

Chapter 3

Under ‘Constant Bombardment’: Work Intensification and the Teachers’ Role

John Williamson and Marion Myhill

Introduction

There has been a growing interest in the work of teachers in recent years, particularly in their increasing workloads and in the changing nature of their work. While the significance of teaching and the importance of teachers continue to be strongly affirmed, there are growing concerns being expressed at the extent to which recent changes are impacting on the teaching profession. In particular, concerns have been expressed about the intensification of teachers’ work and the negative impact that this may have on teachers, their work lives and their work-life balance – and also by extension on the quality of teachers’ work and on their students’ learning experiences.

This intensification which is central to the changes in teachers’ work may well reflect more general workplace trends, from which the education sector is not immune or protected. Trends such as increasing work demands and constraints on workers, the pervasiveness of a business management-oriented framework with a focus on ‘marketization’ and managerialization’ have all been cited as impacting on teachers – as well as the special demands of being required to educate children for the future in a fast-changing and globalised world (Helsby, 1999).

However, there are certain aspects which are central to teachers’ experiences. The intensification of teachers’ work appears most commonly to have resulted from a documented trend towards considerably longer working hours than in the past, an ever-expanding teaching role, and most noticeably, a significant increase in non-teaching and largely administrative duties (Gardner and Williamson, 2004).

With longer working hours and constantly expanding teaching and non-teaching roles and duties, concerns have been expressed that these changes are undoubtedly producing negative effects on teachers. Supportive evidence is provided by consistent reports of increased teacher stress and the growing number of research studies that have investigated teachers’ work lives. Such studies have documented that teachers are now considered to be working longer than reasonable hours (Gardner and Williamson, 2006a), to be engaged in a greater number of non-teaching duties (Gardner and Williamson, 2005), to be complying with more accountability demands (Hoyle, 1995) and to be experiencing higher levels of

stress. What is of particular concern is that all of these pressures are likely not only to have a negative impact on teachers personally, but also to affect their teaching performance.

Intensification of teachers' work lives therefore is a current issue of concern which is being examined, not only to assess its nature and extent, but also to determine its impact on teachers and their capacity to fulfil positively their role as teacher.

In this chapter, we shall review current trends in the intensification of teachers' work, focussing on the nature, sources and impact of intensification. These three issues will be examined from a general perspective and then from the perspective of a particular group of working teachers who participated in a recent case study of teachers in the Australian state of Tasmania.

Intensification of Teachers' Work

Intensification in the teaching context has been described as the "increasing pressure to do more in less time, to be responsive to a greater range of demands from external sources, to meet a greater range of targets, to be driven by deadlines" (Galton and MacBeath, 2002: 13). This has been coupled with a corresponding loss of a 'sense of control' over one's own 'planning, decision-making, classroom management and relationships' (Galton and MacBeath, 2002: 13).

The first key element of the intensification raised here by Galton and MacBeath (2002) is the identification of increasing pressure on teachers which has resulted from being required 'to do more in less time'. The second element is that this pressure is identified as arising largely from external sources. This has led to a sense that these pressures are largely out of the control of teachers themselves; and that this in turn has led to a feeling of a general erosion of teacher professionalism (e.g., teacher planning, decision-making and classroom management judgements).

The third element is an expansion in the range, variety and nature of the 'more' that teachers are being asked to do. Doing 'more in less time' now encompasses not just an increase in work hours, or in general busyness or in just getting more of the same work done in a shorter time. It also involves an expanded teacher role, more-non teaching duties and activities, more deadlines, targets and responsibilities – and as a result, greater in and out-of-school work hours and increased reported stress.

The related major issue, also raised by Galton and MacBeath (2002), is teachers' loss of a 'sense of control'. This issue had been reported earlier by Hoyle and John (1995) and Churchill and Williamson (1999); and it is evident in comparative national research, such as the international series of studies described by Poppleton and Williamson (2004). This perception of a loss of control is both a separate area of concern and also one that impacts interactively with the work intensification issue and to create a much larger and more pervasive concern.

We shall examine both of these major areas – teachers' work intensification and a loss of a sense of control – both separately and then in relation to the Tasmanian case study findings.

What Is the Nature of the Intensification?

Considerable data have now been gathered which document the nature of the intensification of teachers' work.

International trends have shown changes in teachers' work which have resulted in increased teacher hours, class sizes and tasks (UNESCO, 1998). In addition to the international research studies monitoring these trends, various national studies have also focussed on those issues that reflect national, rather than international, research and policy priorities and interests. In the USA, for example, teacher pay has been a major focus (Moulthrop et al., 2005; Stronge et al., 2006) while the focus has been on teacher workloads in both the UK (Galton and MacBeath, 2002; Helsby, 1999), and also in Australia (Gardner and Williamson, 2005, 2006a, b).

The general consensus is that there is a current trend for teachers in many countries to be working much longer hours than previously. Teachers are spending more time at work, as well as more time at home working on teacher-related activities. The related concerns that have been expressed are that this trend has led to high levels of stress and a negative work-life balance for the teacher and ultimately a loss of teaching quality, which in turn creates a negative outcome for students and their learning.

