

# Introduction

What has been the impact of various policy initiatives on the working lives of teachers over the last two decades? Has the government's remodelling agenda made a life in teaching easier and more fulfilling, as it was intended to do; and if not what is preventing the desired improvements from taking place? These are the central themes which this book seeks to address.

The research on which the book is based has been carried out over a five-year period. It began with an exploration of teacher's lives in primary schools in 2002 prompted in part by a report to government by Price Waterhouse Cooper in 2001, suggesting that the tasks teachers performed could be divided into 'low' and 'high' level activities, recommending that the former could either be done by less well qualified staff or automated using the latest information technology. Following our first study in primary schools we explored these issues in a secondary context, with a third study focusing on inclusive policies, which had proved such a recurring theme in the two prior studies. Since the Remodelling Workforce Agreement was also being implemented over the same period, we returned to some of the schools we had visited earlier to determine what changes had taken place and to assess their impact on teachers' work-life balance.

Chapter One considers the effects of 'intensification', the resultant loss of autonomy and a sense of no longer being in control of how and what one teaches. Chapter Two takes a historical perspective, charting ways in which policy initiatives over the last two decades have added to the pressures in the workplace. The following five chapters then further explore the impact of policy changes on teachers' lives, with particular focus on the remodelling process and special needs provision. Chapter Eight deals with the ever expanding role of the Teaching Assistants who, under remodelling, have assumed many of the tasks formally thought to be the sole prerogative of qualified teachers.

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Chapter Nine then takes on an international perspective, charting common themes in four countries (Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia). 'Intensification' is a prevailing concern, leaving many teachers with the feeling that time-consuming initiatives are designed to control performance rather than benefit pupils' educational development. In brief, teachers feel they are no longer trusted to teach effectively. This is a significant finding since early research on 'teacher burnout' demonstrated that coping with the high stress levels was possible, provided teachers felt that they retained a high degree of autonomy in deciding what and how to teach. In the final chapter, therefore we try to take a positive stance and to suggest ways in which the stress caused by these 'universal problems' might be eliminated, or at best reduced.

However, this book is more than an account of the working conditions of teachers. Across the globe research indicates that the lives of teachers are more stressful and that the balance between their personal lives and work is often unacceptable to their families and close friends. Yet this situation does not appear amenable to the more straightforward explanations often put forward to account for this state of affairs. In the UK, for example, teachers claim that the pressure emanates from the centralised reforms which are accompanied by excessive bureaucratic procedures, but in Australia, where central government has little control over education policy teachers also complain of similar pressures. Again in Hong Kong, workloads are in excess of those reported elsewhere but the aim of government reform has been to reduce central control and give more freedom to schools.

It would seem likely, therefore, that across the globe there exist a variety of explanations to account for the present circumstances in teaching so that in the final analysis, insofar as there are common solutions, these need to concentrate on what teachers, schools and those who work with them and are concerned for their welfare can do to make schools better places for teachers and for those whose future they vouchsafe,

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Our final thanks go to the teachers who gave up their time to answer our questions. Without them there would be no book. We trust that there was some benefit in being able to talk to an 'outsider' who had some sympathetic

understanding of their problems. It is our hope that this book helps to reduce this dissonance by widening the debate about work-life balance beyond mere managerial solutions.

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