the optimum conditions for student learning. In particular, they drew attention to the messages that these interactions communicate to students about themselves as learners and as people, with certain interactions carrying strong negative or positive tones. These authors indicate that students are affected by things like teachers being available to talk about learning and schoolwork, allowing them to take responsibility when they seem to be ready, being sensitive to the tone and manner of their conversations with students (e.g., respectful, not humiliating), being fair and not pre-judging students, and making *all* students feel confident that they can do well and can achieve something worthwhile (Rudduck et al., 1996).

Both teachers and students identified their relationships with the other as an important feature in their involvement in school. For many teachers these relationships were the reason that they entered teaching in the first place and it was the students who sustained them in times

of frustration and uncertainty. There were a number of comments about how the implementation of SSR to date has damaged relationships between teachers and students. Teachers had less time to devote to students. Students felt abandoned and without input to their schooling.

*I think it [the relationship between teachers and students] has eroded over time. I think there's almost an ambivalence. They [students] are not acting out so much. It's a passive kind of thing. If the student doesn't have the relationship in a class, then they start to not attend, and then they sort of disappear. Because there's less done through administration in terms of tracking down attendance and the teacher doesn't have time to do that.*

Ironically, TAP initiatives meant to foster mentoring actually mandated relationships that had until then been a tacit part of secondary school culture. Similarly, relationships that had grown through teachers' voluntary services in a myriad of extracurricular activities were lost. Increased teacher workload also meant that teachers had less time and less emotional energy for their students. A number of teachers felt apologetic.

*I didn't feel I was giving my 100% and I found myself apologizing to my students quite a bit, when I'm doing the four out of four I'm saying, "I'm sorry, I haven't marked your test yet, maybe by tomorrow, maybe next week. I'm sorry, I've had this assignment for a month now, but sorry". I found myself apologizing so much and – but the kids were understanding once you sat them down and explained what was going on.*

Some students expressed empathy with their teachers.

*Some teachers, I'm not saying all, but most, they try their best. I can see how difficult it is for them because they're in a very crucial position at the moment. I mean, they try to help us when we need help and things like that. They stay after school. If we need help, if you have any questions, in the mornings, there are always the study groups, that sort of thing. I mean, they try their best and they do what they can do.*

Students also commented on their own sense of helplessness and the power differential within many classrooms. Although the comments were not necessarily related to SSR, students felt that classroom learning could be facilitated if teachers and students could work harder at compromising.

*In classes I've had teachers that sit there and they're, like, the big heavy. They sit in front of class and they think they own the class. They're "Oh, I'm the teacher, I can do whatever the heck I want and there's nothing you can do about it."*

*A lot of teachers won't compromise with a student. I think they should. I mean, you know, they should come to that solution because either the teacher's not satisfied or it's the student who's not satisfied, I mean, in most cases it's the student that's not satisfied, and that shouldn't be the case. I mean, both the teacher and the student should be satisfied. And I think they should come to some sort of resolution if a situation like that happens or occurs.*

## **Chapter 5 - Situating the Findings in Relation to Other Large-Scale Reform Efforts**

Educational policy is more than a politically neutral set of mandates. It is an ambiguous, multifaceted, interactive process. As is evident from the previous chapters, government mandated large-scale reform in secondary schools in Ontario has occurred in a politically charged context. We have not tried, in this study, to assess the nature or adequacy of the policies being implemented. Instead, we have taken the position that teachers, students, support staff and administrators are active agents when responding to policy (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 1998) and we have focussed on how SSR in Ontario is being understood and experienced in schools. In this chapter, we situate what we have heard in the broader context of educational change. Considering our findings in concert with findings from other studies allows us to investigate the nature of the changes in SSR in Ontario in light of findings from elsewhere, with an eye to the improvements, adaptations and future directions.

Changing schools is hard work. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, most attempts to change secondary schools in any substantial way, especially on a large-scale have been unsuccessful (Elmore, 1995; Sarason, 1990). Richard Elmore (1995) suggests that many reform models:

...overlook the complex process by which local curricular decisions get made, the entrenched and institutionalized political relationships, the weak incentives operating on teachers to change their practices in their daily work routines and the extra-ordinary cost of making large-scale, long-standing changes of a fundamental kind in how knowledge is constructed in classrooms. (p. 13)

He goes on to say:

The core of schooling remains relatively stable in the face of often massive changes in the structure around it" (p. 15).

In a recent analysis of factors influencing large-scale reform, Ken Leithwood, and his colleagues (2000) have suggested that variations in the success of efforts to improve the core technology of schooling on a large scale can be explained, broadly, in terms of their influence on:

- motivation (e.g., O'Day, 1996),
- capacity (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Cobb & Bullmaster, 1998), and
- situation (Rowan, 1996).