Several comprehensive studies of teacher workloads have been undertaken in Australia over the last decade. Williamson and colleagues have conducted a number of studies of teacher workloads (Churchill et al., 1997; Gardner and Williamson, 2004, 2005, 2006a, b), as well as studies of the workloads of principals and other school employees (Gardner and Williamson, 2004). In many cases, these studies have been conducted with the support and involvement of teacher education unions (e.g., Gardner and Williamson, 2004).

What Are the Sources of Intensification?

The sources of the intensification can be linked to a range of factors: an increased political interest in and focus on education, a tendency toward constant change in education systems, financial constraints, increased pressures from society and the community, and an increased complexity in teachers' roles. Related issues have been teacher pay and the nexus between workload, performance and pay.

The source factors can be identified as having their origin in pressures both external and internal to teachers. External pressures arise from system-level policies and changes, which operate at a number of levels (school, state, national or international)

and are beyond the classroom teacher's ability to influence. However, they have the capacity to have a strong impact on the teacher's work and work-life.

A number of external sources of intensification and pressures on teachers have been identified:

- A trend towards international educational outcomes comparisons, such as cross-national 'league tables' of student performance by country (e.g., PISA)
- A politicisation of education at various levels of national government (e.g., state and federal governments in Australia); also leading to a proliferation of sometimes competing policies and practices
- A trend towards centralised systems of state school education (e.g., the move from the local LEA/council to a centralised system based in Whitehall, in the UK)

These centralised systems tend to lead to approaches which create extra pressures for teachers. These new pressures arise from several sources:

- 'One size fits all' systems: these are based on economic rationalist principles and are characterised by aggregated student results, an outcomes-focussed approach, attempts to identify 'best teachers' (for the purposes of differentiated salaries), and the ranking of schools (regardless of background factors).
- An assessment-driven approach.
- Limited recognition of schooling context variation: few allowances are made for meeting the needs of all children within a wide range of local conditions.
- Tensions between teachers and bureaucrats: teachers focus on children and their learning needs, while bureaucrats focus on testing/outcomes and resources.

Internally driven pressures arise largely from teachers' professionalism and their commitment to students and their needs:

- Teachers focus on 'their children' and have a commitment to meeting their students' learning needs; this commitment may also extend to a broader concern with their students' personal lives and long term futures.
- Teachers focus on the reality and immediacy of the classroom and its demands and practices, rather than on what they perceive as abstract (economic, political and ideological) policies.

What Is the Impact of Intensification?

The impact of intensification can be seen at the levels of: the school system, the individual school and on the individual teacher. One of the broad consequences of intensification, as reported by one teacher, is that 'we [teachers] are changed out'. This comment contains both a negative view of change more generally and the fact that the constant competition between time for quality teaching and for coping more generally with the workload may impact on personal health and well-being. Teachers see the rise in societal and employer expectations as leading to much

more 'out-of-school' work being done and this is not just anticipated individual preparation and marking but also for more time to be spent in meetings and joint planning.

An important system-level outcome is that innovations are implemented in a 'spotty' fashion. Many teachers report that in the face of the constant rise in expectations they have become more selective about what innovations they implement in their class. As a consequence they proactively consider initiatives through the lens of 'what is worthwhile for my students?', and disregard those other initiatives they deem not applicable. In this situation policy-makers cannot be sure that policies are being implemented at the system level and this has significant consequence for policies such as inclusion.

A consequence which is becoming more evident is the trend for many teachers to refuse to apply for more senior positions within the school and, at the same time, for the number of fractional appointments also to increase. This trend is a concern as the very competent and committed teachers that schools would wish to see in leadership positions are not being considered as the 'costs' to the individual and the teacher's family are deemed to high.

The View from the Coal-Face: A Case Study of Tasmanian Teachers' Worklives

What Are Working Teachers' Experiences of Intensification?

In 2003–2004 an education union-commissioned study of teachers' workloads was undertaken state-wide in Tasmania.

Tasmania is one of the smaller states and territories in Australia, but the main education issues that are evident in the wider Australian context are also evident in Tasmania. The smaller scale also allows for a comprehensive research sample to be gained and a more epidemiological approach to be taken in the conduct of the study. While it is the case that the six states and two territories in Australia operate as separate jurisdictions and education systems and they also differ considerably in terms of size and scale, they are quite similar in terms of the broad challenges that they face and the general approaches that they take. This allows for some confidence in generalising issues and challenges across the systems – while still recognising the unique challenges for state systems with large indigenous populations (e.g., Northern Territory) and with multi-ethnic schools (e.g., Victoria and New South Wales). In addition, the states and territories have also all been similarly influenced in recent years by the increasingly pro-active educational policies of the Australian federal government (e.g., national literacy and numeracy benchmark testing).

The Tasmanian study arose from the recognition that there was 'increasing concern about education workers' workloads' (Gardner and Williamson, 2004: 1). The key purposes of the study were to identify the factors that determine the workloads of teachers,

principals and other education workers (e.g., laboratory technicians and teacher's aides), and to suggest ways of distributing resources to ensure their most effective and innovative use – in order to promote student learning. The significance of the study was increased by the support of the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the contents of the ensuing report being taken up in political debate at the state parliament level.

