Submission

Inquiry into Teacher Education

Introduction

As an overview, it would appear logical that any inquiry into teacher education should also examine the demands which will be placed - and which already are placed - on teachers. Such an approach would ensure that conclusions reached are underpinned by a realistic appreciation of the situation in schools.

Consequently, the submission addresses chiefly the second term of reference - ''To examine the preparedness of graduates to meet the current and future demands of teaching in Australia's schools.'' It also may be applied to elements of points 5, 7, and 10 The submission is derived from PhD research carried out through Edith Cowan University into the topic of teacher work intensification and professionalism in the State School system in Western Australia.

General

One of the factors most affecting teachers in recent years is that of work intensification. This is an issue which is as yet still emerging into the general consciousness of the public, but which has a large impact on the working lives of large numbers of people. This is particularly the case with regard to people working in professional fields, where success is judged more by quality than by quantity, and where it may therefore be more difficult to identify.

Work intensification is an issue with a high emotive content, able to colour the reactions of stakeholders, each of whom may be affected in a variety of ways, and who may have a wide range of perceptions about the relative importance of its elements. As a result, it is not an issue which can be examined as a simple linear process. As viewed by teachers, work intensification is a complex phenomenon with physical, psychological and social aspects. Indeed,

it would appear frequently that there are as many different manifestations of intensification as there are individuals or groups experiencing it. This study has focused on one such group, and has provided insights into work intensification through their experiences and perceptions.

The overall aim of the research was to gain an understanding of work intensification in the State School system in Western Australia, and to determine the extent to which intensification was affecting the work and lives of a specific category of professionals. Two noticeable aspects of the study were the extent to which the issue of work intensification evoked emotional responses from many teachers, and the readiness of many to provide detailed answers. Information was obtained by means of an initial pilot study, followed by a 1000-teacher survey, and interviews. The important consideration was to focus on the perceptions of the teachers, and to ensure that data obtained reflected those perceptions.

The research was based on answering three research questions. These were developed from a review of literature on labour process theory in general and work intensification in particular. A marked distinction emerged in the literature between various schools of thought. Significant gaps became apparent, however, especially in relation to links between work intensification and the work of professionals.

The research questions were:

''To what extent does work intensification exist amongst teachers in Western Australian State Schools?''

''What is the nature of work intensification amongst teachers?''

''What are the causes and effects of work intensification for teachers?''

These questions were aimed at determining the boundaries of work intensification, the extent to which it was a factor in the lives of teachers, and

the nature, causes, and effects of intensification. Examination of the specific issues formed the basis of the findings chapters.

Of necessity, determining the answers to these questions involved consideration of a wide range of topics, including change, health, family matters, professionalism, community attitudes and expectations, teachers' functions, and student attitudes. A number of these developed into themes, and are covered later.

The Demands of Teaching

Work Intensification

One of the underlying issues to emerge in relation to this study was the use of the term 'work intensification', over which a real question would seem to arise. There emerged from the literature two major approaches to the meaning of the term: the wide, inclusive approach, and a more narrow, exclusive approach.

The narrow view of work intensification would appear to rely first and foremost on a view of work as manual activity leading to the production of an amount of tangible goods in a given amount of time. Subsequently, extending this concept, work intensification is seen as referring to either increases in the amount of goods produced (in other words, to increases in productivity), to increases in the amount of time worked, or to increases in the range of duties. Where it can be shown that hours of work, for example, have decreased, it may be asserted that work intensification does not exist or is minimal (Wooden, 1999). An interesting variation on this theme is provided by Allan et al (1999), who examine the three areas of production, hours of work and range of duties, but who allocate the term "work intensification" to only the first category.

The use of narrow definitions for work intensification may be counter-productive, however, with a potential for overlooking the realities of many workplaces. Indeed, using an exclusive definition would seem to lead

inevitably to the conclusion that non-manual workplaces could never experience work intensification.

