

## TEACHERS' WORK AND WORKING CONDITIONS: COLLABORATING TO DRIVE CHANGE

SUSAN MCGRATH-CHAMP ET AL

*Susan McGrath-Champ et al. introduce a series of articles on teachers' work and working conditions. Their work provides an update to "Understanding work in schools, The Foundation for teaching and learning", the 2018 report to the NSW Teachers Federation. The report examined the administrative demands that encroach on the work of teachers and impede their capacity to focus on tasks directly related to their teaching and to students' learning...*

Across the globe, teachers' workload is a concern. Internationally (OECD, 2022) and within Australia (Gavin et al., 2021) studies show that workload is having adverse effects on teachers' health and wellbeing, and is negatively impacting teacher recruitment and retention. Via a series of projects facilitated and funded by the NSW Teachers Federation, our research over the past ten years has exposed the considerable challenges many teachers face in a schooling system that is increasingly segregated by policies that encourage 'choice' and inequitable funding schemes. Teachers, through all our research, have called for greater support and recognition from their employer, and wish to feel valued for the important work they do in schools. The hallmark, collaborative study *Understanding Work in Schools: A Foundation for Teaching and Learning* (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018) revealed the extent of long working hours by teachers, identified unceasing policy changes and demands as a key cause, documented the vast array of work activities carried out by teachers, and identified strategies that are needed to address this workload problem. This provided a basis for the landmark Gallop Inquiry (Gallop et al., 2020) which confirmed these findings and other pressures facing teachers in their work. Teachers are the heart of students' learning, and good conditions of work improve the learning conditions of students. It is teachers in NSW public schools who have been, and are, fundamental to our stream of research. The suite of short research summaries in this thematic collection shares with Federation members the key findings of this research so far, with access to full papers and reports made available where possible via reference hyperlinks<sup>1</sup>.

Partnership with Federation has been, and continues to be, key to quality research (McGrath-Champ et al.,

2022). Collaboration ensures meaningful, well-informed findings and insights, and is a crucial step to driving needed change in government policy and in schools. Findings from this research have been actioned via Federation's advocacy, negotiation and lobbying of various groups, as well as separately through the Work in Schools Research Team making written submissions to parliamentary (e.g. NSW Legislative Council, 2022) and government (e.g. Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2022) bodies.

This brand new section of the Journal of Professional Learning (JPL) consists of four summaries in broad thematic areas which collate and narrate research publications our team has produced via projects supported by the Teachers' Federation. The first summary, 'Teacher workload and intensifying demands', documents work intensification and overload, and deploys a 'tsunami' analogy to describe the impact of escalating paperwork and administration which requires teachers to 'triage' components of their daily work. Devolution and the neo-liberal drive towards school autonomy are key causes of this workload, which are outlined in the second summary ('The impact of devolutionary reform on teachers and principals'). Other impacts including growing job insecurity, 'job scarring' and increased use of temporary employment are profiled in the third summary ('Temporary teachers and precarious work'). The final summary ('Teachers' voices and their unions') discusses issues of unionism and professionalisation in teaching.

### ENDNOTE:

1. In this introduction and the thematic summaries that follow, we have endeavoured, as much as possible, to cite open-access material for both our own and others'

research. Where this is our own work, we have usually linked to an institutional repository. This page will provide a link to the fully published version of the article and, often, a link to a freely-available 'post-print' version (where journal embargoes allow). Full publication details are also available in the reference lists provided.

## REFERENCES:

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Susan McGrath-Champ** is Professor in Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney Business School, Australia. She has a PhD from Macquarie University, Sydney and a Masters degree from the University of British Columbia, Canada. Her research includes the geographical aspects of the world of work, employment relations and international human resource management. Recent studies include those of school teachers' work and working conditions.



**Meghan Stacey** is a former secondary school teacher and current Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at UNSW Sydney. Meghan's research interests are in the sociology of education and education policy, with a particular focus on the critical policy sociology of teachers' work. Her first book, *The business of teaching: Becoming a teacher in a market of schools*, was published in 2020 with Palgrave Macmillan.



**Dr Scott Fitzgerald** is an Associate Professor in the School of Management at Curtin Business School, Curtin University. His research interests are in the broad areas of industrial relations, human resource management, organisational behaviour and organisation studies. His research expertise also spans various disciplines: sociology, political economy and media and communication studies. A key focus of Scott's recent research has been the changing nature of governance, professionalism and work in the education sector.



**Mihajla Gavin** is a Senior Lecturer in the Business School at the University of Technology Sydney, and has worked as a senior officer in the public sector in Australia across various workplace relations advisory, policy and project roles. Mihajla's research is concerned with analysing the response of teacher unions to neoliberal education reform that has affected teachers' conditions of work.



**Rachel Wilson** is Professor, Social Impact at the University of Technology Sydney. Her research takes a system perspective on design and management of education systems and their workforce. She has expertise in educational assessment, research methods and programme evaluation, with broad interests across educational evidence, policy and practice. She is interested in system-level reform and has been involved in designing, implementing and researching many university and school education reforms.

