

Article

Task-Diaries: A Valuable Qualitative Tool for Occupational Health Research on Teacher Workloads

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Abstract

This article discusses the usefulness of a qualitative tool called a “task-diary,” in combination with individual in-depth interviews, for occupational health research on teacher workloads. I describe my use of task-diaries to examine primary and elementary teachers’ workloads in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, discuss the most useful aspects of task-diaries for this research, and suggest further applications of this tool in the workload research field.

Keywords: task-diaries, interviews, teachers, workload, domestic work, occupational health

Acknowledgements: I wish to thank the thirty participants who so generously gave their time to give me insight into their workloads and well-being. I would also like to thank my doctoral supervisory committee: Dr. Barbara Neis, Dr. Linda Cullum, Dr. Karen Messing, and the late Dr. David Dibbon, and thesis reviewers: Dr. Nicole Power, Dr. Marilyn Porter, and Dr. Andrea Doucet. Finally, I would like to recognize funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, SafetyNet Centre for Occupational Health and Safety Research, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research through the Atlantic RURAL Centre at Dalhousie University, Memorial University’s School of Graduate Studies and Dr. Neis’ fellowship from the Trudeau Foundation.

The aim of this article is to describe and discuss the usefulness of a qualitative tool called a “task-diary,” in combination with individual in-depth interviews, for occupational health research on workload. A task-diary is a diary in which participants record in detail all of the different types of tasks and activities they engage in, including leisure activities as well as occupational and domestic work. I focus on my use of task-diaries to examine primary and elementary teachers’ workloads, both teaching and domestic, in rural and urban areas of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Canada. I was guided by a theoretical framework based on social determinants of health, and focused on the importance of gender as a determinant of health.

Background Literature

A large body of research throughout Canada and the world has shown that on a daily basis many teachers of young children are struggling with heavy workloads (Dibbon 2004; Gannerud, 2001; Hughes, 2012; Messing, Seifert, & Escalona, 1997; Naylor, Schaefer, & Malcomson, 2003; Temple Newhook, 2010; Wang et al., 2009). For example, a survey of 1500 Canadian teachers in the province of British Columbia found that nearly nine in ten teachers described the size of their workload as a source of stress (Schaefer, 2003, p. 65), and two thirds of teachers reported that their workload had increased in the past five years (p. 60). Elements of teachers’ workloads that can erode primary and elementary teachers’ health and well-being include a lack of support from administrators, conflict with parents, student behavioural problems, inclusion of special-needs students in regular classrooms, overcrowding, a lack of autonomy and participation in decision making (particularly regarding curriculum development), emotional labour and other invisible tasks, a lack of preparation and collaboration time, a lack of resources to meet curriculum demands and student needs, and the requirement to perform multiple tasks simultaneously (Dibbon, 2004; King & Peart, 1992; Leithwood, 1999; Messing et al., 1997; Schaefer, 2003). Numerous studies have found that teachers experience very high levels of psychological distress (an umbrella term that includes burnout, depression, anxiety, and fatigue) (Johnson et al., 2005; Messing et al., 1997; Punch & Tuettman, 1990). For example, Johnson et al. (2005) compared 26 different professions and found that teachers scored second highest (next to ambulance workers) on physical and psychological symptoms associated with stress. As Messing et al. (1997) have argued, however, it is generally not one extreme factor in teachers’ workloads that causes psychological distress, but the accumulation of a large number of smaller stressors.

Primary and elementary teachers (primary includes Kindergarten through Grade 3, students aged 5 to 9 years old; elementary includes Grades 4 through 6, students aged 9 to 12 years old) are also an important group of workers to study because they occupy a conflicted position in the world of work. In ways similar to other women-dominated caring professions such as nursing, midwifery, and social work (Armstrong et al., 2002; Benoit, 1987, 1989; Messing et al., 1995), primary and elementary teachers are caught between the idealized advantages of professional work (Larson, 1977) and the taken-for-granted challenges of “women’s work” (Acker, 1996; Drudy, 2008; Gannerud, 2001; Messing, 1998; Messing et al., 1997; Vogt, 2002). Research has found that women who expressed greater concern about combining paid employment and domestic work were also more likely to experience health problems, including exhaustion, headaches, lethargy, insomnia, back pain, fatigue, and depression (Walters, Eyles, Lenton, French, & Beardwood, 1998). Carpentier-Roy (1991) argued that women primary teachers with young children experience increased emotional suffering from combining teaching and domestic work. With the strong continuity between their work at school and their work at home, these teachers face a “16-hour workday” where they must be “mothers all the time and everywhere” (cited in and translated by Messing et al., 1997, p. 45).