The study showed a wider, inclusive approach - that work intensification included all activity related to an individual's occupation, whether paid or unpaid, manual or intellectual, at the workplace or away from the workplace - to be more applicable to the field of education. It showed that work may include non-physical elements, such as psychological causes and effects (Heiler, 1996, 1998; Callus, 1999; Bent, 1998). While some or all of the three areas of physical activity identified by Allan et al (1999), may be involved, work intensification frequently consists of more than these. The physical aspects of a person's work may change but little, for example, yet the person still experiences severe work intensification, of a more psychological nature.

This is consistent with the views of teachers, as expressed in written and oral information received from different sources during the study. Indeed, teachers' responses appeared to be quite unequivocal in suggesting that work intensification did exist. When compared with the 1995 AWIRS data, in a Work Intensification Index based on effort, pace of work, and stress, the survey figures suggested that the levels of intensification may have increased in the six years since that survey.

Work intensification was experienced by some teachers involved in the study more than by others. Male teachers - particularly males aged forty and over, and male primary teachers - while comprising a small minority of teachers in general, were more likely than their female colleagues to be affected, although female teachers forty and over reported an equal effect in relation to the complexity of work. Least affected were female teachers under forty. Other categories of teacher most affected by work intensification included primary teachers and members of the State School Teachers' Union (SSTU).

Causes

Overall, possible causes of work intensification identified by teachers were examined from three perspectives: the managerialist, the educationist, and the

professional. Broadly, these dealt respectively with the organisation of teaching, with students and the technicalities of teaching, and with the profession of teaching. The organisation of teaching covered issues such as change, devolution, class sizes, and staff selection and support (including relief) - essentially, the physical resources and duties provided for and expected of teachers. Issues covered in the other sections included student behaviour and general attitudes, parenting, teaching, community expectations and pressures, and the meaning of being a professional. This last was approached both from the ideal of the teacher as viewed by teachers themselves, and teachers' perceptions of how they were viewed by others in reality.

Teacher perceptions of the causes of work intensification, and their relative importance, often depended on situations existing in particular schools, such as size, or the management style used. This point was made in both survey responses and interviews. The major issues mentioned included the pace and frequency of change (at times without training, time, or resources); class sizes; student behaviour; and, mainly for older teachers, information technology.

Another important element - the key element for some - was the question of trust. Considered by teachers as a vital part of being professionals, its absence on the part of education authorities and the community was frequently mentioned. For many teachers surveyed, the relationship between teachers and education authorities was one of conflict and resistance, with pressure being felt on their rights, conditions of work, status, and autonomy. Indeed, for some teachers, the situation amounted to a deliberate attempt at deprofessionalisation (Spaull, 1997).

From the educationalist perspective, one of the more important causes of work intensification was perceived to involve student behavioural issues. This included both the disruptive effects on teaching, and the need to take on a quasi parenting role in order to compensate for a lack of effective parenting in students' families. Many respondents commented on the increased and increasing numbers of roles which teachers were being expected to fill, which frequently detracted from the core role of teaching.

At the same time, however, the extent of teaching duties was seen to have increased also, with more being demanded of teachers with regard to the manner of teaching. Most affected were female teachers, those aged under forty, and primary teachers. The study showed that the effect of teaching duties was seen to increase as class sizes increased. In addition, teachers expressed concerns over the community expectations of teachers, and of the lack of appreciation received for their efforts.

Lack of appreciation emerged as a factor when work intensification was examined from the professional perspective also. The focus of this perspective was largely on what it meant to be a teacher, as viewed by the teachers themselves. Both the literature and the research indicated that professionalism was an important consideration for teachers, and a factor in work intensification. People involved in the study made repeated assertions that teachers as a body were caring individuals, dedicated to the education and welfare of their students. Teachers indicated consistently that, regardless of workload, health, or other considerations, they would not allow their standards to fall, or their students' education to suffer.

For many teachers, faced with the impact of intensification, the tendency appeared to be to sacrifice at least some non-work aspects of their life, in order to devote the extra time to work activities. Where professionalism was interpreted as ensuring quality of teaching, there thus emerged a strong similarity to the concept of manufactured consent (Burawoy, 1979).

