C. Is it a workload issue?: It is the relentlessness that is the problem.

Give a teacher a group of students, a curriculum, some success criteria or learning goals, and there will never be enough time to make the deep changes in attitude, achievement, social, and emotional goals. This is the nature of teachers. Some argue teachers are time-poor – which is impossible as we all have the same time (and this is such an unnecessarily negative view), whereas a more apt claim is teachers work in the present (noted some time ago by Greene, 1984 and Postman, 1969). This is the teachers' reality, where all their personal, social, emotional, and intellectual resources are focused at the moment to create the best opportunities to accelerate learning. Any additional demands can be stressful, require prioritising, and detract from what they see as their core focus – teaching. Thus, in one sense, teachers are easily 'overloaded' and readily have evidence to complain about workload issues. And not surprisingly, they have complained about workload from the year dot.

Most studies about the workload of educators are based on self-reports, which leads notoriously to overestimation (and this is the case across all professions). This overestimation is higher when the work is more intense and requires high levels of cognitive engagement and emotional investment, when social norms already point to long hours, and professionals want to appear dedicated and hardworking. Some recent claims based on self-report include 76% of Australian teachers reporting their workload as unmanageable (Monash), 95% report working over-time during a typical week (AITSL), on average, teachers spend 45 hours on school grounds and more at home (AEU), and 45% work 60+ hours a week (AITSL).

From the TALIS (OECD) report, teachers in Australia claim they spend 4.1 hours on general administrational work (9% of their total working hours) compared to Finnish teachers, who spend 1.1 hours (3% of total working hours). Australian teachers also devote more time to 'other work tasks,' 2.6 hours (6% of their time) compared to Finnish teachers, who spend only 0.9 hours (3%) on these tasks. While Finnish teachers report spending similar hours teaching (20.7 hours, compared to Australian teachers 19.9 hours), they work far fewer hours in total (33.3 hours vs. Australia's 44.8 per week). Although the proportion of time spent on lesson planning (15 to 17%), communication with parents (3 to 4%), and marking student work (9 to 11%) was similar in the countries reviewed (except for Singapore teachers who spent 16% of their working hours marking students work). Australian teachers also spent proportionally more time participating in school management (2.4 hours, 5% of their total working hours) compared to other countries and more time on professional development (1.8 hours, 5% of total working hours) and extra curriculum activities (1.8 hours, 4% of total working hours) compared to Finland. Australian teachers were also more collaborative, with the most time spent on 'teamwork and dialogue with colleges within the school' (3.7 hours, 8% of total working hours) compared to the other countries reviewed.

The contrast is marked: Australian teachers spent, on average, 44% of their workweek teaching compared to 62% for Finnish teachers. Australian teachers work longer weeks because of out-of-class activities, like general administrative tasks, professional development, teamwork, and dialogue with colleagues. None of the tasks is necessarily 'bad,' but maybe we need to find ways to use these "additional adults' we have added to schools to allow teachers to return to their passion – teaching. For example, we could train Teaching Assistants to help with administrative tasks, marking, extra curricula activities, and lesson preparation. We rarely complain about spending workload and time on things that matter to us – and for teachers, this is teaching.

But it is noted these claims are based on self-reports of time use. There are few time and motion studies to add another perspective to these perceptions of workload. Ngwenya (2012) completed one of the few time and motion studies of teachers in Australia. He invited primary teachers to construct daily dairies of their inside and outside school activities. He found that the average time for all school activities was 44 hours a week (20% lower than self-estimated worktimes): planning and preparing (11.2 hrs), teaching their classes (12.3 hrs, which is well below the 24 hours in many Union agreements), teaching with others (3.0 hrs), on-duty (2.2 hrs), professional discussions or learning (4.5 hrs), communication with parents and students (2.2 hrs), staff or out-of-class student supervision (1.8 hrs), administrative tasks (3.4 hrs.), attending meetings (2.2 hrs), and extra-school tasks (1 hr). This allocation and number of activities did not differ for the newer compared to the more experienced staff (but the latter were more involved in a greater diversity of activities), for those in larger or smaller class sizes, and for location (urban, rural, city). They were much higher on Tuesdays, least on Saturdays, and higher in smaller (<300) than larger schools. More experienced teachers worked fewer hours on Tuesdays and longer hours on Sundays than their younger counterparts, but Tuesdays are the most intense work for younger teachers. (Maybe the Boomtown Rats sad song about a school event should be relabeled I Don't Like Tuesdays.)