Successful large-scale reforms are ones that motivate school staffs to change their practices or adopt new practices associated with reform initiatives and provide opportunities for individual school professionals and schools as organizations to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to carry out such improvements. Successful reform also includes mechanisms that ensure both pressure and support in the school, district and political contexts in which the people who are directly affected by the changes have to work (e.g., teachers, administrators, support staff, students). The situation or context can have important consequences for the development of motivation and capacity. This framework of situation, motivation and capacity provide a useful organizer for considering what we have learned about SSR in Ontario from this study.

### ***Situation: Pressure and Support for Change***

Although in his earlier work, Fullan cautioned that *schools* should "think big, start small" when considering reform directions, he has recently stated that *governments* need to "think big, start big", particularly in the early stages of large-scale reform (Fullan 2001). The forces maintaining the status quo in education are so strong that governments, in his view, do not have the luxury of starting small. In the early stages of large-scale reform, there is a positive and necessary role for pressure. However, pressure without support can lead to resistance and alienation (Fullan, 2001). The conclusion emerging from studies of large-scale reform is that both pressure and support are essential elements in the initiation and the continuation of the change process, but they will take on different forms as the reforms progress and evolve.

Governments can only influence education through the policies that they enact. In the current context of large-scale reform around the world, many of the policy levers are focused on keeping the pressure for reform high. This pressure comes in the form of mandated curriculum, standardized assessment programs, school inspections, and public reports of student achievement and schools' progress towards performance targets.

This one-sided approach to reform has led critics to challenge the value of standards-based reforms that are test-heavy but lacking in the supports required to do the job (Olson, 2001). If governments only exert pressure, they can get results that are real but not particularly deep or lasting. To have a good chance of going the distance, they need also to provide support (Fullan, 2001).

Governments can support reform by providing resources, professional development, time for study and practice with new ideas and materials and by fostering professional networks and engaging professionals in planning and implementing the changes. In some locales, such as England, and in a number of states in the US and in Australia, governments have changed their strategies to ensure that the pressure is coupled with support to foster the reforms. For example, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in England is intentionally designed to build capacity by providing clear curriculum frameworks, developing new materials, appointing personnel with the time and skill to model "best practices" and providing professional development opportunities within local education authorities, in addition to the pressure of assessments, inspections and target-setting (Barber, 2000).

### **Pressure for SSR in Ontario**

The magnitude of the educational reform activity in Ontario during the late 1990s and the early years of the new century is a clear indication that there is considerable pressure for change in schools. Although there have been many educational reform efforts in the past 50 years, more legislation was passed on educational change in last five years of the twentieth century than in all of Ontario's preceding history (Gidney, 2000). Not only has there been a plethora of change mandates but the political tone of the interaction between the government and educators has also been extremely negative.

We certainly heard comments in the focus groups about the pressure that was being felt in schools and the influence that this pressure was having. The pressure that came to the forefront for teachers arose from a number of sources. Certainly there was pressure that resulted from the changes to curriculum and assessment and their responsibility to the students.

*And it's because of the pressure of meeting all the applications of the curriculum. I think its coming up as a function of the pressure that's on the teachers and the department heads to make sure everybody is up to snuff for the EQAO, for exams. Coupled with the fact that we were out for a month for the strike.*

*I feel a real **pressure to make sure that students get that material. With this curriculum** being pushed so quickly on these kids they don't have the skills. They didn't get the skills in Grade 8 and Grade 9 for me to try to teach them Grade 10. I'm trying to re-teach them Grade 9. I don't even get close to the Grade 10 curriculum. There's too much curriculum right now for the kids to handle. And maybe I'm the stupid one trying to do it at all.*

Others mentioned the political context in Ontario at the time.

*You've got government here, teachers here, and they're like this, confrontational attitudes. And that certainly isn't any way to build any kind of cohesion or develop a system in a positive manner. Because one's battling the other, the public's in between, and the hear: "it's the government that is right; it's the teachers that are right"*

*Teachers are fed up with the public. We feel we don't have the public on our side. We probably don't have the public on our side, and really it doesn't matter. Because we're here and we're here to represent, our constituents, our students and, to deal with this on a day-to-day basis. We know where our students are (academically) and, whether we've got public support or not, it would be nice to have it.*

*If I look at how the system is today compared to five or eight years ago, it's a lot more stressful environment. And it's a more negative environment. Teachers are down on themselves. I know that when I walk down the street, I don't hear a lot of people yelling, "Hey, you lousy teacher out there" but I think we feel more pressure and we look at the public in a jaded way thinking, "Gee, I didn't hear you supporting me in my strike, and I don't see you supporting me in my...opinion polls". So, I think teachers really start getting down on themselves.*

*It's to do with all this politics, I hate it. I hate every minute of it. I hate all the changes. Don't get me wrong, change is good, change is inevitable, there's no question, but the pace of change, the type of change, the attitude in the province towards teachers. I hate Mike Harris.*

Teachers were also feeling pressure from parents, especially to ensure that students would be able to follow any pathway and not be 'boxed in' by the courses that they take.