From the teacher viewpoint of themselves as educated, trustworthy and responsible educators (Leggett, 1997; Spaull, 1997), professionalism led some teachers to adopt a more critical evaluation of work, both in itself and as it impacted on their lives. While accepting the need for organisation, teachers considered that professionalism consisted merely of dedicated obedience to policy direction in the manner identified by Geiselhart (2000). Professionalism was seen as consisting of responsibility towards students, but with an underlying premise that quality of work performance depended upon the maintenance of a healthy balance between work and non-work activities.

<u>Effects</u>

The larger the workforce, the more it is likely that the effects of work intensification will be as varied as the numbers of individuals in that workforce. By and large, however, the effects may be classified as impacting on either professional or personal lives, although some, such as health, may appear in both. In relation to professional life, the most consistent reaction by teachers - both in general, and across all the demographic variables - was to identify the negative effect which work intensification had on preparation time and health. These related back to the perception that teachers were effectively prevented from providing the quality teaching they wished to provide, partly due to a lack of time to prepare adequately, and partly because health concerns also intervened.

In addition to preparation time and health, work intensificaiton was also seen, in some cases, to have a negative effect in respect of teaching performance and professional development. In particular, male teachers, secondary teachers, and teachers forty and over were susceptible to experiencing this reaction. Country teachers also considered that there was a strong negative effect on professional development.

What would appear to have suffered in many cases, however, were the non-work aspects of teachers' lives - social life, the balance between work and family, and health. Of these, the most important for teachers appeared to be family and health issues, with comments on time and stress reflecting concerns expressed by writers such as Heiler (1996, 1998), Spurgeon et al (1997), Bent (1998), Burchell et al (1999), and Probert et al (2000). Complaints covered matters such as exhaustion, finding time for children, marriage problems, frustration, and stress. A possible concern was that a large proportion of such comments appeared to be received from teachers with twenty or more years of experience. Also of concern was the fact that a majority of school principals considered that teachers could no longer be expected to cope with increasing workloads.

The Theoretical Framework

Throughout this research, it was apparent that a range of often strongly differing approaches and views existed with respect to the issues of work intensification and professionalism. It was seen that changes in the work situation of individuals may be as much perception as reality, but that such perception may also lead to a changed reality. Additional control mechanisms may be imposed in the workplace, additional workload may be generated, or with resistance to changes may emerge. It was seen that, while work situations may often be conflictual, there may also be a strong interplay with notions of consent and of critical thinking..

Themes and Trends Emerging from the Research

A number of patterns and themes stand out from this study, often with important implications for all parties concerned with state education in Western Australia.

Change Management

One of the major issues highlighted in the study was the question of change in the education system. It was apparent that teachers considered that the changes which had occurred in recent years had been imposed, often for other than pedagogical reasons. The response to these changes appeared to be generally unfavourable, with teachers seemingly unconvinced even of the need for change. One comment, from a secondary teacher, typified the overall attitude ''Improvement and change are <u>not</u> necessarily synonymous.'' A common complaint was that change appeared to be driven more by Central Office considerations than by educational need.

Even where changes as such were supported, it was stated repeatedly that the pace of change was excessive, preventing teachers from becoming familiar

with one before others were introduced. An additional concern was that there was often too little guidance or direction, and either too much professional development to absorb, or too little professional development to explain the changes. Anger, frustration and stress were among the most common reactions to this situation. Teachers considered that demands placed on them were excessive, overloading them with extra functions and duties. At the same time, the provision of resources by the Education Department had often been inadequate to cope with change.

Time

Closely linked with the issue of change was that of time, whether devoted to classroom teaching, preparation and marking, professional development, meetings, liaison with students, parents and community groups, to work-related functions, or to personal and family matters. Part of the problem for many teachers was a lack of support, especially for relatively mundane tasks such as filing and photocopying, which were considered more properly the province of clerical staff.

At times, the provision of apparent labour-saving devices such as computers was also seen as a problem. This was partly due to the training often needed, and partly because of a feeling that teachers were now expected to do even more work themselves. A frequent belief was that neither the community at large nor the Department appeared to understand the many and varied calls on a teacher's time, nor the total amount of time which thus had to be given over to work-related matters during a given week.

