

Beyond 'Workload': Teachers and the Conundrum of Time Poverty

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The Review of the National School Reform Agreement is an important opportunity to reflect on the expectations, aims and conditions of Australian schooling. While the overarching focus of the Interim Report is the economic contribution that schooling has in Australia, a key aspect of the Interim Report concerns teachers' work and concerns about the sustainability of current expectations, attrition, retention and recruitment. We will respond to Draft Recommendation 5.2 to report on promising work that is already being done in Queensland public schools that aims to "undertake an assessment of teacher and principal time use" through a focus on time poverty, an effect of workload and work intensification.

We are well placed to contribute to this conversation due to our research project *Time Use, Time Poverty and Teachers' Work* (<https://research.qut.edu.au/ttpatw/>). Since 2020 we have been working with the Queensland Teachers' Union (QUTU) on an ARC Linkage project (LP190101301) that aims to understand teachers' time use. Much of the evidence used to generate data about teachers' work involves surveys asking teachers to recall their workload in previous weeks/months/years. While this is useful in getting the gist of concerns about teachers' work, it can suffer from a lack of accuracy in regard to specific activities. Research by te Braak et al (2022, p.9) has shown that workload surveys tend to overestimate core activities and underestimate "hours spent on "peripheral" activities, such as lesson preparation and correction, internal and external professional consultation, school organisation and policy support, and additional training" (2022, p.12). For this reason, we are piloting an app that acts as a digital time use diary allowing teachers to record their time use over short periods of time to better understand workload and intensification and how this impacts their job satisfaction.

The crisis in teachers' work

This crisis may be understood as the decision of teachers working in schools to leave the profession (attrition) and the view by many undertaking university studies that teaching is no longer a desirable career (recruitment). The 2021 Global Report on the Status of Teachers, which surveyed teacher unions across the globe, found that the twin problems of attrition and recruitment are common across many countries and that the effects of COVID-19 exacerbated

pre-existing systemic problems (Thompson, 2021). With this in mind, the section of the Interim Report regarding teacher workload issues is a critical one for Australian schooling.

A review of literature conducted as part of our research project, and currently under review for publication, shows that both teacher workload and work intensification are concerns across systems (Creagh et al., 2022). Excessive amounts of work and/or an increase in work intensity are found to have a variety of impacts. These impacts are shown to be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of teachers. Increased workload and the pressure associated with work intensification generate stress, family conflict for teachers, mental fatigue, burnout, and ultimately, and unsurprisingly, teacher attrition. Perhaps more pernicious, because of the effect experienced by students, is the role that increased workload/ work intensification has in constraining the capacity of teachers to address the complexities of learning needs in schools today. Understanding these impacts suggests that there is an important need for policy intervention in teachers' work, and in doing so, may arrest problems such as wellbeing, attrition and the challenge of convincing young people that teaching is an attractive career. However, to do this the dimensions of the problem need to be more clearly understood.

Workload:

Workload is usually defined in the literature as the amount of work done over a given period. This is commonly a measure elicited through self-report, such as in a survey. For example, the TALIS 2018 survey asked teachers and school leaders "During your most recent complete calendar week, approximately how many 60-minute hours did you spend in total on tasks related to your job at this school?" (OECD 2018). This question generated the number of hours worked each week which was used as the measure of workload. This example represents the most common way of reporting on perceived workload.

Work intensification:

Work intensification, on the other hand, is a measure associated with the complexity, and demands associated, with a particular task or set of tasks considered a core part of a job. A well-known example of this is Apple's (2004, p.25) work intensification thesis that argued that teachers' work has been made more intense by "considerably heavier workloads" intersecting with accountability demands, less frontline support and a decline in resourcing. Spicksley (2022, p.2) argues that work intensification has led directly to accountability structures that have been widely critiqued as the "performativity culture" evident in English schools. Importantly, intensification is not a product of the complexity inherent in the intellectual and creative work of teachers, but rather of the aspects of teachers' work wrought by increased performative accountability in schooling.

Intensification and load do not have the same qualities or dimensions. Workload is the "totality of the tasks to be performed in a job...commonly but inaccurately proxied by working hours" (Green 2021, p.399). On the other hand, work intensification is, (as stated above) "the rate of physical and/or mental input to tasks performed during the working day" (Green 2001, in Green 2021, p.390). Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009, p.1155) speak of intensification as "more than

simply working longer hours, managing an increasing number of diverse tasks, attending more meetings and doing more administrative work and so on”, but also as “a loss of control”.

Time poverty

Our observation is that workload and work intensification are different aspects of the same phenomena. This means that there is a relationship between the two concepts that should be clearly understood and delineated. We posit that this relationship can be explained through the concept of time poverty, a multi-dimensional construct that encapsulates workload, work intensification and how they work together to explain individual experiences of work. Time poverty is the product of load and intensification. Time poverty encapsulates the experience of work along two different axes or vectors. These work together, but in different ways, to give the subjective accounting of time and work that each individual experiences.

To intervene in the problems of teachers' work requires a consideration of how what is proposed will impact a profession that is time poor. Too often, proposed recommendations to 'solve' the problems of teachers' work focus on either workload (e.g. reducing hours worked, or paid for) or work intensification (e.g. reducing complexity in the work teachers do) without accounting for how they interact. Too much of what has been added to teachers' work involves the need for teachers to give account of themselves in multiple ways on top of their roles managing learning and classrooms. Policy moves toward compliance and accountability that add little to these roles draw teachers further away from work that sustains them and is unlikely to produce the effectiveness and efficiency sought.

One of the problems with regard to policy solutions is that, when the problem is perceived simply as workload, the intervention generally aims to make modest work deductions such as a reduction in a small quantum of hours, for example as put forward by the Quality Time Program in NSW. However, if the problem (or at least part of the problem) is about the demands, or difficulty of the job, then a small reduction in hours is unlikely to produce the benefits that many claim. For that reason, we think we need to talk about time poverty as the relationship between workload and work intensification.

Our suggestions are:

- We need systems and organisations to stop suggesting that the problem is workload. The problem is the intersection of workload and work intensification that we have called time poverty.
- We need better data on time poverty that moves beyond surveys that ask teachers' and school leaders' to recall their time use in the past.
- Any program or intervention that is expected to intervene in the problem of teachers' work should be interrogated for how it lessens workload as well as how it makes teachers' work less difficult, stressful or intense. Without addressing both aspects of the problem, policy solutions are likely to continue the long history of failed initiatives regarding teachers' work.

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