My theoretical approach to this research focused on the concepts of work and gender as social determinants of health (Commission on Social Health Determinants, 2008; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Specifically, my focus was on the ways that primary and elementary teachers' workloads are shaped by gender and, in turn, the relationship between differently situated workloads and teachers' health and well-being. The focus on health determinants is a way of understanding the social and cultural factors that affect women's and men's health and well-being (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that health determinants are not simple, separate causal factors, but "social and political constructs ... that are, in the living of them, complex and interconnected" (Gustafson, 2005, p. 272), and can affect different women's and men's health in widely varying ways.

Teachers are an interesting group to study from a social health determinants approach, in part, because they are a relatively privileged group of workers. Teachers enjoy advantages related to many social health determinants. For example, teachers are securely employed and enjoy a relatively high income, education level, and socio-economic status, which would tend to benefit teachers' health. From an occupational health perspective, it could be theorized that if teachers are experiencing a large number of health concerns, this might indicate that a health determinant such as workload is eroding the positive health benefits of these areas of privilege. For example, a study of women and men nurses in the Netherlands found that workload and "careload" tended to predict emotional exhaustion and sickness absence (Bekker, Croon, & Bressers, 2005).

"Workload" is a complex, multi-faceted concept. Workload can be understood as more than the total number of hours that a worker works or total number of tasks she or he completes. Instead, workload takes into account the importance of the paid and unpaid work of a job as well as unpaid domestic and volunteer work, and the balance between these different types of work (Hochschild, 2003); the diversity, complexity, intensity, and interrelatedness of the activities that make up work; the sense of control and autonomy over work; the fit between expectations and experiences of work; and the fit between skills, training, and work (Messing, 1998; Messing, Neis, & Dumais, 1995; Messing et al., 1997). Rather than simply counting primary and elementary teachers' work hours, in this research I was interested in exploring with them the everyday struggles and joys that make up their workloads, how these vary over time and space, and their strategies and resources for dealing with their workloads.

Methodological Approach

My methodological approach was a feminist action research framework. The guiding principles of feminist action research can be summarized as inclusion, participation, action, social change, and reflexivity (Reid, 2004). The research study was divided into advisory, research, and feedback stages, and included writing a report for the provincial teachers' union, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA).

I conducted 30 individual in-depth interviews, including 24 with primary and elementary teachers and 6 with representatives of other groups in education, including parents, administrators, student assistants (non-teaching, unionized workers who provide support to children with a range of physical and cognitive disabilities), the NLTA, regional school boards, and the Department of Education. Focus groups were also planned, but could not proceed due to the high level of concern surrounding teachers' confidentiality.

The 24 teacher participants included 19 female teachers and 5 male teachers, which is representative of the gender breakdown of the population: In NL, women comprise two thirds of all teachers, 80% of primary and elementary teachers, and over 95% of kindergarten teachers

(Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2006). Eleven teachers were located in rural areas and 13 in urban areas.

I asked participants about their perceptions of primary and elementary teachers' teaching and domestic workloads, the consequences of this work for their health and well-being, and their suggestions for how these workloads could be improved. I developed what I called a "task-diary," a detailed one-day journal, which I then discussed in depth with participants in individual interviews of one to three hours in length. These task-diaries proved to be an effective tool for this study, and are the main focus of this article. Once the initial research was complete, I drafted a summary report for the NLTA. Study participants were invited to offer written feedback on the report, and their feedback was incorporated into the report as well as my doctoral dissertation (Temple Newhook, 2009).

Main Findings of the Teacher Workload Study

Study participants identified five main areas of concern related to their teaching workloads: (a) the intense and all-consuming nature of their work; (b) emotional labour; (c) specific tasks such as supervision duty, paperwork, lesson planning and preparation, student work correction, student evaluations, and the implementation of the Pathways program (the provincial individualized student special needs program); (d) lack of human and material resources; and (e) a persistent sense of invisibility. In addition, I found that teachers, particularly those with young children, were struggling to balance their teaching and domestic work. Years of experience, rural or urban location, and gender were all important factors affecting these workloads. In fact, I described primary and elementary teaching as a "mothering profession" to reflect the way this work is gendered so strongly around mothering. Teachers also raised a number of concerns about the effects of their workloads on their families' well-being, as well as their own. These concerns included tiredness; guilt; feeling overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed; lack of time for themselves; physiological problems, such as headaches, voice problems, and lower limb pain; and difficulty taking time off when ill. These findings point to the importance of developing a broader understanding of health and well-being, and question the taken-for-granted nature of the health concerns of teachers and of women: what I call "ordinary suffering."