Using a multi-method approach employing questionnaire, diary entries, and interviews (both focus and individual) and a quasi-grounded approach to the analysis, several major themes emerged from the data: length of working hours, intensification of work, impact of recent changes, satisfaction with role-related decision-making involvement and the identification of aspects of the workplace that hindered or assisted the work.

As background, it should be stated that approximately 95% of the teaching-force in Tasmania are members of the Australian Education Union (AEU). The study used a stratified sampling technique to ensure a minimum of 10% of each of the main groups (primary teachers, secondary teachers) and a higher percentage for selected groups with comparatively small membership numbers than the teacher groups (guidance officers, social workers) (Gardner and Williamson, 2004).

The Nature of Intensification: Teachers' Working Hours

From the 'snapshot' data of hours worked based on diary entries, the findings indicated that close to half of the surveyed teachers reported working hours that placed them in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 'very long working hours' category. This is based on a definition of at least 50 hours of work per week. However, many teachers worked much longer hours than this: more than half (54%) of the secondary teachers worked more than 50 hours a week, with some working more than 60 hours (8%). The great majority of primary and senior secondary teachers worked between 40 and 60 hours (89% of primary teachers; 79% of senior secondary teachers). So it seemed that long working hours had become something of a norm.

Working 50–60 hour weeks necessitated considerable work at home as well as at work. Respondents also reported an increased amount of time devoted to work during the week – and at the weekend.

At work, teachers reported an increased workload, not just in teaching, but also in administrative and other non-teaching tasks. Ironically perhaps, given the efficiency claims for on-line communication, teachers perceived that the introduction of computers for staff, and particularly email communication, were perceived to have added very considerably to their workload:

We have to do all our own letters and worksheets. I still [at the time of interview] have a couple of hundred emails to read. An increasing number of people are complaining about email. It's an extra job on top of preparation and marking. I feel as though I'm not spending enough time on what I should be doing. It doesn't have defined end-points ... I'm trying to do my best for the kids ... trying to be professional. (*Senior secondary teacher, female, >21 years experience, individual interview*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 6)

What is concerning about this teacher's comments is that she is clearly struggling under the weight of increased non-teaching tasks, which not only takes up more time than she is willing, or capable, of giving. It has also have impacted on her to the extent that she now feels she has a job that has 'no defined end-points' and that she is only capable of 'trying to be professional'. Overall this comment suggests a feeling of being overwhelmed by ('drowning in') the current non-teaching demands of the job.

What is of further concern is that this teacher is not a new and inexperienced graduate, but a very experienced teacher. If she is not able to survive, let alone thrive, in the current system, then what teacher can? This situation is clearly of more general concern for all teachers and schools, not just for this particular teacher; and considerable future systemic problems are indicated.

A second issue that arises from this teacher's comment is that her non-teaching workload creates for her a high level of concern about her capacity to do what she sees as her 'core business', which is teaching students and being a professional teacher.

Tensions Between Teacher Collaboration and Isolation

Another recent change in the role of the professional teacher has been the systemic trend toward demanding teachers to be involved in collaborative planning and teamwork. While collaborative planning and teamwork may well be an admirable ideal – and well justified by the pedagogical literature – this approach requires, by definition, more time devoted to planning and organisation than does individual teacher planning (Gardner and Williamson, 2006a).

This time commitment again has a cumulative effect; and the time commitment to working out of hours comes at a cost. One teacher gave a very clear account of the impact of the workload on her private as well as her work life, the steps she took to create a better work-life balance – but also the serious toll that this took in terms of the negative impact on her career aspirations:

When I started teaching I did hours of preparation and marking night after night, year after year. After seven or eight years I decided I could *not* continue working day *and* night. I no longer existed as a social person. My family life was greatly diminished. So I decided not to take work home [as a rule], Work (the place) is for work (the activity). Home is home! I had to change the way I teach; I gave up aspirations of promotion... I believe that my teaching has been improved (by the changes I made). I have more energy, better health, I'm more child-centred and I'm a more interesting person. However, at times I regret that I haven't been able to work in senior positions. I feel I could contribute lots, but the workload requires lots of work in 'home' time. (*Primary teacher, female, 21+ years experience, questionnaire; emphasis in original*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2006a: 3–4)

Perhaps this time issue is at the basis of the finding that female teachers are five times more dissatisfied than male teachers about working 'out of hours'. As one female

teacher commented, “I have three jobs. I am a mother, a wife and a teacher....” (Gardner and Williamson, 2004).