*There's a lot of parental pressure, pressure to keep those kids in the academic stream. And these poor kids are falling apart.*

*What's in the best interest for your child? Well, they would probably be more successful in an applied course, but the parents are seeing that applied will close every option for university. And they want their child to finish high school having that option of college or university. If they make that decision now the door is already closed. Well, you still have kids just suffering miserably and plodding along, and they're crippled. These kids are signing up for summer courses like crazy, and taking courses again next year. They know that they can't do it in four because of this unrealistic pressure.*

### **Support for SSR in Ontario**

Changing schools is hard work because it depends on changing classroom practice. Changing practices requires new learning, relearning, and sometimes "unlearning" (Goodlad,

1999). Change of this magnitude does not happen quickly. Before these deeper changes can be expected, educators need to become conversant with the ideas behind the mandated changes and what these changes might look like and feel like in concrete classroom applications. A great deal has been written about the kinds of support that teachers need; things like professional development, accurate and timely resources, time to study, to practice and to discuss the changes, and honest feedback about their implementation (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2002).

It was clear from our conversations that the educators in this study did not feel as if they were being provided with the necessary supports to make the transition to the new ways of thinking and acting embedded in SSR. They talked at length about the difficulty of trying to come to grips with the new curriculum expectations at the same time as they were teaching a heavy load. Although they knew about some professional development opportunities associated with their work, the shortage of supply teachers, the lack of funding and the concern about burdening their colleagues during their absence meant that most of them had received no professional development. There was also little opportunity to discuss the curriculum changes with colleagues or to share insights or questions, given the increase in teaching time.

*We're feeling all this pressure and we have no support except each other, yet, we don't get to see each other because we're so over worked.*

Not only were new resources either absent or too late, we heard about funding cuts that reduced the resources and services that were once available for teachers and students.

*Quite a bit of the change is good. Great ideas, but a lack of funding. So, they talk the great talk, but they don't put their money where their mouth is. Change requires financial support, and all they've done is cut back support staff, cut back teachers, cut back budgets. They came on strong with the Grade 9 and 10 curriculum, giving lots of money for books. This year for Grade 11, we know for a fact, they're only providing \$72.00 per pupil, and that's to cover all of their textbooks. Well, one of my textbooks for one of my courses costs \$60.00.*

Teachers in the focus groups also talked about the lack of emotional support and the influence that the negative climate was having on them. The political tone that accompanies large-scale reform or school improvement efforts can influence teachers' emotional well-being, and their motivation to implement reforms (Hargreaves, 1997). Andy Hargreaves (2000) has cautioned that the current political “confrontational climate” in Ontario underscores “international evidence that people will not take risks in climates of blame”. Other researchers

have warned that governments in some countries are in danger of alienating the very people on whom they rely to implement their reforms (Stoll, 1999). The negative political tone was inseparable from the reforms themselves for the teachers in this study. Teachers felt that schools were being unfairly targeted and bashed without consideration for their well-being or recognition of how educators fulfilled their professional obligations to students and to education in general. Several teachers were re-considering their career goals, as a result of having to teach in a negative work environment.

*I used to be proud to say I was a teacher. I was involved in a good group, a social group; I had a social life before reform. Now, I just don't say what I do for a living. I'm embarrassed to say what I do for a living because, then, I know the lines are going to start coming and, then, that evening is no longer enjoyable for me. If somebody does find that I'm a teacher, I usually end up leaving any social events that aren't with my colleagues.*

Some teachers who had been in the profession for a number of years found themselves re-evaluating their commitment to the profession for the first time in their careers.

*I think - what else can I do besides teach? We don't get any respect. I'm embarrassed to say to most people that I'm a teacher, you get no respect for what you do.*

Relationships with colleagues provide a powerful source of emotional and instrumental support for teachers involved in making changes. Recent research by Joan Talbert and Milbrey McLaughlin (2001) underscores the complexity of context for secondary school teachers whose worlds are situated by state/province, district/board, school and department. Their study of “professional communities” in a number of schools in three different states delineates and describes the vital importance of department cultures and professional relationships among teachers. Susan Lasky and her colleagues (2001) found that the stress and isolation that teachers experience are very much related to peer contacts and support. In the one school in their study that reported high morale, the principal, vice-principal, and the teachers listed very specific actions that they had taken to mitigate teacher stress and facilitate school community. They talked about using all of the 'wiggle room' in the schedule for subject area planning groups and relying on a school newsletter for procedural information as a means of “freeing up” staff meeting time for strategic and collaborative planning. The principal and vice-principals interacted regularly with both staff and students in informal ways such as attending sporting events, walking the halls, conversing with students during lunch, visiting the staff room, and

making themselves available to teachers. They also scheduled regular opportunities for the staff to get together for fun. Teachers reported that this social time, combined with scheduled meetings reduced feelings of isolation.