Overall, findings supported strongly the notion that changes frequently led to additional work and affected other aspects of a teacher's life. Across all demographic groups, teachers themselves were in no doubt, for example, that preparation time was the aspect of work most affected by work intensification. This was also linked closely to concerns expressed about professionalism, and the frequent need to choose between quantity and quality of education. Teachers' concerns focused not so much on official hours of work as on a seemingly ever-increasing number of tasks and functions which they

considered peripheral to teaching, and which occupied the time needed for lesson preparation.

Health

As with preparation time, a majority of teachers considered that work intensification had had a negative effect on health. Responses appeared to become extremely negative when viewed in relation to the teaching profession in general. Health included both physical and psychological elements, and related closely to the question of stress. Findings reinforced concerns expressed in the literature (Heiler, 1996; Spurgeon et al, 1997; Benson, !998; Bent, 1998; Hunter & McKelvie, 1999) of the negative effects of work intensification on health and wellbeing. However, despite their importance, the effects of health problems were frequently resisted by teachers, due partly to problems involved with obtaining relief, and partly to an apparent denial of self - again linked to perceptions of professional responsibility.

Overall, the survey responses regarding health suggested a situation not dissimilar to the social and work / family situations. In all three areas there emerged the picture of the teacher as not only often lacking the time for socialising with friends, or for family matters, but apparently finding difficulty even in meeting the more fundamental needs for relaxation and sleep. Approximately one-third also recognised a need to confront the issue of temper, but - perhaps surprisingly - few reported using common crutches for stress, such as alcohol and medication.

While stress figured commonly in written comments, a common pattern was for teachers to consider themselves able to cope - on a short-term basis at least - while simultaneously considering the teaching profession as a whole to be experiencing comparatively major problems. Teachers interviewed were quite frank and open in discussing personal situations and experiences, but the survey suggested only a limited inclination to use artificial means of stimulation or relaxation.

Professional Development

Professional development was a consistent concern for large numbers of teachers in all categories, but particularly for males, for those in secondary schools, those in the country, and those over the age of forty. Many respondents considered that one of the causes of work intensification had been not merely the quantity and pace of change, but also a lack of guidance, direction and training - leading to problems of implementation.

A number of respondents took the contrary view, that the problem was the requirement to do too much training, thus reducing the amount of time available for other matters, such as preparation, and reflection. In both cases, the perception appeared to be that more effort was needed to synchronise work changes and the related professional development, and to then ensure that this matched the time requirements of teachers in a realistic manner.

Experience

One of the more apparent findings to emerge was the issue of age and experience. Consistently, teachers aged over forty were most likely to experience - or to perceive the existence of - work intensification, and to consider its effects to be negative. This related to both physical aspects, such as the hours worked, effort, and teaching performance, and psychological aspects such as stress. The implications of this, both from the point of view of the continued professional dedication of the State's most experienced teachers, and from the point of view of the general health of the teacher body overall should not be underestimated. As the survey suggested that a large proportion of teachers might fall into the experienced category (in this case, sixty-eight percent), care could be needed in order to prevent any large-scale crisis in either the availability or health of teaching personnel.

Uncertainty and Confusion

Uncertainty appeared to be a significant issue for many teachers, covering a range of topics. A fundamental concern was the inability to find a definitive statement of direction for education which could then be translated into everyday teaching. Many teachers appeared to no longer have a sense of their role, either as individuals or as members of a profession in the general community, and this reached the extent of creating a sense of isolation. In addition, considerable comment was made over the practice of merit selection - dubbed ''the Myth of Merit Selection'' by one interviewee - which was often seen as creating uncertainty and insecurity with regard to appointment, and as distracting teachers from teaching. A sense of confusion also appeared to emerge in relation to understanding the changes which were implemented and the expectations which other people had for teachers.