The Development of the "Task-Diary" Tool

"If people could only see what our day looks like, and everything that we do ..."
(Rural primary teacher).

Qualitative methods were very important in this study because their strength is in providing rich, detailed descriptions that aim to capture an individual's point of view and experiences, and examine the social structures that shape and constrain them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Many feminist action researchers have used qualitative methods in order "to generate in-depth understandings of women's experiences and put women's diversity at the centre of the analysis" (Reid, 2004, p. 4).

In the case of research on teachers' workloads, however, much of the existing research, such as the rural/urban comparison of Abel and Sewell (1999), has been exclusively based on quantitative methods such as questionnaire and telephone surveys. My research study built upon a recently completed quantitative study of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers' workloads (Dibbon, 2004), which collected information on demographic characteristics, job satisfaction, class size, class composition, preparation and supervision time, curriculum implementation, professional development, and other teaching-related tasks. My study was designed to complement Dibbon's

(2004) quantitative study, providing qualitative data that could offer a more detailed understanding of rural and urban primary and elementary teachers' domestic and teaching workloads, and the consequences of these workloads for teachers' health and well-being.

In total, I conducted 30 interviews. I also asked each of the 24 primary and elementary classroom teachers to keep a detailed task-diary of their teaching and domestic work for a period of one day, which I then discussed with them in-depth during our 1- to 3-hour-long individual interview.

Individual interviews with teachers were important to my research design because they provided the opportunity for participants to speak, in person and one-on-one, about the workload issues that were most important to them. This enabled me to better understand how workload affects teachers' lives individually. The individual setting also meant that I was able to talk to teachers about issues that some might not have felt as comfortable talking about in a group. Each teacher had my full attention; we both had the opportunity to ask questions or have certain points clarified. Individual interviews, however, can be quite intense (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995; Weiss, 1994), and so I had to be prepared for the variety of emotions that teachers expressed. Several teachers became tearful during the interview, and many expressed frustration or anger.

Many studies of teachers' workloads (e.g., Bartlett, 2002; Messing et al., 1997; Naylor et al., 2003) and of the balance between occupational and domestic work (e.g., Craig & Powell, 2011; Gershuny, 2011) have employed a primarily quantitative tool called a "time-use diary." Time-use diaries require participants to indicate, for varying periods of time throughout a day, the activities in which they are engaged. The time-use diaries may be open-ended, but are primarily close-ended, simply requiring participants to select from a set of pre-determined possibilities. In teacher workload research, time-use diaries are generally designed to focus solely on teaching work, and aim to quantify the specific number of hours and minutes of employment-related work. Time-use diaries are often used to record activities in minute detail, for example, in 5-minute intervals (Gershuny, 2011). This gives time-use diaries the strength of very precise information about the amount of time spent in various activities, and thus the data they provide can be used in complex multivariate analyses to give representative statistical generalizations about time-use. This data, however, is less suited to qualitative analysis on participants' perceptions of their tasks and workloads.

For this study, I focused on a more complex definition of workload that included the overlap between teachers' teaching work and domestic work. Thus, I required a tool that would combine quantitative and qualitative elements in order to estimate the number of hours teachers spend on different types of activities, including teaching and domestic tasks, and to examine and discuss the different types of work that teachers do. The feminist action research approach emphasizes involving participants in the development of the research, including methodology. In the preliminary research stage, I engaged in discussions with the NLTA, as well as a key informant, to plan the research methodology. These discussions brought to my attention the common concern among teachers that their workloads were almost "invisible"—very poorly understood and respected outside of the profession (an issue discussed in detail in my thesis (Temple Newhook, 2009)). This made me aware of the need for a research tool that would allow teachers to illustrate their daily workloads in detail. Time-use diaries are often very time-consuming for participants because they require constant minute recording of activity. In the preliminary research stages, my discussions with the NLTA and a key informant indicated that such recording would be unduly burdensome for teachers. The tool needed to be simple and efficient, without interrupting participants' workday or requiring a large time commitment. Teachers are accustomed to preparing a lesson plan for each day and detailing their plans for each class of the day; and so, ideally, teachers would be able to complete the tool by the end of the day, with

reference to the lesson plan. The tool also needed to provide more in-depth detail than a standard time-use diary, which would primarily involve recording hours or minutes spent in work-related tasks (Gershuny, 2011). For this reason, I decided to modify the time-use diary method and designed a “task-diary.” The task-diary is intended to be used in conjunction with the individual interviews, and this is key to its strength as a workload research tool. A sample of a completed task-diary can be found in Figure 1 below. This sample task-diary is based on the handwritten task-diary of an urban elementary teacher who participated in this study, with identifying details removed or changed.