Educators in this study described many different aspects of increased professional isolation because they no longer had time to plan with colleagues, formally or informally. They also missed informal chatting time during lunch and during prep time. Over and over, we heard that teachers were feeling isolated from each other and that they were not engaging in discussion in their schools or departments to think about, argue about, challenge and internalize new ideas and practices.

There is growing evidence from reform efforts around the world that lack of time is the critical block to teacher learning and school improvement (Hargreaves et al., 2000; Tye, 2000). There's no getting away from it - learning and change take time, and they need the investment of time (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2002).

*And if it starts with resources and allowing teachers the PD time to become trained and equipped in this area, I think that is something that we need to see. I think we've lost the time of becoming experts in our field and we're now Jack-of-all-trades, masters of none just with the extra half course as an example. We're teaching areas that may not be in our field, and may not be an area that we're comfortable with, looking at material that's brand new and no time to learn that. So, if we had the correct funding, if we had the amount of time. If we had sessions for training, this is a system and that could work. But, it's just too much too fast, with too little.*

### **Motivation to Change**

Mandated changes, by definition, push the boundaries of both motivation and capacity. Changes inevitably embody ambivalence, anxiety, loss and struggle as people make sense out of new expectations or conditions and integrate them into their daily routines. Large-scale mandated educational reform carries with it job intensification and redefinition of teacher role expectations (Hargreaves, 1994).

Change is not likely to happen in classrooms if teachers are not motivated to change their practices, and sometimes even their values. With complex and multidimensional change mandates coming at them at a fast rate, educators experience a new set of demands and they have to decide how much they are willing to invest in making the changes. Typically, large-scale

reforms initially have appealed to the intrinsic needs of a small segment of the teaching population (Elmore, 1996). The reforms may have little or no intrinsic appeal for the bulk of the teaching population. Instead, teachers and administrators need to be convinced that the changes are worth the extra effort.

The educators in the focus groups were suspicious of and hurt by the negative experience of battling with the provincial government and the perceived loss of public support. They also felt overwhelmed by what was being expected of them. Although the decisions about teaching time and extra-curricular have since moved out of the foreground in secondary school reform, when we talked to teachers and students in these focus groups, they were unhappy about the labour strife. Some might argue that these decisions are separate from the secondary reform mandates themselves. Nevertheless, they had a major initial impact on how the mandates were interpreted and received.

Moving beyond superficial compliance depends on teachers deciding that it's worth the effort to pursue new learning. New learning requires focused attention, spending time in reading and discussion, practicing new strategies, and being open to new ideas. Teachers in this study were weighing the options and making very personal decisions about how to adapt to SSR. They were not lazy or disinterested. They were confused and anxious about what was expected of them; they were struggling to make sense out of the reform requirements; and they were angry and hurt by the climate within which they found themselves. Even the government-appointed Education Improvement Commission (2001) in its final report had this to say:

Notwithstanding the many accomplishments we've seen in schools across Ontario, we must note that, at the time this report went to print, some unresolved conflicts continued to compromise our students' education. We're extremely concerned about the corrosive climate that persists among the Ministry of Education, the district school boards, and board staff, particularly teachers. This unhealthy atmosphere needs to be dispelled immediately – before our students' education is jeopardized further. (p. 5)

### ***Capacity to Change***

Capacity to change relates to both individuals and to organizations. At the individual level, educational change requires that educators develop new skills, behaviours, beliefs or understanding (Fullan, 1991). Schools also need internal capacity if they are going to take charge of change. As Louise Stoll (1999) describes it:

Internal capacity is the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers and the school itself for the purpose of enhancing student learning.

Teachers involved in reforming and restructuring their schools are engaged in two enormous tasks - reinventing the school and reinventing themselves (Miller, 1999). Both of these undertakings are complex, multifaceted processes of learning and socialization that can evoke a sense of powerlessness and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. They can threaten teachers' sense of control and their influence over their work environment (Smylie, 1999). On the other hand, optimal learning is what Csikzentmihalyi (1990) calls "flow" - a state where the individual is totally and unselfconsciously absorbed and engaged in the pleasure of the learning and the doing.

