

Preparing for 'Top Down' Curriculum Change

Abstract

This paper reports on the theory generated from a study of the management of a major 'top down' curriculum change in the highly specialised area of religious education from the perspective of the religious education coordinator (REC). It identifies how RECs prepared for the management of the change and provides information about the key issues they addressed in order to manage the change. Emanating from a grounded theory approach some of the key issues pertaining to the theory generated were: the RECs' initiatives to become informed about the change; strategies undertaken to inform teachers of religious education, providing opportunities for teachers to dialogue about the change, exploring the textbooks underpinning the change in the light of existing curriculum and; decision making processes employed to bring about the change.

Introduction

Religious education coordinators (RECs) in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia, have been involved in the management of a major curriculum change in religious education. A grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1998) to the study of the management of this curriculum change from the perspective of RECs in Catholic secondary schools generated theory about the initiatives they took to prepare for it. A brief outline of the curriculum change will precede a report on the theory generated about how RECs prepared for the change.

Outline of the Curriculum Change Initiative

The change initiative which was the focus of this study was instigated by the Catholic authorities in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. By 2001 all schools in the Archdiocese had been directed to implement a "text-based curriculum" (Pell, 2001, p. 5) and it was founded on a new series of religious education textbooks written for the Archdiocese and entitled *To Know Worship and Love*. Although this initiative had been referred to as a "text-based curriculum", no official interpretation or explanation of the term was provided or documented by the Archdiocesan authorities. It is arguable that the term "text-based curriculum" referred to each school developing its own religious education curriculum based on the contents and topics outlined in the *To Know Worship and Love* textbook series. Traditionally each school in the Archdiocese had been responsible for writing its own curriculum in religious education based on curriculum guidelines produced by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne.¹ Catholic schools in the

Archdiocese continued to write school based curricula, however now these were to be underpinned by the contents contained in the student textbook series instead of the curriculum guidelines that had been previously developed by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (1995).

An Episcopal Vicariate for Religious Education was established by the Archdiocese and it was responsible for leading this major "top down" (Morris, 1995; see also, Marsh & Bowman, 1987). In particular it was responsible for the production and distribution of the textbooks series underpinning the text-based curriculum change. A textbook was written for each year level from preparatory level to Year 10 and subsequently two additional books were written for Years 11 and 12.

Approximately eighty secondary schools were involved in this major curriculum change which was the focus of this change. Embedded within a constructivist paradigm a grounded theory approach was adopted to generate theory about the RECs perceptions on their management of this top down text-based curriculum change. While it was possible to interview all RECs involved in managing the change the researcher in keeping with grounded theory approaches was not preoccupied with the number of participant (Glaser, 1998) but in staying in the field until each category pertaining to the theory generated had reached saturation point. For the grounded theorist category saturation is reached when no new data emerges from the field (Goulding, 2002). The research generated theory about how the RECs prepared for the text-based curriculum change and this is the focus of the next section of this paper.

How the RECs Prepared for the Curriculum Change

The theory generated from this study revealed that RECs had engaged in a number of initiatives in order to prepare for the curriculum change. The table below identifies the broad areas where RECs undertook preparatory initiatives. This paper reports on the

¹ Throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne had produced a series of curriculum statements entitled, *Guidelines for religious education of students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (1973; 1975; 1977; 1984; 1995). The curriculum statements were to be considered by each Catholic school in the process of developing the formal classroom curriculum in religious education.

discoveries emanating from this study in relation to each of these areas. Some of the perspectives shared by the

RECs involved in this study are reported in their own words.