It may also be the reason why some teachers had chosen to work part time in order to thrive:

Teaching has become more pressured due in part to changes in teaching emphasis and in part to behavioural issues (across the school). I prefer to put in long hours at school ... and find .8 perfect. My work is challenging ... rewarding, but exhausting. Stress leave and illness ... evidence of this. Many envy my .8 but cannot afford to do so themselves. (*Primary teacher, female, 16–20 years' experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2006a: 4)

Or just survive:

I go home at 5pm and then work for another two hours at night. I decided to go part-time because of a 'lack of a life' and I questioned my capacity to do a fulltime load. (*Primary teacher, female, focus group*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2006a: 4)

What is of concern here is the concept that fulltime work as a teacher is not conducive to a healthy, balanced life; the work of a teacher has become so demanding and that the only way to survive, let alone thrive, is to work part time. Is this going to be the pattern of the teaching work force of the future? While at one level this may be a viable and potentially positive option, there are also inherent problems related to the provision of quality teaching. If part time work were to become the majority pattern of work rather than the minority, then what would schools be like? School organisation would be considerably more complex, and potentially less cohesive, coherent and connected. And then what impact would this have on students and their learning, particularly at the primary level?

A related finding was that many of the respondents reported working very long days at work (10–12 hours), but only taking – or only being able to take – minimal breaks. It was rare for respondents, for example, to report having taken the half hour uninterrupted breaks during the day which was an industrial requirement:

Yesterday I worked from 7.30am until 7.10pm with a recess break of 15 minutes, a lunch break of 25 minutes, 10 minutes coffee break and 30 minutes for tea. I had 7 periods of contact time, including an evacuation for [a safety threatening incident] and professional learning ... we are expected to be “on call” for professional learning whenever management see fit during Monday to Thursday. (*Secondary teacher, female, >21 years' experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 6)

It is interesting to note the teacher’s reference not just to the longer working day, which is likely to have spanned both the workplace and the home, but also to the large amount of class contact, the brief break periods, and the perceived lack of control by the teacher over her working day.

This perceived lack of control is exemplified by her reference to the unforeseen time spent on an unplanned event (e.g., a safety evacuation) and by being “on call” for professional development as arranged by the school’s senior management team. The unplanned activities during a teacher’s day, while doubtless necessary, are

likely to impact both on the teacher's day in terms of extended time, but also in terms of her personal control over that time (e.g., the lack of certainty expressed about when professional development would occur) and the suggestion that her working day is somewhat at the whim of management. This lack of control seems to be both an indicator of work intensification, and also of the wider changes in teachers' work and professional autonomy.

It is also interesting to note that the teacher's use of the term 'management' suggests a perceived separation of the classroom teacher from the school or system hierarchy, which further indicates the current influence and extent of managerialism in schools. This trend had earlier been reported in the UK and has been cited as a factor that had changed significantly the nature of teachers' work (Helsby, 1999).

The Nature of the Intensification: Teachers' Perceptions of Change

In addition to teachers' concerns about work intensification was the related issue – and reality – of change, particularly changes over the last 5 years (Gardner and Williamson, 2005).

Change and the change process were reported as one of the most important and influential aspects of the intensification of work; and one which both separately and in combination with work intensification created considerable additional stress.

Teachers were not only engaged in on-going teaching activities, which were inherently challenging, but also had to adapt to large-scale whole-of system changes, which brought additional pressures.

This combination led to teachers expressing concerns about the pace of change, and the new complexity and contradictions inherent in their role. Teachers reported a wide range of issues that could be grouped broadly as related to one of three main change factors: *time/pace, task demands and complexity, and change process*.

The particular issues identified by the teachers in the study were:

Change factors	Issues identified by teachers
Time/pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time needed to implement change while dealing with the exigencies of day-to-day work in schools • Being required to teach more curriculum, or a broader curriculum, in less time • Increasing demands on time of non-teaching duties • Typically having to discuss essential work matters 'on the run'
Task demands and complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of having to juggle too many demands and expectations • Feelings of being close to losing control of the 'juggling act' • Having rising case loads but a corresponding fall in staff numbers

(continued)

Change factors	Issues identified by teachers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having to perform more, irrelevant or conflicting responsibilities • Being unable to sleep at night because of thinking about the day's activities and planned actions for the next day
Change process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of change • The incoherence of change

(from Gardner and Williamson, 2005:9)

Change for teachers is not an ephemera or an abstraction. Those teachers with 5 or more years experience in the education system clearly perceived that considerable change/s had occurred and they were also well able to list a range of factors that supported their perceptions. What was of particular note was that more than 50% of the teachers (and principals) were in 'strong agreement' that these changes were 'significant' in the way that they had affected their work.

Four key areas of workplace changes were identified as having had an impact on teachers and their work. These were curriculum and pedagogy, student needs (and inclusion), accountability and control, and reduced resources.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Teachers reported that changes in curriculum and pedagogy were having a significant impact on their work. While this has been reported in other settings (Popleton and Williamson, 2004), the situation in Tasmania was exacerbated by the fact that the data were being collected at a time when the Tasmanian government school system was undergoing a period of major curriculum change. A new state wide curriculum was in the process of being introduced and implemented. This new curriculum was considered to be significantly changed from the previous curriculum and it was also accompanied by major shifts in the underpinning pedagogy and in the teaching and planning practices that teachers were now being ask to employ.