In large-scale reform, educators have much less choice about how they will conduct their work. The teachers in the focus groups lamented the loss of their classroom autonomy. Legislated teaching time and class size, densely detailed in curriculum documents, and the provincial report card put limits on what, who and how they taught. Autonomy is an important element of the work of professionals but it goes hand in hand with professional responsibility. Professional responsibility in teaching depends on building and maintaining the specialized knowledge of the profession. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that their professional knowledge base is current, accurate and comprehensive and that it is reflected in the teaching and learning that occurs in their classrooms (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2002). Throughout the focus groups we got some insight into the uncertainty and ambiguity that teachers were experiencing as they struggled with a number of the dimensions of SSR and their capacity to implement them. Like teachers in other studies, they often complained that the other, extraneous, or bureaucratic aspects of change had taken away from their abilities to effectively teach their students (Smylie, 1999). However, they also described their own discomfort with implementing some of the requirements, especially when they were teaching outside their areas of specialization.

*But, again, no training. No one has sat me down and said "Here's how you implement this stuff; here's how you can make this stuff work." I feel like I've been thrown in the deep end, sink or swim.*

*Many teachers are really struggling. They struggle with the new courses because they are very different from what they've done in the past. They're teaching something that they've never taught before and there is nothing to help them. They just go in there and do it.*



## ***Rethinking The Role of Secondary Schools***

As the teachers in the focus groups talked, it became clear that they were experiencing some fundamental paradoxes about the role of secondary schools. Although they did not describe their concerns as philosophical ones, SSR was bringing a number of issues about the purpose of secondary schools to the surface. The changes embedded in SSR, especially the different destinations that were guiding programs, were forcing teachers to think about how to serve all students. They expressed concerns that many students were not likely to attain the standards that were being set by the new curriculum. This concern is not unique to Ontario teachers. The role of secondary schools is indeed changing.

Historically, secondary schools have had responsibility to establish which children continue with their education which ones go to the world of work, and when the move would happen. There has been a major shift in the nature of the population in secondary schools, however. In 1958, 59% of students who entered high school graduated with a diploma (Gidney, 2000). A recent Statscan study (Youth in Transition Survey, 2002) found that 90% of 20 year olds in Ontario in 1999 had a high school diploma. They also highlight the fact that although the majority of high school dropouts with no further education were working (59% full-time and 18% part-time); this group was also the most likely to be without a job (23%). Secondary graduation has become a necessity for young people to be successful in adult life. However, curriculum, timetables, assessment and teaching in most secondary schools have continued to operate as mechanisms to sort and direct students who are not academically inclined to other programs or locations.

In our focus groups, we found teachers grappling with this issue. The changes in curriculum and the push for higher standards were bringing the diverse needs of students into sharp relief. How could they teach **all** of the students, especially with fewer resources and more demands on their time? What should be included in programs for students at different ages? ...with different interests? ...with different backgrounds? What is the teachers' professional responsibility to ensure learning? The new curriculum had provided answers to these questions and teachers were not sure that they agreed with the decisions that had been made. They reported that new grade 9 and 10 curriculum in all subjects and at all levels was making more demands on their students. Grade 9 Science students at the applied level were expected to use the same texts

as students in the academic program. Over and over teachers reported that students did not have the skills and prior knowledge to cope. Math teachers cited units of curriculum they used to teach in senior advanced courses that had been moved to grade 10. Physical education teachers talked about increased expectations surrounding written work in health. In every school we visited teachers indicated that if expectations for academic and applied levels were difficult, programming for special needs students had been completely, and some alleged deliberately, forgotten.

The conflict between teaching students and teaching curriculum was intensified when teachers talked about the changes to assessment and reporting. They were having difficulty making sense of the different requirements in the SSR documents. On one hand, the documents have a focus on describing student performance using rating scales with several levels of descriptors (e.g., a 4-level achievement chart) but they also require that teachers make judgements about the adequacy of their students' performance and assign a numerical grade on the report card.

The confusion being felt by Ontario teachers is similar to the quandary that teachers are experiencing in many places that are embroiled in assessment reform. Studies of classroom assessment suggest that it is one of the hardest and most consequential areas of teachers' work, highly emotionally charged because it is where teachers' relative success becomes visible to parents and to the public at large (Hargreaves et al., 2001; Gipps, 1994; Stiggins, 1994). Assessment has many different purposes and these purposes are often in conflict with one another. The curriculum guidelines and province-wide reporting requirements put clear constraints on what the teachers could do. Teachers were accountable for the implementation of the curriculum and for conforming to system expectations, while at the same time teaching the particular students in their classes and found themselves caught between requirements for "meeting standards" and their convictions about the learning needs of individual students. At the same time, testing and marks have been convenient instruments of social control to slot students for over 100 years (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

The challenges of purpose and process that were expressed in the focus groups arose, in part, because there is no explanation in the documents to provide teachers with a rationale and a framework for thinking about their practices. Because there is no description of the intentions

behind the assessment changes, teachers, students and parents were struggling to understand the changes and to make them fit with the daily activities of schools. Underlying the confusion, however, was a creeping ambivalence about the role of assessment and reporting. What decisions are and should be made based on assessment and evaluation of student work? Who should be involved in student assessment? How should reporting happen?