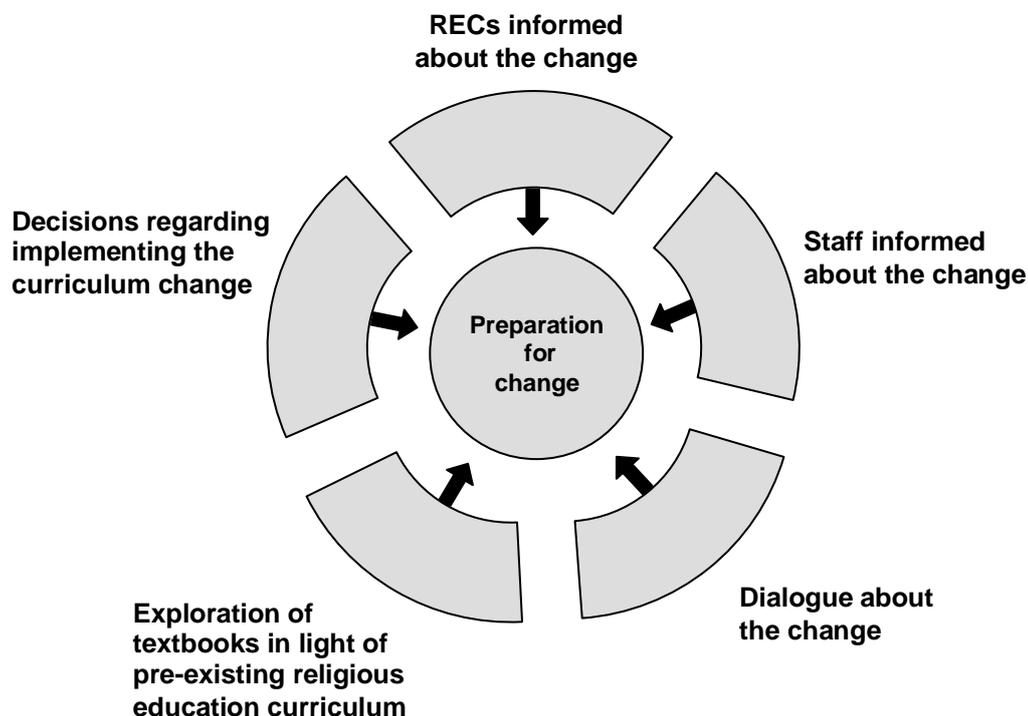


Table 1: Areas in which RECs undertook initiatives to prepare for the change.

RECs Informed About the Change

The RECs explored several ways of becoming informed about the change. Opportunities to attend information sessions organised by the Archdiocese and facilitated by the authors of the textbooks were given priority. Some RECs contacted the authors of the textbooks and agreed to read and trial draft chapters and test them out with their students. This process provided the RECs with an opportunity to become familiar with the content of the textbooks as well as provide feedback to the authors. Some RECs developed informal networks such as maintaining regular contact with other RECs and sharing any information they had discovered about the textbooks and the intended change. Some RECs who were employed in Catholic schools owned by religious congregations held meetings and wrote letters to the Archdiocese with the intention of gaining information about the intended change to a text-based curriculum.

The religious education coordinators from schools belonging to the same religious congregation as my school, met to discuss the suggested changes. We put in a submission responding to the changes and made recommendations concerning those changes. We did not get a direct response to the

recommendations contained within the submission, but were asked to trial the draft chapters of the textbooks. (REC A)

Some RECs tried to gather information about the intended changes from congregational leaders of various religious orders involved in education and Catholic schooling. In the latter part of 1999 one REC was invited to attend a meeting of the Conference of Religious Congregational Leaders. The leaders of religious congregations who owned or sponsored schools in the Archdiocese were in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how the schools owned by religious congregations would prepare for the changes to the religious education curriculum. The REC realised during the course of the meeting that the congregational leaders were equally ill-informed about the intention, status and context in which the textbooks would be situated in Catholic education and it was agreed that a letter would be drafted and sent to the Archdiocese asking for information about the changes and its implications.

Several RECs sought information about the intended changes from their school principal. The overall responsibility for religious education in a Catholic

school rests with the principal who delegates responsibilities to the REC (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 2005, p. 1). The RECs involved in this study revealed that school principals were equally ill-informed about the intended changes and in most situations relied on their RECs to keep them informed.

The principal was always asking me about the textbooks and the staff also questioned me. I did not know what to say, I had no answers to give them and I did not know where to find the answers. I would talk to other RECs and they did not know much either. It was as if we were all kept in the dark. I did not find the CEO particularly helpful or informative. (REC B)

Approaches Undertaken by RECs to Become Informed About the Change

The Archdiocese had directed the change but according to the RECs, they did not provide adequate information to those responsible in schools for the management and implementation of this curriculum change. They could not identify who was directly responsible for informing them about the curriculum change and the implications of that change. Subsequently the RECs explored several avenues in order to become informed about the text-based curriculum change. The approaches taken by the RECs included: a) direct contact with personnel from the CEO, Melbourne; b) attendance at information forums facilitated by Catholic Education Office staff; c) reading and trailing draft chapters of the textbooks and providing feedback to the authors of the books; d) contact with authors of the textbooks; e) informal networks with RECs from other schools; f) discussions with leaders of religious congregations; and g) discussions with school principals.