Figure 1. Sample Completed Task-Diary.

Task-Diary Instructions:

1. Choose a day to complete the task-diary. Enter the date in the space provided above the table.
2. Throughout the day, whenever you have the opportunity, please record your activities next to the approximate times when the activities were carried out. Please include all types of activities, including teaching tasks, chores at home, leisure activities, volunteer work, meals, and sleeping times. You may include as much or as little detail as you wish.
3. When the task-diary has been completed, please indicate whether or not the day was equally busy, more busy, or less busy than a typical weekday.
4. There is also a space provided after the end of the table for any notes that you would like to mention about the day.

Thank you very much.

Your time and effort in participating in this study are greatly appreciated.

TASK-DIARY

Date: April 23rd, 2007

Compared to my typical weekday, today I was: equally busy

TIME	TASK or ACTIVITY
Before 6 a.m.	Sleeping.
6:00 a.m. 6:30 a.m.	6:30 a.m. – Alarm goes off. Shower, get dressed, make bed.
7:00 a.m. 7:30 a.m.	Called up younger child. Go downstairs, got breakfast ready. Unloaded dryer, loaded up dryer and washer. Folded clothes while child had breakfast. 7:30 a.m. – Got lunches ready for two children. Called up older child for school. Cleaned up from breakfast. Made the children’s beds.

<p>8:00 a.m.</p> <p>8:30 a.m.</p>	<p>Got kids to begin getting ready for school – brush teeth, wash face, and comb hair. Put on outside clothes.</p> <p>Had a cup of tea and slice of toast while talking to my mother on the phone.</p> <p>Got kids into the car and went to school.</p> <p>8:30 a.m. – Arrived at school.</p> <p>Greeted the children and listened to stories they had to tell</p> <p>Went to computer lab to get a copy of a Math worksheet for this week.</p> <p>Ran to office to take off 30 copies.</p> <p>8:45 a.m. – Read to the students for 15 minutes.</p> <p>Checked homework and answered questions.</p> <p>Gave out stickers to students with homework completed.</p>
<p>9:00 a.m.</p> <p>9:30 a.m.</p>	<p>Took lunch order.</p> <p>Began lesson in Health.</p> <p>Had students finish a worksheet.</p> <p>Walked around answering questions.</p> <p>9:30 a.m. Language Arts</p> <p>Asked twelve spelling words, collected tests.</p> <p>Administered a spelling check-up. Collected these. Corrected last week’s spelling work as a class. Collected the students’ poems.</p>
<p>10:00 a.m.</p> <p>10:30 a.m.</p>	<p>Gave out spelling for next week. Went over words to make sure they knew how to read them. Provided instructions. Students worked until 10:30. Assigned for homework. Any “free” time is spent with a child in class who has a severe developmental delay and needs one-on-one assistance.</p> <p>10:30 Recess Duty. Supervising 75 children on the playground.</p>
<p>11:00 a.m.</p> <p>11:30 a.m.</p>	<p>10:45 a.m. Math</p> <p>Students had a Math quiz today. Gave the quiz and helped a student who needs assistance with writing tests.</p> <p>Introduced the next unit in Math: decimals.</p> <p>11:50 a.m. Students wrote down homework. I went around to stamp agendas to ensure that it is done properly and no one “accidentally” leaves anything out. Students are not permitted to go to lunch unless agendas are stamped. Assisted child with severe developmental delay to get homework typed on computer.</p>
<p>12:00 p.m.</p> <p>12:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Lunch Duty (again) from 12:00 to 12:25. Supervising 150 children in the cafeteria, with another teacher.</p> <p>12:25 – 12:45 Gulped down my lunch in the staff room, while making 30 copies of a Religion worksheet. Photocopier jammed so almost late getting to class.</p>
<p>1:00 p.m.</p> <p>1:30 p.m.</p>	<p>12:45 p.m. Social Studies. Continued with the lesson from last day.</p> <p>1:15 p.m. Prep Period. (Finally got to the washroom!) Started correcting Math tests. Interrupted by school board worker who came to install two new whiteboards (unannounced). I had to find another room for my students, then take 15 minutes to remove posters from my walls to accommodate the workers. Corrected a few more tests, then cleaned up classroom from whiteboard installation.</p>
	<p>1:45 p.m. Religion. Began new lesson. Students finished questions.</p>