Before teachers can move to decisions about how much to invest and in the mandated educational changes, it is likely that they will need to come to grips with these fundamental questions.

### ***Creating A Context for Change***

Educators and schools are not transformed through mandates (McLaughlin, 1989). Instead, change requires learning by individuals and by organizations. Learning for capacity in schools depends on believing in success, making connections, attending to motivation, experiencing emotion, being a community, engaging in inquiry, fostering creativity, encouraging practice, and finding time (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2002).

The educators that we talked with did not feel as if they were equipped to make the changes that were being expected. They felt as if they were trying to make changes and move things around in ways that they didn't understand and that they weren't sure that they agreed with, without the necessary resources, training and support to do it well.

## **Chapter 6 - Summary - What We Learned and What Next**

### ***Background***

#### **The New Orthodoxy**

- Government mandated reform is not a new phenomenon in Ontario education. As in many other jurisdictions, however, the intensity and pace of reform mandates has increased and the reforms have followed what we have called elsewhere "the new orthodoxy" - centralization of power and funding; defined standards; deeper learning; a focus on literacy and numeracy and science; centralized curricula; indicators and rubrics; aligned assessments, and consequential accountability (Hargreaves et al., 2001).

#### **Documenting the Process**

- A number of researchers in Ontario are working to chronicle and understand the process and impact of the educational reform efforts and engage the educational community and the public in ongoing discussion about SSR.

### ***Understanding SSR***

#### **Not Averse to Change**

- Teachers in the study were not averse to changes in secondary education but they were not sure that the government changes were taking schools in the best direction.

#### **Curriculum Compression**

- The new curriculum was seen as a dramatic shift from the prior curriculum and teachers felt it was too demanding for students, at least those who had not been prepared in earlier grades, and there was little time for review or consolidation of skills and concepts.

#### **Compression of Program**

- The 'double cohort' created by the reduction of secondary school from 5 to 4 years was a major issue for the students who were affected and for their teachers.
- Students could not do long range planning because of uncertainty about available courses.
- There was a prediction that the reforms could lead to fewer course offerings in both core and option areas. Ultimately, this could result in a narrowing of opportunities for students.
- Teachers in optional areas were concerned about loss of programs as OS:IS students fast-tracked and younger students were filling their timetables with required courses in order to graduate in 4 years.

#### **Curriculum vs. Students**

- There was concern that students who were having academic difficulty were not being served by the curriculum changes and that there was a danger that they would leave school.

### **TAP: A Good Idea Gone Wrong**

- TAP, instead of creating a connection between each student and a teacher who could mentor and guide them, was seen as a burden for which teachers were inadequately prepared and in which students were "wasting their time".

### **Confusion and Scepticism about Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting**

- New classroom assessment requirements were seen to be time-consuming and didn't make sense to many teachers.
- The provincial report cards were confusing and left both teachers and students wondering what they were for and what they meant.

## ***Implementation***

### **Too Much; Too Fast**

- There was concern about the compressed timelines for implementation, especially given the volume and depth in the new curriculum.

### **Political Tone**

- The political context surrounding SSR has been rocky and rancorous with protests, withdrawal of services, labour conflicts and negative media attention.
- Teachers and students felt that schools and programs were disrupted and uncertain.
- Teachers expressed weariness, stress, isolation and even discontent with their chosen profession.

### **Do More With Less**

- Educators told us that there was insufficient funding to acquire the resources, materials and equipment and almost no time to make sense out of the new curriculum.
- The funding reductions have left districts and schools without access to support staff.
- There was limited access to professional development and/or ongoing assistance for implementation.

## ***Collateral Damage***

- Teachers at this stage in SSR were feeling overworked, isolated, stressed, frustrated and de-professionalized.
- Students were fearful about succeeding and making good decisions for their futures. They also felt abandoned and unsupported by their teachers, in part because their teachers were themselves not clear about the SSR changes, and in part because teachers who were preoccupied with their own responses to SSR had no time or energy to commit to helping their students cope and adapt.

## ***A Glimmer of Hope***

- Some students provided a glimpse of hope for renewal in the next stages of educational change in Ontario. Over and over, students were trying to make sense of teachers' behaviours and feelings as a result of the mandated changes. As they saw it, the current conditions were out of anyone's control. Nonetheless, students assured us that "Once things settle down everything will

be okay”, and “It’s just that everything is so new”. Perhaps, this new generation will provide the resiliency and understanding needed during times of rapid change.

### ***What It All Means***

The trajectory of large-scale reform has been explained in large measure in other research studies by considering the situation (pressure and support) in which it occurs; the motivation of educators to engage with the reform and the availability of opportunities for those who need to implement the changes to develop the necessary capacities (Leithwood, Jantzi & Mascall, 2000).