Marsh (1997) and Brickell (1972) have argued that the adoption of a “top down” (Morris, 1995) curriculum initiative requires a clear understanding of the intended curriculum innovation. The RECs perceived that those authorities responsible for communicating the rationale and details of the intended curriculum change did little to communicate or provide adequate documentation or information about the change to RECs, principals or congregational leaders of religious schools in the Archdiocese. Rymarz (1998) argued that curriculum management required informed understandings of educational theory and knowledge. As curriculum leaders, most RECs perceived it to be their responsibility to know and understand the intended change and the implications of the change for the delivery of religious education curriculum in their particular school. In the absence of adequate information about the intended changes, the RECs explored various avenues in order to become informed about the intended changes.

I had to find out all I could about the change because if I did not nobody else in the school would take responsibility for it and we would end

up not knowing what we were required to do. (REC G)

This “top down” (Morris, 1995) curriculum initiative directed by the Archbishop of Melbourne, provided an example of the influence outside forces may have in affecting curriculum change in schools (Brady & Kennedy, 2003). According to Marsh and Bowman (1987) “top down” curriculum change can be effective when a textbook is used to support the initiative. This study revealed that textbooks are more likely to be effective if educators have a clear understanding of the pedagogical theory underpinning them and/or the curriculum to which they are assigned.

Staff Informed About the Change

Regardless of how difficult it was for RECs to access information about the purpose and intention of the change, they believed that for them to manage the change they needed to keep their own staff informed. The RECs initiated several strategies to ensure that their staff had access to the available information. These strategies included: a) reports to the faculty by the REC; b) information dissemination; c) reading and trialling draft chapters of the textbooks; and d) professional development seminars.

The RECs made presentations at faculty meetings updating and informing staff about any new information they had received related to the curriculum change. We had an RE staff meeting four times a term and I factored into the agenda a section concerning up-dates regarding the textbooks. Any information I had I would report to the RE faculty. (REC I)

The faculty meetings enabled members of their religious education faculty to ask any questions arising out of the curriculum up-dates.

Another strategy commonly used by the RECs involved the dissemination of relevant literature and correspondence to members of the religious education faculty. According to the RECs most of the literature came from the Archdiocese and authors of the textbooks. It consisted mainly of information concerning timelines about the publication of the textbooks and when they would be available for purchase, overviews of chapter topics relevant to each year level, and draft copies of the chapters produced by the authors. A willingness to read literature concerning the curriculum change by members of the religious education faculty was sometimes compromised by other demands facing many religious education teachers.

Many teachers of religious education in Catholic schools in Australia are not qualified or specialists in religious education (Thomas, 2000). For many teachers, religious education was a second or third teaching area and was given less priority in terms of lesson preparation and professional reading time

(Fleming, 2002). The following comment by one REC expressed a view commonly held by most of the RECs who were interviewed.

Any correspondence that came my way I would photocopy and pass on to the teachers. It was a way of trying to keep them informed. Not many had time to read it but we would try to discuss the contents at RE meetings. (REC O)

Another strategy used by many RECs involved encouraging members of their religious education faculty to read and/or trial draft copies of the chapters intended for the textbooks with their religious education class. RECs had access to the draft chapters of the textbooks. The Episcopal Vicar's Office invited some schools to trial the draft chapters. All RECs in the Archdiocese were welcome to contact the authors of the textbooks and receive draft copies of the chapters. Most RECs encouraged members of the religious education faculty to read the draft chapters and become familiar with the contents.

Encouraging members of the religious education faculty to attend professional development seminars was highly favoured amongst the RECs. The professional development seminars for religious education teachers focussed mainly on the contents of the textbooks and possible strategies for teaching the contents of the textbooks. All the RECs involved in this study negotiated as many opportunities as possible for members of their religious education faculty to attend the professional development seminars. Many of the teaching staff Catholic schools have only one religious education class as part of their teaching allotment (Thomas, 2000). This has accounted for very large religious education faculties in many Catholic schools throughout the Archdiocese. Schools with large religious education faculties found it was impossible to send all religious education teachers to the professional development seminars. The following comment was representative of most RECs involved in this study.

