

Life on & off the job:

A Time-Use Study of Nova Scotia Teachers

Executive Summary

A project "Life On and Off the Job: A Time-Use Study of Nova Scotia Teachers" was commissioned by the Nova Scotia Teachers Union to explore the temporal realities of teaching activities and the way they interface with personal and family life. The study was motivated by a need to understand the implications of increasing demands made on teachers by multiple and uncoordinated changes, including increased accountability, a policy of inclusion, centralised curriculum development, and downsizing being imposed on the system, resulting in job intensification. This is the first report based on data collected for that project. It describes the methodology used, the sample from whom data were collected, and initial findings from the data.

The methodology adopted was based on the internationally accepted standard time-diary approach, which is widely accepted as the most reliable means of collecting accurate and reliable time-use data (see Appendix A for coding scheme and Appendix B for diary format). The current study expanded on the traditional time-diary approach by disaggregating the time spent on the job to better understand the range of activities teaching entails. Typically, in time-diary studies, time at work has been included as a "black box" in aggregate terms only. Internationally, this study is among the pioneers to utilise a standard time-diary approach to explore the teaching profession.

The survey instrument used to collect the data for this report was an expansion of one used every five years since 1975 in the Netherlands. It was sent to 1800 randomly sampled teachers throughout the province of Nova Scotia. The sample was deemed to reflect adequately the distributions of both regional school boards and school levels. Overall, there was a 45.7% response rate, which varied considerably from one regional board to another.

More than three-quarters of the respondents are classroom teachers and female. More than one-third have greater than 25 years of experience. Almost 75% of the respondents have children in their household. In processing the data full-time and part-time teachers were distinguished, and the data were adjusted to reflect the appropriate allocation of days of the week.

Preparation time is both desirable and necessary for several reasons, such as the opportunity to commit to and get involved in change, and for restricting the process of intensification in teachers' work (Hargreaves, 1990, 1991). Results from this study indicate that teachers are receiving an average of 179 minutes of preparation time per cycle, which is simply not enough time, given all the changes occurring within the classroom and in education generally. This assertion is supported by the time-diary data, which indicate that teachers perform an average of 630 minutes of preparation activities per week.

A result of the demanding nature of the teaching profession, over 90% of teachers either seldom or never feel they have time on their hands. Additionally, over 80% either often or always feel rushed each day. Therefore, we suggest that teachers do not have adequate time to reflect on their teaching, they do not have time to work collaboratively with their peers, and they do not have time to refuel emotional and physical reserves.

The nature and demands of teaching have changed significantly, with many activities generating increased demands on teachers' time. Changing job demands, followed closely by other paperwork, work-related meetings, and IPP's have led to the greatest increase in the time required to perform different teaching activities. The intensification of teachers' work invariably leads to prioritising of activities that are rewarded over those activities that are not (Robertson, 1996).

Students are perceived as the losers in the process of recent educational changes since the greatest perceived decrease has been in time spent with individual students, suggesting that activities with individual students are often not rewarded by the system, while paperwork and meetings typically are.

Teachers believe that other people's perceptions of the teaching profession have changed for the worse over the past five years. Teachers appear to believe that the greater the distance between other people and the daily realities of the classroom, the lower their view of the teaching profession. The ramifications of this are that, in the teachers' view, federal and provincial politicians are perceived to have the poorest understanding or appreciation of the teaching profession, yet these people are the power brokers of our society. These results suggest the potential for fostering a sense of hopelessness, cynicism and demoralisation among Nova Scotia's teachers.

More than 80% of respondents indicated they feel they are trying to take on too many things at once, and about 75% feel that others expect too much of them. Seventy-five percent said they worry about not spending enough time with family and friends. Obvious ramifications include feelings of guilt, resentment of job demands, and anxiety from the fear of not meeting expectations. The most stressful job-related activities are teaching, professional development and other meetings. Teachers identified teaching and professional development as the most stressful aspects of their lives.

Teaching (employed work) is the most stressful activity performed by teachers. However, teaching is comprised of a myriad of different, yet interrelated, activities. Of these teaching-related activities, student discipline is the most stressful activity, followed by committee work and IPP's. Stress associated with class instruction ranks seventh out of the fifteen different teaching activities.

Interestingly, the teachers' estimate of time they spend on teaching-related activities, 51 hours a week, is lower than the diary estimate of 52.5 work-hours of teaching-related activities per week. For classroom teachers, over 40% of these hours are spent on class instruction, amounting to less than half of their total work time. Hence, activities other

than instruction contribute very significantly to their workday and are often performed as “homework.”

- One-third of teachers' time is spent on class instruction and tutoring.
- Twenty percent of teachers' time is spent on preparation, most of which is homework.
- Over ten percent of teachers' time is spent on marking and grading.
- Meetings and paperwork/report cards each consume another four to seven percent of teachers' time.
- Other work-related activities, mainly supervision, administration, and extra-curricular activities, account for the remaining time.

School administrators perform 56.7 work-hours of teaching-related activities per week. Administrators, expectedly, spend the greatest (23.8%) proportion of their work-hours on administrative activities. These activities -- combined with paperwork, meetings, telephone calls, and preparation-- account for almost three-quarters of their total work hours.

Based on survey results, more than 80% of teachers are involved in some aspect of the IPP process. These teachers are each responsible for an average of 4.8 IPP's. The responsibilities associated with these students constitute a demand on teachers' time resources of an average of 4.2 additional work-hours per week for teachers with IPP's compared to those without IPP students.