#### **Situation**

- Educators in this study were certainly feeling pressure from the mandated changes and from the political climate.
- Support for the changes (e.g., materials, resources, professional development, time) were in short supply and difficult to access in a practical and timely way.

#### **Motivation**

- The pace of implementation, magnitude of the changes, lack of support and negative tone were seen as demotivating influences for educators that may have a lingering impact.
- The time for collaborative work relationships was almost non-existent in districts, schools or departments.

#### **Capacity**

- Teachers involved in reforming and restructuring their schools are engaged in two enormous tasks: reinventing the school and reinventing themselves (Miller, 1999). Both of these undertakings are complex, multifaceted processes of learning and socialization that require new learning for everyone.

#### **The Role of Secondary Schools**

- SSR brought several fundamental and important issues of secondary schooling to the surface. It raised the question of how to ensure high quality and appropriate learning for **all** students to provide the access and the background that they need to progress successfully to their multiple destinations. It also highlighted inconsistencies and confusion associated with assessment, evaluation and reporting. Until these issues are confronted and addressed, teachers will continue to question the worth of the reform efforts and doubt the value of committing to the changes.

### ***What Next?***

Mandated educational change has become the vehicle of choice for improving education in many jurisdictions world-wide. As it evolves, researchers are working in many venues to increase understanding of large-scale reform. In this study, we have explored SSR in Ontario in its very early stages and at a time when there had been considerable acrimony. Teachers and

students in half a dozen secondary schools talked about how they understood SSR and what they perceived as the impacts of SSR in these early stages of implementation. Throughout the investigation, we were struck by the paradoxes, tensions and inconsistencies.

As we stated in Chapter 1, our findings offer a snapshot of SSR in Ontario at a point in time, but they are not the end of the story. SSR in Ontario began under a shroud of anger, mistrust and bad feelings. The legacy of this difficult start is very much evident in the data that we collected. There are also sparks of optimism and possibilities for the future.

The themes that have emerged from this study will guide our work as we continue our investigation of the trajectory of SSR in Ontario through the 3-year project funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). In this longitudinal study we will consider the evolution of SSR in 10 schools, selected from two Ontario districts. We will continue to investigate teachers' motivation to make mandated changes, their perceptions of their own, their schools' and their districts' capacity to implement those changes, and the context of pressure and support for implementation. We will also consider what changes actually take place in schools, in classroom practice, and in students' engagement and learning. This journey promises to be an exciting and unpredictable one, as we paint a picture of educational change in Ontario secondary schools to help all stakeholders see the landscape more clearly.

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## **Appendix A – Chronology of Educational Reforms in Ontario**

Secondary schools in Ontario have undergone several restructuring attempts in the last 50 years.

### ***1960s and 1970s***

- The Conservative government in 1961 brought The Robart's Plan, which reorganized secondary education into three programs of equal status: arts and sciences; business and commerce; science, technology, and trades. Students were streamed into one of three pathways, which prepared them for different future options.
- In 1967 many small local and rural schools were amalgamated into regional school boards.
- The Robart's plan was replaced in 1969 with Circular H.S.I. programs were organized into four areas of study: social sciences; communications; arts; and pure and applied sciences. Students were given a credit for each subject completed. This allowed them to advance in that subject. They were not promoted into grade levels, but had to earn a specified amount of credits to obtain a diploma. The previous streams were replaced by subjects being organized by levels of difficulty: advanced; general; basic; or modified.
- Under the Conservatives in 1974 the Secondary School Diploma Requirements H.S.I 1974-75 increased the number of compulsory credits.

### ***1980s and 1990s***

- In 1980 the Liberal government commissioned the Secondary Education Review Project (SERP), which raised issues about the role of secondary schools and the Ministry composed a response to the SERP report entitled, The Renewal of Secondary education (ROSE) that endorsed nearly all of the SERP recommendations, including the abolition of Grade 13 and the need for more prescriptive provincial curriculum documents.
- This was followed in 1982 with the release of Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions (OSIS). It was to be implemented in 1984. Courses were reorganized into three levels of difficulty: advanced; general; and basic and most were streamed. Grade 13 was replaced with OAC credits and graduation requirements were increased from 27 to 30 credits.
- George Radwanski in 1987 was commissioned to review what Premier David Peterson (Liberal) considered to be an unacceptably high rate of secondary student dropout. This report resulted in a Throne Speech announcement of destreaming Grade 9; developing of a common curriculum for Grades 1-9; and testing at the provincial and national levels.
- In 1989, the Liberal government introduced a revision of curriculum for Grades 7-12 – "Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior" and introduced the "Transition Years" initiative for Grades 7,8,9, which included detracking, integrated curriculum, outcomes-based curriculum and alternative classroom assessments to be fully implemented by 1992.