2:00 p.m.	2:15 p.m. Art. Took students to the Art Room to do a painting project.
2:30 p.m.	2:45 p.m. Back to class for dismissal. Had students clean up classroom and get ready to go. Completed behaviour form on child with severe developmental delay (daily form) to be sent home to be signed. Gave out spelling tests.
3:00 p.m.	3:10 p.m. Met with another teacher to discuss next year's classes and determine numbers, placement, etc.
3:30 p.m.	3:30 p.m. Went over Math lesson for tomorrow and finished tidying classroom.
4:00 p.m.	4:00 p.m. Left for home
4:30 p.m.	4:15 p.m. Got home and started immediately on homework with older child, who had an exam the next day. Younger child complained she was sick and hot. Not feeling well. Gave her some medication and she lay down for a while. Read to her to make her feel better.
5:00 p.m.	5:15 p.m. Got supper ready, while still helping older child with homework. Husband got home and helped with supper.
5:30 p.m.	
6:00 p.m.	6:00 p.m. Supper. Younger child feeling better.
6:30 p.m.	6:30 p.m. Have cup of tea with husband. Playtime with younger child, watch the news out of the corner of my eye.
7:00 p.m.	7:30 p.m. Got younger child ready for bed. Brush teeth, wash and get into bed. Read to younger child for about 30 minutes.
7:30 p.m.	
8:00 p.m.	8:10 p.m. Tidy up house.
8:30 p.m.	8:30 p.m. Take out Math tests. Corrected these and the spelling tests until 10:45 p.m.
9:00 p.m.	Correcting
9:30 p.m.	
10:00 p.m.	Correcting.
10:30 p.m.	10:45 p.m. Watch some of night time news – sit, breathe and chat with my husband for a few minutes.

<p>11:00 p.m.</p> <p>11:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Got ready for bed. Cannot sleep because younger child continues to cough. Thinking about what I will do if she is too sick to go to school. How will I get lesson plans completed and into school? ... as I don't know anyone to look after her. What will I have the students do with me not there? Finally drifted off to sleep.</p>
<p>After 12 a.m.</p>	<p>3:00 a.m. Younger child wakes me up complaining she is sick. I get her a drink of water and some cough medicine. She settles in bed with me and quickly goes to sleep. So do I!!</p> <p>6:30 a.m. Alarm goes off and I get to do it all over again!!!</p>

NOTES: I have 31 students in my class. 7 are on Pathways, including one who has a severe developmental delay.

Using Task-Diaries and Interviews Together

Participating teachers were initially contacted via letter-mail. Once the teachers agreed to participate, I mailed each of them a consent form and a blank form for the task-diary, along with instructions, and followed this up with a telephone call in order to discuss the study and to answer any questions about how the task-diary should be completed. I listed the potential harms and benefits of participating in the research in the consent form that all participants signed as part of the informed consent process. I also discussed these harms and benefits with each participant verbally before they signed the form. I let participants know that this research would not necessarily benefit them personally, but that the overall aim is to work with participants to develop knowledge that could be beneficial for teachers as a group. I also made it very clear to participants that their participation was voluntary, that they could refuse to answer any questions, that they could leave at any time during the interview, and that any information they provided would be destroyed if they so requested.

For a period of one day, I asked teachers to report all the different tasks and activities they engaged in, including leisure activities as well as other types of work: schoolwork (in the school building and at home); volunteer work; domestic work, such as childcare and elder care; and domestic chores, such as shopping, food preparation, and housework. I asked teachers to report whether the day was more, less, or equally busy compared with most other weekdays (Messing et al., 1997). I asked for a description of all activities because the definition of work is very ambiguous, particularly when multitasking or when engaged in an activity that could be seen as leisure or as work, such as spending time with children. I intended for the inclusion of all activities to encourage discussion in the interviews of issues such as the continuity between teaching and mothering (Acker, 1996; Carpentier-Roy, 1991; Gannerud, 2001). I asked the teacher participants to complete the task-diaries in advance so that we would have the opportunity to discuss the task-diaries together during the interviews.