We sent staff off to the various professional development in-services. I could not send all staff to each in-service. I sent one representative to each of the Year 7, 8, 9 and 10 in-services. They brought back a wealth of information regarding ideas about how they could use the textbooks in RE. (REC G)

The RECs believed that ensuring that their staff members were informed was integral to the management of this particular curriculum change. As indicated earlier, the information available about the change was limited to issues concerning publication timelines, overviews of the topics covered in the textbooks and draft copies of the chapters contained in the textbooks.

Textbooks have a wide range of uses (Issitt, 2004) and a good textbook can provide insights into current pedagogical approaches (Engebretson & Rymarz, 2002; 2004). However, the draft chapters did very little to inform staff about the nature and purpose of the change and the rationale and theoretical position underpinning the change. This is perhaps because textbooks are not stand alone instruments (Finlay, 2000) and they need to be understood along side other factors such as curriculum and pedagogy (Vespoor, 1989).

Dialogue about the Change

In order to prepare for the change most RECs provided opportunities for religious education teachers to discuss the intended changes. There were a variety of ways in which dialogue about the curriculum change occurred. They were: a) informal discussions about the intended change; b) forums to discuss concerns and feelings about the change; c) record keeping; and d) meetings to discuss strategies for implementing the change.

Most RECs commented on the importance of being available for members of the teaching staff who sought them out to discuss and to pose questions or concerns they had about the intended changes.

Teachers would seek me out from time to time. They would come to my office and ask me questions about the textbooks and the intended changes. I felt it was important to stop whatever I was doing and just listen to their concerns and in some way reassure them that as a faculty we would work it out. (REC O)

It was also common for RECs to provide forums where staff could meet and discuss their concerns and feelings regarding the proposed change. We gathered as a faculty and discussed more broadly how people felt about the changes. We spent a bit of time exploring the level of feeling amongst the staff. As issues were raised and feelings expressed, we tried to come to some consensus about how we would approach these changes and the time frame it would take. (REC J)

The opportunity to discuss feelings enabled individual staff members to be heard by their colleagues. It provided opportunities for them to explore their concerns. Some RECs suggested that this process enabled the faculty to move forward and consider strategies for implementing the curriculum.

When the textbooks became available for use in schools some RECs suggested that religious education teachers keep a journal to record their experiences. As they trialled different sections of the textbooks they were encouraged to record notes after each lesson as well as write down their evaluations. It was intended that these reflections would be shared later in religious education meetings.

At the end of the term the teachers at each year level would meet with me and share their insights which they had recorded in their journals. We shared these experiences from those records keeping notes that the teachers had been asked to do. And then I would base further discussion and further implementation of the process on their input. So in this regard keeping records was a more formalised requirement in terms of feedback and accountability, but it helped to determine how we should proceed as a faculty. (REC A)

Some religious education coordinators spent a minimum of time discussing feelings and reactions to the proposed changes. They adopted a task-focused approach to managing and implementing the curriculum change. The following comment from one REC was similar to the view held by others who were primarily task focused.

Because of all the negative hype about the textbooks, I knew that some teachers would want to discuss whether we should or shouldn't have the textbooks. I wasn't going to go down that path. I knew that the textbooks were mandatory, and we had to use them. I wasn't going to waste my time discussing whether we should have them or not. I was the REC and my task was to implement the textbooks and once I sorted that out in my head I was clear on what had to be done. I got people on board by discussing how we would go about implementing the books. We met regularly to discuss the chapters we should teach and at what stage in the semester or year. (REC B)

Dialogue about the changes provided a way for religious education faculties in schools to move towards implementing the text-based curriculum. Several RECs commented on the opportunity for members of the faculty to talk about the intended changes and discuss any concerns. It was an opportunity for staff members to come together under the leadership of the REC, and explore ways of implementing the text-based curriculum.

Dialogue about the changes enabled teachers to express their feelings about the intended change. The opportunity brought to the fore feelings about the Church, religion and the ministry of Christian formation.