## **1990s**

- 1991 brought the release of “Common Curriculum: Grades 1-9” that defined broad learning outcomes, grouped subjects into program areas, and encouraged integrated curriculum and alternative assessments and school boards, teachers’ groups, etc. embarked on a flurry of curriculum writing and in service programs to support the Common Curriculum.
- The NDP government established a “Royal Commission on Learning” in 1994 that recommended many changes for education from parental involvement in governance to a provincial assessment system.
- In 1995, the newly-elected Conservative government acted on some of the recommendations of the royal commission and created a College of Teachers to oversee accreditation and professional standards for teachers and teacher training institutions and established the Education Quality and Accountability Office with responsibility for developing and running a provincial student assessment system, a school monitoring system and provincial indicators.
- In 1995-98 several education bills were passed that included amalgamation of school boards, moving taxation and funding from the municipalities to the provincial government, a district aggregate average class size, reductions to teachers’ preparation time by as much as fifty per cent, reduction of professional development days from 9 to 5 per school year, increases to the time students and teachers spend in class each year, and expanded use of noncertified instructors in speciality programs such as counselling, computers, guidance
- Secondary School Reform policy documents in established new stream/track designations after Grade 9, changes in assessment practice, changes in graduation requirements, new standards and new co-op and work experience programs and a structured school-to-work transition.
- During this period, the government also established the Education Improvement Commission with a mandate to co-ordinate the change to district boards, control school board funding in the early days of amalgamation, oversee the transfer of assets, liabilities and staff and conduct research and make recommendations on policy issues related to educational reform.
- In 1998 the Ontario College of Teachers released a document defining “Standards of Practice for Teachers” and in 2000 the government legislated a test for teachers entering the profession, mandated a provider driven recertification program for practising teachers and established a province-wide performance appraisal system for teachers.

## **Appendix B – Methodology**

This study is a qualitative one, intended to provide detailed descriptions of the impact that secondary school reform was having on staff and students during the early days of implementation. The data were collected through focus groups with staff and students in 6 secondary schools located in different geographic areas of the province between April and November 2001.

### **Instrument Development**

The research team used the data collected from the open-ended survey questions as part of the OSSTF studies and literature in the field of educational change to construct a focus group interview protocol for use with staff in the selected schools

The staff protocol addressed the meaning and impact of SSR for teachers. The teachers were asked to consider their own experiences and describe how SSR was influencing them positively and negatively, personally and professionally.

Student engagement reform was investigated by asking questions about the nature of secondary school students' engagement with their school and with their own learning. Students were also given the opportunity to discuss, in their view, perceived changes taking place within the school and within their own classrooms.

### **Sample Selection**

The team wanted to ensure that the participating schools were selected to reflect different school contexts around the province (i.e., geographic regions, urban/rural, program offerings, size, presence of OSSTF members who are not teachers, etc). Initially, nine school district in the province were invited to participate in the project. Once districts indicated a willingness to allow the researcher to approach schools, a letter was sent to both the principal and the OSSTF representative in six schools selected to provide the researchers with a broad range of contexts. As a follow-up to the letter, the research officer on the team contacted the school principal and the OSSTF representative to discuss the parameters of the interviews. They were asked to jointly select between 6- 8 teachers to represent a variety of subject areas and years of experience and 6- 8 students from Grades 10 and 12 to represent different academic profiles. All interview

participants received letters outlining the project and were asked to sign consent forms or, in the case of students, consent forms were signed by their parents.

### **Data Collection**

The initial contacts with principals and OSSTF representatives were well received and many of the focus groups were larger than anticipated. In several schools, the team conducted two focus groups with both staff and students to accommodate the numbers.

Although a sample of six schools can ever be representative of the province, the research team selected schools to bring different perspectives by including rural and urban, different geographic regions of the province and offering a range of programs. The schools involved in the study ranged from a small (450 students) composite school in the north to a midsize (800 students) composite school in an urban setting and a large (1450 students) rural school in the south-west of the province. The six schools were in 5 different districts. Four of these districts had undergone amalgamation and one had not.

At the beginning of each interview session the researcher reviewed ethical parameters, issues of confidentiality and reminded participants that participation was voluntary and that they were free to leave at any time. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Student interviews were conducted during the school day and students were excused from class to participate. Wherever possible teacher focus groups were scheduled through class time but usually occurred at the end of the school day.

### **Data Analysis**

The tapes from the focus groups were transcribed and the transcripts were numbered and stripped of any and all identifiers including geographic region, school name and individuals' names. Three members of the research team worked together to identify overarching themes and establish a codebook. These three team members did all of the coding and met and coded transcripts together on three occasions to maintain inter-rater reliability. Their coding decisions were then used to 'tag' transcripts using FolioViews qualitative analysis software, which allows the research team to investigate the data based on collections of coded statements.