One possible consequence of this was suggested by the overall survey results, where a large minority of respondents appeared to consider the effects of work intensification to have had neither positive nor negative effects. This has the reinforce the distinction between general and individual, and further pointing to a determination by teachers that there should be no effect on the ultimate test of professionalism - teaching. It might be questioned whether it also could point to a lack of decisiveness, or to a form of withdrawal, as suggested by one primary teacher interviewed.

Principals

It was considered important that principals responded to the survey, given their role in a devolved education system. While ultimately their focus was on student education, in an operational sense they formed a level connecting the classroom teacher and the central bureaucracy. Depending on the leadership style of individual Principals, this could represent either a conduit or a protective layer. However, the nature of their role also necessitated at least a degree of analysis of the position of teachers - which was not always evident in the teachers' responses.

While following the same overall pattern as teachers, and often appearing to believe themselves able to cope with work intensification, the principals surveyed also showed a strong belief that teachers were experiencing problems, and were unable to cope with further intensification. Given their dual role as educators and managers, principals clearly experienced different forms of intensification, but also felt responsibilities to teachers. Their existence as a discrete grouping would appear to be important, and to provide a worthwhile area for research.

Class Sizes

The examination of work intensification throughout this study considered a number of demographic variables, and some of these, such as age and gender and teaching level, were regularly significant. However, the issue of class sizes appeared to cut across all factors, as one of the most important issues currently in terms of the delivery of education. Class sizes were identified by teachers as a major cause of intensification, and a strong link appeared to be evident between the two. The extent of teaching duties, for example, was itself increasingly seen as a cause of intensification as class sizes increased. When asked to choose between additional salary and additional staff, a large majority of respondents chose the latter, further indicating the significance of the issue.

Professionalism

It is unlikely that any study of the education system could be undertaken without at least a brief examination of the role of professionalism. In this study, the emphasis was on determining the nature of professionalism, and any impact or influence on the intensification of the work of State School teachers. It became apparent from the research that professionalism was indeed an important factor in the minds of teachers.

Differences of interpretation emerged between a managerialist approach, attributed by many teachers to the education authorities (and occasionally to

principals), and the more trusting, autonomous approach espoused by teachers themselves. These two approaches to professionalism indicated more than mere differences of opinion, and reflected rather a fundamental philosophical conflict. Such conflict created, or at least exacerbated, work intensification for teachers, with effects felt in the school and at home. The managerialist approach was seen as leading to additional non-teaching tasks and functions (such as reports, meetings - including with parents and community groups - and training). All of these were time-consuming, and thus diverted teachers' energy and focus away from teaching.

Teachers as a whole were very much aware of their work situation, however, and a generally sceptical attitude was displayed towards the views of the education authorities. Professionalism was seen to revolve around quality in matters pedagogical and responsibility with regard to the education of students. Overall, the scepticism adopted by teachers often appeared to be closely aligned with the questioning approach of the critical theorists, and it appeared that professionalism could be both a bulwark against blind acceptance of official views and a means of seeing the world realistically.

Implications

Teachers

The major point to be made about teachers is that they form a body of professionals dedicated to the education of their students. They have adapted to a range of complex changes over a number of years, and managed to cope with increased demands on their time, energy, and health. However, for many teachers it would seem that coping strategies have been failing, and that problems have begun to be experienced with work performance, health, and home life. These problems often then rebound and have a further impact on morale and performance.

Health - including psychological health - was a concern for many teachers, who expressed feelings of anger, confusion, and stress. For teachers, the implications of continuing work intensification is for such matters to be

exacerbated beyond reasonable levels, and for this to cause a decline in the quality of their core function - teaching. An increasing trend has seen teachers opting for part-time work, in an effort to reduce the demands upon them, and to restore some balance between work and private lives.

Depending on how this is implemented, however, the success of this strategy may be more apparent than real. Such a trend to part-time teaching may have the potential to increase, if measures are not taken to reduce demands on teachers. Ultimately, any such measures may depend on decisions of individual teachers as to what are acceptable work levels.