My unease is that an emphasis on doctrine without an adequate attention to personal experience and critical analysis isn't really authentic in terms of the process of Christian formation. We have members of staff that haven't had the opportunities for engaging in ongoing Christian formation and we are concerned that their own formation will be stifled if they perceive the textbooks as taking religious education back to the pre-Vatican II era. (REC A)

Approaches Taken to Dialogue About the Change

Dialogue amongst members of the religious education faculty in each school about the change to a text-based curriculum was perceived as valuable in determining how the school-based curriculum would take form. This was particularly important since Catholic schools in the Archdiocese had a long tradition of developing school-based curriculum in religious education. Prior to the introduction of the *To Know Worship and Love* textbook series, *Guidelines* (1975; 1977; 1984; 1995) had established a tradition of school-based religious education curriculum. Under the direction of the REC each school was responsible for developing its own curriculum in religious education based on *Guidelines* (1995). This trend continued with the introduction of the textbooks into religious education in Catholic schools. It was assumed that each school would use the textbook as the main source for teaching and learning in religious education and would develop a school-based curriculum from the content contained within the textbooks (Pell, 2001).

Conflict is an integral part of change (Smith and Lovat, 2003). This study revealed that conflict issues were not limited to professional concerns but also personal concerns. Some teachers of religious education used the time to discuss issues of conflict related to their perception of the Church and their own Christian formation. Dialogue on these issues attested to the notion that change was perceived to be more about people than the curriculum initiative (Fullan, 1999; Stenhouse, 1975).

The RECs encouraged opportunities to engage in dialogue about the curriculum change in order to promote the change. Because this "top down" (Morris, 1995) change was mandatory, one REC set particular boundaries. This REC would not allow the time allocated for dialogue about the change to be consumed by concerns about the appropriateness of this curriculum change. As stated earlier, "I knew that the textbooks were mandatory, and we had to use them. I wasn't going to waste my time discussing whether we should have them or not" (REC B).

Curriculum change can be assisted by establishing boundaries that help to deal with the process of change not just the change product. Smith and Lovat (2003) have indicated that "too many attempts towards change in education have not recognised these features nor provided ways to deal with them" (p. 195). Other boundaries set by RECs involved encouraging teachers to keep a journal of their experiences and thoughts about the change. Time was set aside during faculty meetings for staff members to reflect on and discuss their journal entries.

Change challenges teachers' perceptions of themselves and their own competencies (Smith and Lovat, 2003). The opportunities provided by the RECs to dialogue about the change enabled staff members to

contemplate how the changes would affect and influence them. According to Fullan (1999), change occurs because individuals themselves change. The opportunity to dialogue provided an opportunity for staff members to contemplate their own changing personal and professional views.

The opportunity to listen to and discuss feelings about the change and express concerns (both educational and religious) was considered an appropriate means to determine how to approach the text-based curriculum change at school level. Some RECs encouraged dialogue about the change in a more formalised manner and required teachers of religion to maintain written records when using the textbooks. Others set clear parameters around what would be discussed during curriculum planning meetings. Some RECs encouraged teachers to talk about their experiences and concerns. From the perspective of the RECs, opportunities for staff to talk about the intended changes assisted in determining the way forward in terms of implementing a curriculum based on the textbooks.

Exploration of the Textbooks in Light of Pre-existing Religious Education Curriculum

In the process of preparing for the change to a text-based curriculum, most RECs explored the textbooks in the light of the pre-existing religious education curriculum, which had been developed from *Guidelines* (1995). This was done by a) auditing the existing curriculum; b) identifying key learning outcomes from the *To Know Worship and Love Teaching Companions*; and c) incorporating textbooks into classroom teaching.

Some RECs attempted to audit the existing curriculum in their school against the content of the text books. For some RECs the process involved matching the topics and units taught in the pre-existing curriculum with similar topics contained within the textbooks.

When I looked at Year 7 and 9 there were a lot of topics that we were already teaching. When the Year 8 text came along, there was a number of overlaps: Caring for creation, Sacraments, History and St Paul. The Year 10 text was also virtually what we were doing at our school anyway, World Religions, Mark's Gospel, Conscience, Morality. In preparing the curriculum from the content of the textbooks, I didn't feel that we were really doing anything new. (REC I)

This approach provided little impetus to explore content in the textbooks that was not relevant to the pre-existing curriculum.

One REC prepared for the change by identifying the key learning outcomes for each topic or chapter in the textbooks. The key learning outcomes were obtained from the *To Know Worship and Love Teacher*

Companions (Elliott, 2001; 2002) supporting the textbooks.