Once the task-diaries were completed, I conducted in-depth individual interviews with each of the teacher participants. All but three of the interviews were conducted in person, and took place in a mutually agreed upon location, such as the teacher's home or a community centre. The remaining three interviews were conducted via telephone. I recorded 22 of the interviews with a digital audio recorder, and later transcribed them verbatim. Two of the teachers preferred not to be taped, and I instead took notes throughout the interview and wrote them up in a more detailed form immediately following the interview. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a general

list of topics rather than specific questions. In each interview, I began by carefully going through the task-diary with the participant, asking for clarification and detail as we discussed the day that had been recorded. As the interview progressed, I asked the teacher about her or his perceptions of their teaching and domestic workloads, the health consequences of these workloads, and their ideas for how their workloads could be improved.

I understand interviewing to be an active process, where both the interviewer and the respondent are actively involved in making meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995). By discussing the task-diaries, I encouraged teachers to explore their perspectives on the different types of work they do in different parts of their lives. As Gubrium and Holstein (1995) have explained, “[r]ather than searching for the best or most authentic answer, the aim is to systematically activate applicable ways of knowing – the possible answers – that respondents can reveal, as diverse and contradictory as they might be” (p. 37).

Analysis of the Task-Diaries

I analyzed the task-diaries systematically with the interview transcripts. As I examined each interview transcript, I simultaneously analyzed that teacher’s task-diary, using a process of multiple readings. I first read carefully through the task-diary and transcript, along with any notes I had taken at that time, to establish an overall understanding of the teacher’s perspective, and to get an understanding of the types of tasks in which the participant was engaged at different times throughout the day. I then read through a second time and corrected any typographical errors in the transcript. During the third reading of the task-diaries and transcripts, I carefully went through each page and divided the statements the teacher had made into four categories: teaching workload concerns, domestic workload concerns, health and well-being, and recommended solutions. (I also did the same for the notes I had taken during the interview, including notes I had taken while the tape recorder was turned off but that the teachers permitted me to use in the study). Finally, I read through the task-diaries and transcripts and sorted the categorized statements into documents headed by topic (e.g., “supervision duty” or “tiredness”), and organized the documents into separate folders that were titled according to the four categories mentioned above. As I analyzed the task-diaries and transcripts, I continually referred back to the research literature in order to situate the new understandings that I developed into the context of previous theory and research (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). For example, when I realized how much emphasis participants placed on feeling that others did not recognize or appreciate much of their work, I reviewed more research on invisible work (e.g., Messing, 1998; Messing et al., 1995). By combining the analysis of the interviews and the task-diaries, I benefited from the advantages of both methods. The analysis of the task-diaries allowed me to develop a fuller understanding of the details of teachers’ daily workloads and, in combination with the interviews, allowed me to understand teachers’ feelings about different aspects of their workloads, as I illustrate below.

Discussion: Effectiveness of Task-Diaries as a Qualitative Tool for Workload Research

The three most effective elements of the task-diaries for research on teachers’ workloads and health were that they facilitated (a) the examination of different types of work and workloads; (b) the exploration of the ways that workloads vary at different times of the day, week, and school year; and (c) the documentation of the multitasking nature of teachers’ workloads.

Examining Different Types of Work

As I conducted the research, I found the task-diaries served as an excellent tool for drawing attention to the diversity of teachers' work tasks and workload experiences. I found the task-diaries were invaluable in initiating discussion and encouraging elaboration of all aspects of participants' lives, not simply their work as teachers. The task-diaries also highlighted the importance for teachers of many types of issues that are not generally well captured in questionnaires, such emotional labour, interruptions, the cumulative nature of small tasks, and the intricate balance of teaching and domestic work.

The task-diaries were an important reminder for teachers of the emotional work they do throughout the day; work they were able to elaborate on in the interview. Teaching frequently involves intense "emotional labour"—work required to manage one's emotions: to mask certain feelings or "perform" a certain way for others (Hargreaves, 1992, 2001; Hochschild, 1985). Teachers recorded in their task-diaries and then talked about activities, such as monitoring the anxiety level of a child with emotional problems, making time to talk with a child who has an ill father, bringing clothes for a child from an impoverished family, hugging a withdrawn child who recently came to the country as a refugee, or calming a mentally-challenged child having an angry outburst. Through the task-diaries and interviews, the teachers in this study were clear that taking care of children's emotional and social needs had become a significant element of their workloads.