The State Education System

While workload issues have been a regular focus of the State School Teachers' Union and other organisations, such as the ACTU, for a number of years, this study suggests that more fundamental consideration may need to be given to the issue. Indeed, it could be questioned whether the situation might be considered to have gone beyond the problem stage to that of crisis. Certainly it is considered that serious problems exist. The research showed sixty percent of the teachers involved had given serious consideration to resignation. In addition, sixty percent reported having sleeping problems; nearly half of the people with families had problems with their children; and a quarter of married staff had marriage problems, all due to increased work pressures.

On the credit side, it must again be emphasised that teachers displayed very high levels of dedication to their profession, as well as a determination to ensure that students received a quality education. This was one of the most persistent messages to come from the study, and suggests the importance of maintaining that attitude. The question would appear to be finding a balance between the extent to which teachers need to support change and accept a degree of work intensification in order to cater for that change, and the extent

to which the Department might be prepared to support teachers in order to minimise or avoid intensification altogether.

Based on results of this study, one of the more important requirements of future research would appear to be to critically identify community views, aims, and desires with regard to public education, and subsequently to make comparison with current approaches. Such analysis would tend to be strategic, and possibly vital for future directions in education. It is likely that issues would need to include teacher numbers and professionalism, current and future expectations held of public education, of teachers, and, ultimately, even the desired nature and structure of society.

Conclusion

Work intensification is very real issue for State School teachers in Western Australia. With respect to the first research question, issues of time, class size, the physical effort required of teachers, and health, were major physical indicators of work intensification to emerge from the study. However, teaching has long been an occupation requiring regular and considerable amounts of out-of-hours work, whether it is the traditional marking and preparation, or activities such as supervising sport. Similarly, large classes are not a modern phenomenon. Thus the mere existence of such elements may not necessarily indicate teacher work intensification.

As viewed by teachers, however, the situation in recent years has frequently exceededwhat might be considered reasonable limits. Multiple changes, additional duties, functions, expectations, extra complexity, effort, responsibility, and insecurity, have been reported as leading to confusion, frustration, and anger, and to a range of personal, health, domestic, and professional problems. These have often caused teachers' psychological considerations to take on a greater importance than the physical. As part of this, there has been a strong adverse effect on personal life. In turn, this has often had a detrimental effect on work performance and attitudes.

As a result of increased demands and complexity in their work, it is appropriate that indicators of work intensification amongst State School teachers should include serious psychological issues. These may stem from existing physical work demands, or may exist as discrete work issues, and include health, stress, relations with colleagues, sleep, and marital problems. Whether at a macro level in the Education Department, or in individual schools, it is possible to make a realistic assessment of the situation confronting teachers.

A large majority of teachers involved in the study considered themselves to have been experiencing a situation imposed upon them externally by government, by the education authorities, and by the community at large. Although teachers in general showed themselves to be dedicated, caring professionals, it may be wondered whether the cumulative effects of work intensification might not prove to be counter-productive, in terms of both teacher welfare and the outcomes currently desired from the public education system. Gaining an understanding of such issues may assist all parties - teachers, unions and the Education Department - to plan realistically for the future.

Ultimately, however, finding a solution to work intensification may be a long-term issue. While it may be a question of action by government, or its agent, the Education Department, it is also likely that an essential precursor to action will be a re-evaluation of the education system by the Western Australian community as a whole. The crucial issue to be decided may well be what the community - as a community - expects and requires of a public education system. What outcomes are seen as optimum? What are the criteria for judging the success or otherwise of the system? In turn, an important part of such a process should be to decide what is expected from teachers within the system, and what the community is prepared to do to ensure that these expectations are both achievable and reasonable.

Determining issues at a strategic level is likely to enable attention to be paid to more operational matters such as performance indicators, and requirements for resources, funding, and staffing. Matters such as class size, professional

recognition, community status, remuneration, workload, health, and quality of education may be easier to determine once overall, realistic objectives are identified and understood. This balancing of the needs and requirements of the community, students and teachers, in such a manner as to avoid paradigmatic divisions, may well be the major challenge for public education in Western Australia in the twenty-first century.

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