I typed up all the outcomes for all of the topics in Years 7, 8, 9, 10. This helped me to understand the contents in the textbooks. After doing that I created a folder for each of the topics and identified the outcomes relevant to the topics. In each folder I would list strategies and other resources. We had used most of the resources included in each folder in the past. So gradually I built up and transferred from our old topics resources and strategies that still had relevance and could help achieve the outcomes that were set for a particular topic in the textbooks. (REC L)

In this situation the approach taken in order to prepare for, and implement the change provided more scope for identifying a sequence and range of topics emanating from the textbooks. The pre-existing courses were used to resource and provide further strategies for teaching the topics contained within the textbooks. Thus the content of the curriculum remained the nexus between the pre-existing course and the textbooks.

Another approach taken to prepare for the change involved encouraging teachers to interact with the textbooks in the classroom. This approach provided opportunities for teachers and students to encounter the textbooks and become familiar with the content contained within the textbooks.

It was really a matter of introducing the texts and saying: here are the texts; use them to teach RE. And there wasn't really any rewriting of the courses in accordance with what the textbooks were about. I think the courses are unsatisfactory because of this. You have teachers who are teaching different chapters from the texts. There isn't any uniformity and the courses weren't written in a comprehensive way when we introduced the texts. It has been a bit of a 'mish mash' but we are working on it now. (REC O)

This approach provided opportunities for teachers to incorporate the textbooks into a pre-existing curriculum it also provided more flexibility for each teacher to teach different content areas in the classroom learning and teaching process. This approach to preparing for the implementation of the text-based curriculum did not emphasise a uniform approach for each class at the same year level.

In many situations the content of the textbooks was used as an additional resource to be incorporated into an existing school-based curriculum. In some situations the use of the textbooks exposed deficits and overlaps in the existing curriculum thus allowing for further consideration of the relevance of content covered in the pre-existing curriculum.

They [the RE teachers] use the texts as a basis. There was no way you could do everything in the textbook anyway. There was too much content. So we took our curriculum, and we tweaked it, we moved it. We changed content from one particular year level to another. We made the content fit better and we are teaching stuff [content] that is in the textbooks that we hadn't been teaching in our curriculum. I found that at Year 7, 8, 9 and 10 level the textbooks have helped to structure the course a bit more as well as iron out any overlaps. (REC G)

Approaches to Textbooks in Light of Pre-existing Religious Education Curriculum

The RECs believed that the management of the text-based curriculum primarily involved the integration of the content of the textbooks into a school's pre-existing school-based curriculum that was underpinned by *Guidelines* (1995). This approach undertaken by most RECs suggested an inadequate understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of both approaches.

The previous and present approaches to religious education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne have emanated from two distinctive theoretical paradigms. The life-centred approach adopted in *Guidelines* (1995) was based on theological principles (Engebretson, 1997, pp. 25-29). The approach assumed in the *To Know Worship and Love* textbook series was based on a knowledge-centred outcomes based educational approach (Pell, 2001, p. 5; see also Buchanan, 2004). The integration of content between the pre-existing curriculum and the content contained within the textbooks suggested that the RECs did not account for the varying theories underpinning the current and pre-existing curriculum approaches.

According to Ryan (2000), textbooks can assist teachers in identifying the particular curriculum theory that underpins them. However this study revealed that in most situations the RECs were primarily focussed on integrating the content of the textbooks into similar content areas associated with a school's pre-existing curriculum based on *Guidelines* (1995). They did not take into account the varying theories underpinning the current and pre-existing curriculum.

Decisions Regarding Implementing the Curriculum Change

As outlined earlier, discussion about the changes amongst faculty members was encouraged. Opportunities for dialogue provided occasions for religious education teachers to gain understanding about the change. However the management of this change required RECs to employ various decision making strategies. Three broad approaches to decision making were used by the RECs. They were: a) cooperative decision making; b) expert decision making; and c) informed decision making.

One REC, a leader of a religious education faculty of predominantly qualified and experienced teachers of religious education, adopted a cooperative approach to decision making and implementation. This involved religious education teachers making key decisions about what resources would be used and what strategies would be incorporated². In such situations the RECs encouraged all teachers of religious education to be involved in the planning and implementation of the curriculum change.

Most of our RE teachers are qualified, so what I did as the REC was set up at each year level a team leader who would divide up the topics to be taught at that particular year level and each teacher would develop a teaching unit incorporating the textbooks and other resources and strategies relevant to that particular topic. (REC I)

Most RECs were responsible for leading faculties where the teaching staff taught one class of religious education. In such schools the teachers taught mainly in other faculties for which they were qualified to teach. The limited involvement in religious education generally meant that preparation time for religious education curriculum was compromised.