This context may explain why one teacher felt herself to be in a situation akin to being under fire in a battle zone:

There is constant bombardment with pedagogy and [new curriculum] documents. ...
(*Primary teacher, female, focus group*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 10)

Teachers experienced a range of responses to both the changes and the manner of their implementation – from frustration and irritation to a loss of confidence and low staff morale. In addition, a perceived lack of (system) support and a perception that their previous teaching experience was either undervalued or irrelevant in the new 'change environment' added further to these negative responses.

The same teacher, for example, reported that the introduction of the changes 'implied what you were doing before is not right' and gave rise to the feeling of frustration that arose from a perception of wasted time and energy:

I've had experience of putting in time on learning new things.... and then we haven't used it. (*Primary teacher, female, focus group*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 11)

Time was also clearly a major factor in explaining why the implementation of the new curriculum was not always well received. Teachers argued that change requires time to implement and negative responses occur when teachers feel that insufficient time has been allocated to their needs. This was also reflected in the perception that the change was incoherent; and that there was a lack of recognition of the reality of teachers' lives by those charged with implementing the new curriculum, which led to frustration. So the 'standard' pressures of increased time and task commitments were augmented by the 'new' pressures – and stresses – of the change requirements:

A big frustration at the moment is trying to come to terms with the [new curriculum], while at the same time teaching, marking, preparing lessons, running extra curricular activities, etc. Things seem to be in a mess.... (*Secondary teacher, female, > 20 years' experience*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 11)

Student Needs and Inclusion

There is an increasing emphasis on teachers' recognising and meeting a wide range of student needs both inside and outside the classroom. This is seen as an inevitable consequence of social change and, while debated at times, the responsibility of teachers. In addition, Tasmanian government schools operate on an inclusion policy which means that teachers are likely to have a wider range of students in the classroom, including those with special needs (e.g., autism, Down syndrome), than previously.

In the Tasmanian study, teachers were in general agreement with the state systems' 'inclusion policy' – in principle. However, there was considerable disquiet and anxiety with its implementation, largely because of a perceived lack of support and resources:

Good to have inclusion, but [it] needs proper funding. Your planning and preparation times are doubled plus the students take up the teacher's time in the classroom... There may not be enough room in the classroom for special equipment. You have to do PD out of school time to learn, for example, how to lift a child. There's a lot to learn about special needs ... when you're on your own, it's lonely. Unless you practise some things regularly, you need to be shown again. (*Primary teacher, focus group interview*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 11)

It was also noticeable that the implementation of the inclusion policy added further time directly to teacher's work in school and indirectly to their work time through the need to undertake (voluntary) professional development outside their school work time. There was also a reference to a lack of adequate resources which added to the teacher's work time (e.g., through extra preparation), but it was also likely to be an additional source of further stress.

The aspect of resource shortfall problems was supported by one of the principals in the study:

The discrepancy between the hours we are funded for this student [i.e., one with special needs] and the time he needs support means that we have to take resources from the general resource package. This will affect the general program for other students. (*Principal, <5 years' experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 11)

The specific inclusion policy clearly added considerable time to a Tasmanian teacher's workload; and this is likely to be found widely elsewhere, as it is a general policy in many national education systems to include students with 'special needs' in regular classrooms. However, what also adds to teachers' time is an increased assumption that teachers are the most suitable people (rather than parents or health professionals) to meet a much broader and more general set of student needs (e.g., social and emotional, as well as academic and learning) that all students might experience, than previously would have been seen as an integral part of a teacher's work. This added teacher responsibility for implementing the student inclusion policy, combined with an assumed and comprehensive responsibility for meeting student needs (and a perception that there are many more students now who are 'needy'), would have to add significantly to *all* teachers' workloads.

With special needs students, teachers reported feeling both under-prepared and inadequately equipped, as well as not in control. One teacher's description not only of her current situation, but more particularly of her expressed feelings and concerns about what might happen *the following year*, highlight the high level of anxiety and stress associated with this policy; and what is even more concerning is that this was a teacher of more than 20 years of teaching experience:

While I am out on duty in [playground] I see around me at least twelve [grade identified] children with disabilities. As there are going to be only two grade [grade identified] classes next year I foresee several of them in my class. I can imagine just what next year will be like and I have only had experience with children with [named condition]. I am not looking forward to feeling totally inadequate and not in control. It is quite depressing actually. Shouldn't staff be educated before they are confronted with these problems? (*Primary teacher, female, >21 years' experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 13)

One professional support service staff member summarised this situation and reflected on the stress factors for teachers:

Inclusion means more pressure.... central support for kids no longer [available] ... so less support for teachers working with at-risk students and students with disabilities. This is stressful for teachers. (*Support service staff, focus group interview*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 12)

Accountability and Control

A significant source of stress comes from work situations where staff perceive themselves to have little or no control (Hoyle, 1995; Poppleton and Williamson, 2004). In this study teachers (and principals) expressed concern and frustration that they were being held accountable for outcomes that were largely outside their control:

Teaching well is an incredibly complicated process ... integrating and orchestrating multiples of factors, many of which teachers have little ability to control or prevent. (*Secondary teacher, male, >21 years experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 13)

Teachers also expressed concerns that they were accountable for 'everything' and certainly for larger issues than they could personally control:

Kids have changed ... kids today think that everything is our responsibility; ... to make the subject interesting, to get them to do their work, to behave. Parents and hierarchy too put these things on to teachers. Kids have to take some responsibility ... if they don't do their work, surely some of the responsibility lies with them? (*Secondary teacher, female, >21 years experience, individual interview*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 13)

Principals too expressed concern that they were now accountable to a range of agencies, both state and federal. For both teachers and principals the issue was not so much the increase in accountability, but that this was not accompanied by (appropriate) support. In fact their concerns were linked to greater accountability in situations of reduced resources.