One notable implication of these two time-and-motion students is the variability of activities, the many distractions to within-class teaching time, and the relentless demands on teachers' time – with an average break across the school week of 1.8 hours: Teachers "rarely enjoy any significant break during a typical week" (p. 133). Ngwenya paints a "picture of overloaded, overworked and possibly overwhelmed teachers" (p. 233) and notes the relentlessness of the tasks and an inordinate amount of time taken by activities other than teaching (15 hours teaching and 32 hours on other tasks). When planning, marking, and preparation are included in 'teaching time,' this leaves 9 hours from a 35-hour week for everything else. Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum (2020) estimated that a typical classroom is interrupted over 2,000 times per year and that these interruptions and disruptions cause a loss of between 10 to 20 days of instructional time per year.

It is this 'everything else' that becomes the focal point for claims of over-working and thus, perhaps it is not surprising that the recent Productivity Commission (also noted above) found that the more teachers spend out-of-the-classroom in middle leaders' roles etc., then the greater are the claims of overload and intention to leave the profession. The proliferation of middle leaders (almost 1 in 5 of NSW teachers) hints that we are finding a way to pay teachers more by inviting them out of the classroom into middle leadership positions. We stretch them, ask them to take on more roles, supervise more non-teachers, and ask them to be superb jugglers of their time while reducing their enjoyment of teaching! The message is how to preserve the focus on teaching, supporting teachers to make that their priority, and creating structures, support, and career structures to recognise this expertise and keep them as close to teaching as reasonable – and keep excellent teachers in the activity they most enjoy, teaching.

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An alternative is to create more time for teaching and/or lengthen the school hours or days per year. Care is needed, however, as merely increasing more time on teaching does not necessarily lead to a greater impact on students. Australia already has one of the longest school days and years of all OECD countries (220 days compared to half this time primarily because of the 6-6.5 hour compared to 4-5 hour day in class time in Finland and Estonia, with the latter two both outperforming Australia in the PISA rankings). Moreover, reducing the 'other than teaching tasks' and time also may not lead to improvements, as it is noted that there are many teachers who balance and cope with the time they have, wish to engage in professional learning etc., and have a high impact on their students. Another alternative is for teachers to have a four-day working week - while students still come for five days, adopting the Singapore model of one-day a week working in a school as per distance learning mode, creative time-tabling of sports, arts, etc. On this fifth day, there could be professional learning, school or department or year collective efficacy days for planning and moderation of marking, where there is time for teachers to reflect, learn informally and formally, and develop professionally alone and in teams. It is the time to improve professionally that is often rated as more critical than lack of sufficient time (Lohman, 2006). We all have the same time. How we use it matters, and whether we have any discretion in how we use it. It is the relentlessness, the variation in attention to so many tasks. Becoming more efficient as well as effective should be the mantra.

The Deloitte (2017) Australia time and motion study of 119 principals in NSW government schools found that they spend 40% of their time leading teaching and learning, 6% on teaching improvement, innovation, and change, 40% on leading the management of the school, 11% engaging with the community, and 3% on other activities. Of note was the remarkable number of different tasks covered during any day, with many (43%) taking less than 5 minutes but demanding attention and solutions. A typical hour includes 40 different activities! Minor allocations were given to policy review and implementation (1%), reporting (5%), technology adoption (1%), financial management (3%), staff performance management (3%), improvement and innovation (1%), strategic planning (2%), and (the most complained about) compliance (3%). It is critical to note that only 1% was allocated to personal time – pointing to the relentlessness and diversity of principal tasks.

The principals noted the "most frequent and highest impact triggers for stress relate to staff welfare, violence amongst students, and a perceived increase in parental entitlements of community 'voice' which needs to be managed" (p. 36). The latter is a concern given the more instant communication channels resulting in greater access to principals during and since COVID. Principals also noted that they do not believe the Department acts in their best interest, too often conducting audits instead of providing support. In addition, they see their line managers as a reporting line rather than coaches or mentors, there is no clear and holistic set of tangible and measurable outcomes for principals to evaluate themselves against, no guidelines to take into consideration when prioritising workload, and they argued there is a need for a success profile of the principal role. While Australian school leaders have professional standards (https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/australian-professional-standard-for-principals), maybe there is a need for developing success profiles of the various phases of leadership from teacher-leaders, middle leaders, deputy principals, new, middle and more experienced school leaders. (It is noted that Middle Leader standards are in the process of being developed and trialed.)

Another strategy is to devote more attention to de-implementation. Do we really have to do ALL the tasks to be as efficient and effective. As Hamilton et al. (2023) outline, this is a very hard task. We asked whether all the tasks educators engage in lead to improvements in student learning? What can we stop to make time for what matters more? Stopping what educators may have been doing for years is difficult (in the same way dieting, engaging in exercise, and changing long-time life habits is hard to stop). We recommend Removing, Reducing Re-engineering, and Replacing and developing a de-implementation process to be more efficient and to Reinvest the saved time and resources to generate stronger returns for the educator and students.