Through our discussions of the task-diaries, it also became clear that constant interruptions were intensifying teachers' workloads. One rural primary teacher remarked that she had not realized how frequently she was interrupted throughout the school day until she recorded the interruptions in her task-diary. Similarly, as I discussed an urban primary teacher's task-diary with her, she described the variety of interruptions that she encountered in a typical day:

You're in the middle of a lesson and the secretary might buzz down and say, "I got so-and-so on the phone, she's one of your [Grade] parents, she missed the meeting, she's wondering can she swing by lunch time and pick up the take-home package." ... Or you're in the middle of a lesson and somebody's knocking on the door because they're looking for something that rolls, or they're looking for something that they remember seeing in [your] room. Or somebody's brother or sister has a message for them, and they just come down whenever's convenient for them.

The task-diaries also helped to reveal another important characteristic of teachers' workloads, what Messing et al. (1997) referred to as "the global workload": the sum total of the multiple small tasks that comprise teachers' workloads (p. 49). While individually these tasks would be manageable, in combination this larger number of tasks, plans, and information can be mentally intense. As participants reviewed their task-diaries, many commented that despite the large number of tasks they recorded, it had not been possible to write down every single task they performed in a day. Over and over again, teachers explained that they do not just teach—they counsel, advise, settle conflicts, wipe tears, apply Band-Aids, calm tempers, and are constantly switching from one role to the next. An urban elementary teacher surprised herself when she re-examined her task-diary. It was packed with work tasks from morning until night. She exclaimed, "It does sound really hectic, doesn't it? When you read it. But it is." One urban primary teacher argued strongly that the extra tasks fulfilled by primary and elementary teachers tend to be taken for granted as part of their "mothering" role: "These extra duties, under the umbrella of motherhood, have to be recognized as not just babysitting. Because sometimes that's what people think of us as."

Finally, the task-diaries revealed many details about teachers' domestic workloads, and the balance they tried to achieve between domestic work, teaching work, and (sparse) leisure time. It became clear that mothers of young children, in particular, were struggling with heavy workloads at school and at home. The task-diaries showed these women at work even in the middle of the night: correcting until 2 a.m., comforting a toddler at 3 a.m., being woken to give medicine to an ill child, and lying awake trying to figure out childcare arrangements. Task-diaries also showed that leisure time for teachers in this study, particularly mothers of young children, tended to be broken up in small chunks. For example, the only time in an urban elementary teacher's day when she was not working was 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening. For the rest of her day, this teacher was working to meet the demands of the children in her class and her children at home. In fact, when she reviewed her task-diary and was asked about her time to herself, she replied that she barely knew what it was like to have her own time: "There's no time. ... Every minute of the day is counted for."

Comparing Workloads at Different Times

Teachers would often compare tasks from the recorded day to tasks during other times of the week, year, or other stages of their career. This meant that the combination of task-diaries with a follow-up discussion in a face-to-face interview facilitated an understanding of the ways that teachers' workloads vary at different time periods. From an occupational health perspective, this also helped me to grasp teachers' "cumulative exposure" to various workload concerns.

The task-diaries made it clear that teachers complete a great deal of their teaching work, such as planning, preparation, and correcting, as well as meeting with parents and co-workers, outside of regular school hours. The task-diaries showed that the average number of hours that the teachers spent doing schoolwork on the day recorded was about nine and a half hours. As we discussed the task-diaries, teachers also compared their weekday workloads to their weekend workloads, and described the work they do on weekends, during holidays, and during the summer (see also Naylor et al., 2003). As one urban primary teacher explained:

Every night you have schoolwork to do. I don't know any other way to do it, I just don't. And on the weekends you have schoolwork. And if you don't, if you say 'I'm just not!' then, guess what? Then you've got a bigger pile next time you sit down.

The task-diaries were also very useful in showing that during the school day, even when teachers were not on supervision duty, scheduled breaks such as recess and lunch were often taken up with work tasks. For example, in one rural primary teacher's task-diary, she listed the following activities during her 20-minute recess "break": monitored a child with special nutrition needs, set homework for absent children, spoke to the special needs teacher about supplementary work for a student, did some correcting, tidied materials in the art room in preparation for a later class, spoke to a parent who came to her classroom, and called the secretary for the parent. The lack of breaks is particularly important in relation to occupational health because research has shown that rest periods are very important for workers' well-being (Takahashi, Nakata, Haratini, Ogawa, & Arito, 2004). After reading her task-diary, and noting how much she did in the run of a day, one urban primary teacher wrote at the end of her task-diary, "I now realize why I am so tired."