One principal's comment typified his colleagues' views on accountability and resourcing:

If we were truly self-managing then decision-making would be much quicker and easier. Interference at Department level outside school does not take into account individual differences. This includes decisions to do with resourcing – money and personnel. I would prefer to be left to run my school rather than continually answering to someone else. Accountability for federal funding is also a huge problem ... paperwork is endless. (*Principal, male, >21 years' experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 13)

Reduced Resources

Concerns were expressed by teachers (and principals and teacher assistants) about resourcing levels for all school activities and particular mention was made of the limited resources available for professional learning for teachers (and TA's). This concern most likely arose from the pressures of increased curriculum and other changes, for which teachers felt they needed greater professional learning time and support.

Principals had a particular concern that their expertise should be recognised with a closer nexus to be made between schools and resources. Many of them saw this in terms of a scenario where policies had been predicated on a 'one size fits all' model and where the geographically and professionally distant head office of senior bureaucrats who had developed the policy failed to venture out into the schools to see first hand the impact of their policies.

Several of the principals also commented that they were spending significant amounts of time writing bids for competitive funds for what they considered to be part of the school's core activities. For example, they described how contested funds were available for some aspects of the implementation of the inclusion policy but in their view these resources should have been provided as a matter of course.

The effects of government political decisions and funding priorities could be felt in the teachers' physical work environment – school buildings, classrooms and teachers' office space. The appropriateness of the fact that teachers' office space is often very cramped and routinely shared with other teachers was challenged. As one highly experienced primary school teacher asked:

“[H]ow many managers of 25–30 people wouldn't have their own office?” (*Primary teacher, female, >21 years experience, individual interview*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 14)

Another teacher spoke about the effects of diminishing resources on his and his colleagues' core work with students – and the conflicting pressures they felt between maintaining teaching quality and meeting budgetary expectations:

Given a budget, our team plays around with and we may have to cut classroom resources. I am concerned about ... the tightening of budget strings. ... there are pressures from above about the quality of work and classrooms and teachers, yet strategies we're able to use are opposing quality at the 'coal face'. (*TAFE teacher, male, >10 years experience, individual interview*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 14)

Involvement in Decision-Making

There is evidence to suggest that teachers are more likely to be able to adapt to rapid changes if they are involved meaningfully in the school's decision-making processes (Poppleton and Williamson, 2004). The Tasmanian study focussed on teachers' satisfaction with their involvement in role-related decision-making. While many teachers were happy with the decision-making related to their roles (with the exception of teacher assistants and TAFE teacher respondents), there were particular areas of concern and complaint.

'*Symbolic*' decision-making: Many teachers felt that their involvement in decision-making was more 'symbolic' than real; that there was the appearance of consultation, but not the substance:

There appear to be structures enabling teachers to participate, but many decisions are imposed from above, i.e., by the hierarchy. (*Secondary teacher, female, >21 years experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 15)

Interestingly this view was also shared by principals, who might have been expected to be more involved in decision-making than teachers:

Over my years as principal, I have generally found that principals are not listened to. Consulted in appearances, yes, but listened to, no. (*Principal, male, >21 years experienced, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 15)

Opportunities to participate in decision-making: The lack of involvement in decision-making seemed in part to be the result of a lack of serious planning for comprehensive staff involvement:

The timing of communication can restrict opportunities to have input to the central level, for example [when material is distributed for comment at] the end of term or the school year. (*Support service, focus group interview*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 16)

And the teacher's employment status may be a barrier. There were some teachers, such as those on temporary contracts, who felt themselves outside the decision-making process (and perhaps the system as a whole), no matter how experienced they were:

As a temporary teacher, I am disposable. (*Secondary teacher, male, 4–10 years' experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 16)

In many schools and in many classrooms with included students there are teacher support staff or aides. In Tasmania these allied educators are seen as very important to promoting student learning. However, they are only paid for the time they work during the school year (i.e., exclusive of school holidays) and they are often employed on annual contracts with no ongoing tenure. In the context of wishing to have better communication with all members of the teaching and support staff within the school, a teacher assistant reported:

TAs are not involved in planning meetings, they should be. Teachers are reluctant to ask TAs to give extra time for meetings given the current working conditions of TAs. There needs to be meetings ... staff meetings ... we *are* staff. Ultimately we're all here for the children. (*Teacher assistant, female focus group interview, interviewee's emphasis*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005)

Similarly, a library technician reported:

I am not included in staff meetings and briefings, therefore I'm often not aware of things that are going on in the school, changes in policies, etc. unless someone remembers to inform me...I feel the lack of consultation with me about my role ... denigrates my qualifications and ... experience and service at the school. (*Library technician, female, 4–10 year's experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005)

The Workplace as a Supportive Environment for Teachers

The respondents were asked to identify those aspects of the workplace that both assisted and hindered the work of teachers and allied educators (Gardner and Williamson, 2004). Those factors that were perceived to provide a supportive setting were: support from colleagues, support from senior staff/principal, a supportive environment and proactive programs. However, for those at the head of a school, the principal, this support was often lacking, as one relatively new principal described:

It can be very lonely, when things are not going well; you question your own ability. ...that can be very stressful. (*Principal, <5 years' experience, questionnaire*)

There were also a number of factors that were identified as hindering the work of staff. These were given as: school processes and programs; time issues; inclusion policy; and student needs.

Conclusion

The nature of Tasmanian teachers' work lives has been shown to be similar to those elsewhere (Galton and MacBeath, 2002; Helsby, 1999). Likewise the impact of this work intensification has had similar outcomes on teachers' reported ability to perform their roles and duties.

Teachers have reported, for example, not just the pressure of intensification, but also the impact that it had on their perceptions of their capacity to perform their roles, or even to maintain good health given the level of stress it induced:

We are expected to do *more* in seemingly less time. Children have become more demanding ... the Department has become more demanding ... parents are more demanding ... senior staff are more demanding. ... I personally know five teachers who have been on prolonged stress leave over the past five years ... one of our staff is currently on stress leave. (*Primary teacher, female, 16–20 years' experience, questionnaire, emphasis in original*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 7)

The respondents reported – largely in negative terms – four broad issues that they identified as the key features of intensification:

- That they were forced to do their planning and decision-making 'on the run' as the school day was full
- That the changes were generally imposed from outside the school with little or no consultation
- That they had limited opportunity for quality work time on those matters they saw as 'core', i.e., teaching and student pastoral care, rather than administrative tasks or accountability reports
- That they were working to unrealistic change implementation timetables

These issues were reflected in the comments of one senior secondary school teacher who summarised the complexity of the current teacher's role. However, what also seems to add to the issue for this teacher is the lack of community recognition of teacher's work which may have potentially negative consequences for the future of the profession:

The role of the teacher has changed considerably to the extent that we are social worker, surrogate parent, administrator and lastly, an educator, yet our status in the community ... or salary ... does not acknowledge any of this ... If we don't address it soon, there will be too few people going into the teaching profession and I'm saying this as someone under the age of 30. (*Senior secondary teacher, female, 4–10 years' experience, questionnaire*)

(Gardner and Williamson, 2005: 8)

Teacher Responses to Intensification

Teacher responses to the current work intensification suggest that they are 'surviving but not thriving' under the pressure. While these Tasmanian teachers may have been under particular intensification pressure due to the implementation of a new

state-wide curriculum, the evidence from elsewhere suggests that this situation is more standard than particular. Worldwide, teachers in industrialised countries are experiencing increased time/pace and complexity factor pressures in their work. Much of this is due to general workplace change, but the teacher's workplace is particularly affected by these changes – and exacerbated by the particular commitment that teachers feel toward the professional and vocational aspects of their job and their commitment to students (Churchill et al., 1997; Helsby, 1999).

The outcomes of the intensification can be seen in two clear teacher strategies for coping with multiple and complex changes:

- *Teacher resistance and selective change implementation* – with the sheer number of changes and policies, teachers find that they cannot implement all of them (*policy change fatigue*), so they 'cherry pick' the policies they want to implement on the basis of those they consider to be of the most benefit to the children in their class or school.
- *Teacher 'inertia' or 'cynicism'* – experienced teachers tend to recognise externally generated change (or fad) cycles and, if they are not convinced of the merits of the change or if they are not concerned with personal promotion in the new era, they tend to follow one of three options: they continue their usual practice, they may incorporate or accommodate some aspects of the new 'fad' into their current repertoires, or, they re-name their activities to reflect the current ideology (e.g., Tasmania's 'Essential Learnings' curriculum).

It is interesting to note that expert and novice teachers appear to respond differently to change and that change affects the two groups of teachers differentially. The teaching-force in Tasmania is an aging one; the average age of Tasmanian teachers is now 48 years. There are important implications for the profession in the fact that so many teachers are now leaving before they serve 5 years; one consequence is that it will mean a 'churning' of beginning teachers with few progressing their skills and knowledge to the levels of competent or expert (Berliner, 2002). It may be argued that if there is this hollowing out of experienced teachers consequently the teaching force will not offer the same quality of teaching of earlier years.

The data from the Tasmanian study show that increased workload both leads and contributes to:

- Extreme busyness: no time for reflection, and professional issues such as consideration of teaching, matching teaching to students, and so on.
- Increased tension between 'teamwork' and 'whole school' policies versus individual decision-making.
- A broadening of considerations of what constitutes teacher expertise: this is typically in terms of generalist versus specialist teachers (where the 'system view' is that "a teacher is a teacher" which gives administrative ease to staffing schools), rather than an expertise-based view (Berliner, 2002). This consideration, in turn, leads to downplaying of specialist curriculum knowledge/expertise and an increase in multi-skilling, which results, at least in the short term, in increased employability but more limited personal/professional empowerment.