Most of our RE staff are not qualified to teach religious education and they teach mainly in two or sometimes three other faculties. Their time and energy goes into teaching in the faculty areas for which they are qualified. They find RE really difficult to teach and it doesn't help that each year they get an RE class at a different year level so they can't even consolidate their practical skills at a year level over a period of time. (REC L)

In situations where RECs perceived religious education teachers as having limited preparation time and knowledge in religious education, it was primarily the expertise of the RECs that underpinned the curriculum decisions.

Limited time and the lack of expertise were factors that I think in the end meant that the staff pretty much left it up to me to complete the write up of the new curriculum. I looked at the content in the textbooks and what we had done in the previous years and I decided the way to go. The texts were enormous and impossible to cover in one year so I decided the topics and prepared the units of work. (REC J)

In some situations the process for preparing for the curriculum change ultimately involved a decision by the REC, but it was sometimes informed by the

² Despite the competencies of this particular religious education faculty, in terms of qualifications and experience, the REC made the decisions about which topics would be taught at each year level. This issue is addressed later in this chapter.

insights and issues raised by members of the religious education faculty. This measure of informed decision making was an approach that enabled RECs to gain insights and understandings about how members of the faculty perceived the changes. However, ultimately the final decision rested with the REC.

It takes a lot of energy. I think what you need is a core group of people who are committed to teaching the subject and to working in RE, rather than having teachers who have a class of RE tagged onto their teaching allotment just to fill up their timetable. You know, we are very lucky because we are moving away from that now. There are a lot of people who have three or four classes of RE and it makes a great deal of difference. People have time and are willing to work on curriculum issues. We now have twenty-six teachers in the faculty instead of forty-one. We discussed ways of implementing the curriculum but in the end I had to make the decisions. (REC B)

According to Johnson (1996) schools that shape and control a change initiative to suit their situation are suited to effect change. The decisions made by RECs demonstrated initiatives to shape and control the change initiative by taking into account the composition, competencies and expertise of their teachers of religious education. These factors influenced their decision about how to manage the change. The role of the REC is diverse, challenging and demanding (Liddy, 1998) and well suited to a proficient operator. Fleming (2001) has indicated that RECs are effective in a management role when they have the ability to carry out plans and achieve outcomes efficiently. The RECs demonstrated an ability to involve other members of the religious education faculty in managing the change. In some cases the relationship between the RECs and members of their faculty could be interpreted as contriving collaboration as an administrative mechanism (Hargeaves, 1994) where the REC simply directs the faculty to achieve certain outcomes in order to bring about the curriculum change. Viewed in another light the parameters set by the RECs were based on decisions based on their perspectives on the skills and competencies of the members of their religious education faculty members. Subsequently a collaborative culture emerged where RECs provided an opportunity for change to take place by creating boundaries and so determining how the change would be managed. This approach has the potential to reduce the level of anxiety and uncertainty associated with change (Brady and Kennedy, 2003).

Summary of the Theory Generated

The RECs explored several avenues in the process of preparing for the management of the change to a text-based curriculum. The RECs were aware of the Archdiocese's mandate that all classroom religious education curricula in Catholic schools in the

Archdiocese of Melbourne be based on the *To Know Worship and Love* textbook series. However details about how this would take place were not clearly explained to those who were ultimately responsible for managing the curriculum change. This fact provided the impetus for RECs as curriculum leaders to explore various avenues in order to understand the change.

The RECs provided opportunities for teachers of religious education within the schools to become informed about the intended changes. It was necessary that classroom teachers of religious education understand the intended changes as well as the REC. This research has revealed that both RECs and religious education teachers saw the changes relating primarily to issues concerning curriculum content. This perspective on the change drew attention to the practical application of the curriculum content. Concerns and understandings about the theory, and rationale relating to the change were not at the fore of this implementation process. However the scope of this change suggested a major paradigm shift in terms of how religious education would be taught in the Archdiocese. For this reason communication about the change with the RECs who were ultimately responsible for managing the curriculum change needed further consideration and attention. The Archdiocese could have assisted the RECs by providing documentation and forums for RECs not only to understand the content contained within the textbooks but also to understand the pedagogy, rationale and theory behind the change.

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