Documenting Complex Multitasking

The task-diaries were also particularly useful in helping me to understand the truly multitasking nature of teachers' teaching and domestic workloads, and to explain why, as one rural primary teacher put it, "the hours that a teacher puts in can't be counted." The task-diaries documented the

complex multitasking that teachers use to get through both their domestic and teaching work. More important, the task-diaries made it evident that it can be nearly impossible to distinguish between time spent on teaching work, time spent on domestic work, and leisure time, because teachers so often engaged in multiple activities simultaneously. This is an important consideration for research based solely on quantitative time-use diaries that categorize time periods with a single activity. My findings with the task-diaries suggest that the validity of strictly quantitative time-diaries may be limited for workers who depend heavily on multitasking.

Multitasking was indeed a highly important strategy for these teachers both in their teaching work and in their management of their teaching and domestic workloads. For example, teachers wrote in their task-diaries about correcting student work while they were doing the laundry; glancing at the news while they made supper and comforted a child; keeping an eye on their own children playing while they prepared lessons; and going over options for helping a student while doing the dishes. One urban elementary teacher illustrated her multitasking skills as she went through her task-diary: “While doing schoolwork, I can also get home-made supper ready, as well as supervising the children with ... their schoolwork for the evening.” Yet this multitasking that teachers use to manage their workloads can also be very fatiguing. One rural primary teacher explained to me in detail various multi-tasking strategies she has come up with to manage her teaching workload, a lengthy commute, and caring for two preschool children, which included doing preparation and correcting work during the drive. Initially, she said, “I don’t have a horrific work load ... It’s a lot of work, but it’s all things that you have to do.” But as the interview progressed, she admitted that she was feeling exhausted, and said quietly, “Maybe I’m run ragged ... Yeah, I pretty well am.” This finding supports recent research by Offer and Schneider (2011), who studied gender differences and multitasking among dual-earner families in the United States. The authors found that women tended to spend an average of 10 more hours per week multitasking than did men. Women also perceived multitasking more negatively than did men, with increased negative emotions, stress, psychological distress, and work-family conflict.

Implications for Health and Well-Being

In this study, the task-diaries helped to make clear that being healthy and feeling well are about more than just the absence of illness or injury (Walters & Denton, 1997). Most participants in this study described themselves as generally being in good physical health. Nevertheless, as we examined their task-diaries together, most would slowly begin to reveal more and more concerns for their well-being. Teachers talked about their concern for how their workloads affect their spouses, their children, and their elderly parents, and also explained the toll these concerns have on their own health, including tiredness; guilt; feeling overwhelmed, rushed, or stressed; lack of time for themselves; physiological problems, such as headaches, voice problems, and lower limb pain; and difficulty taking time off when ill. These findings indicate that researchers’ attention should be drawn beyond the issue of stress, which is so dominant in teacher workload literature, to encompass a broader understanding of the concept of well-being that takes into account the importance of teachers’ and women’s ordinary suffering.

Conclusion

In this research study, the combination of task-diaries with follow-up discussion in a face-to-face interview proved to be a very fruitful methodology to use with a qualitative, sociological approach to understanding primary and elementary teachers’ workload concerns.

Task-diaries have the potential to be a useful tool for many types of research, and for workload research in particular. Workload can be conceptualized as a simple quantitative concept, taking

into consideration only the number of hours worked in a given time period. I would argue that it is often much more productive to explore workload as a multifaceted concept that takes into account the importance of multiple types of work, including the paid and unpaid work of an occupation, unpaid domestic and volunteer work, and the balance between these different types of work (Hochschild, 2003); the diversity, complexity, intensity, and interrelatedness of the activities that make up work; the sense of control and autonomy over work; the fit between expectations and experiences of work; and the fit between skills, training, and work (Messing, 1998; Messing et al., 1995; Messing et al., 1997). Task-diaries can be used to better grasp such intricate details of workload concerns.

It might be that task-diaries are also particularly suited to studying teachers—a group of workers who are accustomed to keeping detailed records of their daily activities. Task-diaries would also likely work well in other such occupational areas—for example, with nurses or social workers. They might be less useful for other occupations where detailed record keeping is not as common, such as factory workers or some types of trades workers. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to find out how task-diaries might be employed for research in those types of occupations as well, especially if modified to better fit a variety of types of work and workloads.

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