- Shifts in perceived accountability: the data suggest a cleavage between commitment and accountability to the profession versus accountability to external ‘masters’ and, likewise, a view of accountability that is hierarchical and external or one based on individual professional decision-making.
- System- or school-level determined professional development activities rather than personal needs based; the resultant tendency is to encourage staff to engage in school/system change-related PD, rather than personal professional development.
- A shift from more autonomous schools to a more centralised and bureaucratic model. Schools consequently are more like government departments where there is limited capacity for the individual teacher to choose curriculum, or assessment approaches that best suit her students rather what is mandated by state or federal curricula (or school), assessment requirements, and national testing, finally
- Increased levels of teacher and allied educator stress: with too many policies implemented at the one time especially as they involve curriculum, testing and assessment procedures and concomitantly the implementation of the inclusion policy.

Where To from Here?

The data from the Tasmanian study of teachers’ workloads are consistent with those from other countries (Galton and MacBeath, 2002; Helsby, 1999; Poppleton and Williamson, 2004). These different countries all report intensification in teachers’ work lives and, therefore, it is not a matter that will disappear simply by being ignored and swept under the carpet at the school- or the system-level.

Teachers have reported that there are number of practical ways to assist them to deal with this increased workload, such as them being involved in decision-making that relates to the adoption and implementation of major policies for new curricula or new strategies to include children with a spectrum of behavioural and psychological needs in regular classrooms. This shift to involve teachers more meaningfully in school decision-making will require a substantial mind change from many school leaders and employers.

At the system-level there needs to be more thought given to the number and size of the innovations that are introduced to the schools. In Tasmania, for example, in the 5 year period 1995–2000 it has been calculated that 80 major policies were announced and schools were expected to implement all of them. This amount of change would suggest it is clearly beyond the scope of any organisation to achieve implementation fully and successfully. Rather than creating situations where teachers will inevitably fail to implement all policies as decreed by the policy makers it would make more sense to have fewer but more meaningful innovations.

More teachers report a down-sizing in their employment either through not applying for senior administrative positions within the school or with a move to a fractional level appointment. If the schools are to continue to offer quality teaching

to all students major policy changes need to be made to the support provided to teachers in terms of their on-going professional development and learning and the amount of work they are routinely expected to engage in out of school time.

Employers of teachers will need to move quickly in two important areas. First, to assist those teachers who are not coping with the present changed work context and conditions, and second, to provide appropriate mentoring and support for those beginning teachers who have not yet served 5 years in the classroom.

References

- Berliner, D.C. (2002) Teacher expertise. In B. Moon and A. Shelton Mayes (Eds.). *Teaching and learning in the secondary school*. London: Routledge/Open University.
- Churchill, R. and Williamson, J.C. (1999) Traditional attitudes and contemporary experiences: Teachers and educational change. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education & Development*, 2(2), 43–51.
- Churchill, R., Williamson, J. and Grady, N. (1997) Educational change and new realities of teachers' work lives. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 25(3), 141–158.
- Galton, M. and MacBeath, J. (2002) *A life in teaching? The impact of change on primary teachers' working lives*. A report commissioned by the National Union of Teachers (NUT). Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.
- Gardner, C. and Williamson, J. (2004) *Workloads of government school teachers and allied educators in Tasmania*. Report commissioned by the Australian Education Union Tasmanian Branch.
- Gardner, C. and Williamson, J. (2005) *Teaching is not the job it used to be*. Paper presented at the 2005 AERA Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada.
- Gardner, C. and Williamson, J. (2006a) *My home has become another workplace*. Paper presented at the 2006 AERA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA.
- Gardner, C. and Williamson, J. (2006b) *Having a life outside teaching: The nature and amount of teachers' out-of-hours work*. Proceedings of the 2006 Australian Teachers' Education Association Conference, pp. 157–171.
- Helsby, G. (1999) *Changing teachers' work: The 'reform' of secondary schooling*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Hoyle, E. (1995) Changing conceptions of a profession. In H. Busher and R. Saran (Eds.). *Managing teachers as professionals in schools*. London: Kogan Page.
- Hoyle, E. and John, P. (1995) *Professional knowledge and professional practice*. London: Cassell.
- Moulthrop, D., Calegari, N.C. and Eggers, D. (2005) *Teachers have it easy: The big sacrifices and small salaries of America's teachers*. New York: New Press.
- Poppleton, P. and Williamson, J. (Eds.) (2004) *New realities of secondary teachers' work lives*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Stronge, J.H., Gareis, C.R. and Little, C.A. (2006) *Teacher pay and teacher quality: Attracting, developing and retaining the best teachers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- UNESCO (1998) *World Education Report 1998: Teachers and teaching in a changing world*. Paris, France: UNESCO Publishing.