

# Intensification and Complexity in Teachers' Narrated Worklives

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## Abstract

Reflecting on a previous study of teachers' narratives, this epistolary conversation follows ideas of intensification and complexity that emerged in the authors' return to the narrative accounts. Their conversation highlights representations of teaching as a struggle for recognition, personal happiness, and security—all within a system of accountability. Of central concern is the concept of complicity and how it is related to the seduction of consent through which teachers encounter a discourse of professionalism. By way of countering a misrecognized professionalism, the authors suggest that teachers' narrative writings can be a means of forming a critical stance.

*Keywords:* kaiwa, epistolary conversation, narrative inquiry, worklife, ethics, professionalism, intensification, accountability

## Résumé

En s'appuyant sur une étude précédente de narratifs d'enseignants, cette conversation épistolaire suit l'idée de l'intensification et la complexité émergeant du retour des auteurs sur leurs récits narratifs. Leur conversation souligne les représentations de l'enseignement comme un combat pour la reconnaissance, le bonheur personnel et la sécurité—l'ensemble dans un système de responsabilité. Le concept de complicité et la manière dont il est relié à la séduction du consentement via lequel les enseignants rencontrent un discours de professionnalisme sont des problématiques centrales. En luttant contre un professionnalisme mal reconnu, les auteurs suggèrent que les récits narratifs des enseignants peuvent être un moyen de former une position critique.

*Mots-clés* : kaiua, conversation épistolaire, enquête narrative, vie professionnelle, éthique, professionnalisme, intensification, responsabilité

## The Background of Teachers' Worklife Narratives<sup>1</sup>

*To begin, dear S,*

Setting the context for this article, we must look back over the few years during which it has been gradually taking shape. In 2010, we completed a narrative inquiry as one branch of a multi-method study for the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation. Seven teacher-narrators had contributed data for this branch of the project, broadening the spectrum of methods for the overall study, which also included a survey and a daily log for statistical analysis, as well as a focus group for more qualitative work.

Do you recall how, in a meeting where we presented a kind of unitary report on our multi-method study, those who heard it seemed so impressed with the narrative detail in one participant's representation of herself as a teacher: one who, in the Canadian winter, spends all of the scant daylight hours inside the school; one on whom there is darkness when she arrives, and darkness when she departs; one who comes and goes in darkness? This image stood out in sharp relief against the other sorts of data amongst which our inquiry had its place. The survey drew one sketch according to statistical analysis; the log of daily activities, marking a "typical" workday, drew another sketch by similar means; then there was a "focus group" exercise in which utterances were *collectivized* and hence *anonymous*—but on the qualitative end of the spectrum, the narrative data are considerably more concrete, where the challenge for the writer is, as Freeman (2007) points out, "a *poetic* one, the foremost aim being not to reproduce reality but to actualize and explicate it, to bring meaning into being in such a way that the world is made visible" as the writer sees it (p. 136).

The overall task was to identify key issues for the Federation's upcoming contract negotiations, especially considering the need to represent workload for local teachers. For previous reports of this kind in Canada (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 1995, 1997, 1998; Alberta Teachers' Federation, 1997; Harvey & Spinney, 2000; Belliveau, Liu, & Murphy, 2002; Naylor & Shaeffer, 2003; Dibbon, 2004), we found that a major source of

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1 This article has been developed with the support of funds from the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Public Affairs. It also develops, importantly, from work contracted with the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation. We gratefully acknowledge our colleagues in the PEITF study, Ronald J. MacDonald, Khym Goslin, and Ray Doiron.

ideas had been Hargreaves's (1994) *Changing Teachers, Changing Times*. His treatment of the "intensification thesis" was therefore key to our work in the narrative inquiry. Especially in the detailed teacher narratives, their sense of exponentially intensifying *work-life* experience was overwhelming.

Taking the sense of *worklife* as a portmanteau of *work-life balance* and *home-life* to emphasize continuity as well as balance, or to de-emphasize lines drawn between *work* and *life*, had provided scope for the narrative inquiry. Our main question had been exceedingly simple: *How was your day?* A total of seven participants had kept diaries, as we offered feedback and further questions in response to each entry that came our way. The teacher-narrator-participants, amidst three plenary meetings, began to form distinct representations of their everyday experience of *the job*.

I am sincerely yours,

—C.

*I agree with you, dear C,*

That we have new evidence of "complicated conversation" (Pinar, 2004) at work in the lives of teachers, especially as we have the updated evidence that confirms the trend of work intensification (Apple, 1986; MacDonald, Wiebe, Goslin, Doiron, & MacDonald, 2010). As one of our teacher-narrator-participants, Debbie (pseudonym), January 20, 2010, notes:

Today was a busy day at work. During class time I was reviewing material for exams, and during my prep I was working on my exams, photocopying review sheets, and looking up phone numbers of students with outstanding work. I have a couple of parents yet to reach about late and missing assignments. I will have to try to call in the morning when I get to school. After school I was supervising students who were working on a fundraiser. They need to get contributions ready the first week of next semester, and because of exams next week, they will have to finish this week. (MacDonald et al., 2010, p. 67)

Regarding the increased work intensity that teachers feel, others have documented the most common administrative reply of replacing “instructional time” with “preparation time” (Apple, 1986; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, 1995, 1997, 1998; Alberta Teachers’ Federation, 1997; Naylor & Shaeffer, 2003; Dibbon, 2004). But for our teacher-narrator-participants, this band-aid response to intensity has had minimal effect. And very quickly the conversation becomes complicated: Why hasn’t increasing prep time reduced work intensification? What have we missed? Why is it that teachers feel that their work is never done? It is, as you know, this last question that drives our conversation with one another.

Looking forward to extending the conversation,  
—S.

*Forestalling your last question for now, dear S,*

... and for our readers’ sakes (discounting you for the moment as a reader), please indulge me an aside, a small justification for the epistolary conversation we’re having.

I am now putting thoughts in a letter, and I call it *kaiwa*—just as you so generously encouraged me to do as I wrote my MEd thesis (MacDonald, 2010). There, I addressed different interlocutors in a few series of letters on different topics I’d chosen for inquiry. The inquiry itself was mainly an exercise in reflecting on becoming a certain kind of teacher, somewhat removed from public school systems. I’d spent the previous several years teaching something called *eikaiwa*, which might be put into Canadian English as “Conversational English” but is most often called, in Japanese English, “English Conversation.” With a look at the three kanji used in spelling it out, the *ei-* refers to “English,” the *-kai-* to “meeting,” and the *-wa* to “speaking.” I’ve found, with your guidance, that I can maintain what I would call the same spirit of practice in inquiry by which I have become *eikaiwa no sensei*—*teacher of English Conversation*—further taking this path as a form of epistolary autoethnographic research.

I find that this conversational approach, because it imitates or can be speech addressed to someone, tends to transgress a reader’s sense of where lines lie, say, between fact and fiction (Wiebe & Macdonald, 2011). While I believe that this is an important

challenge to knowingly make (*knowing me, knowing you*), the actual process of writing as if I were speaking to you directly procures what we might call a greater performativity for the writing process: it seems to lower the threshold for input as I feel less constrained to merely imagine the (disembodied) reader before I commit words to the page (Doll, 2005); I like to think it facilitates inquiry by offering a really concrete sense of negotiated communication, in this case between you and me as we stand in for writer and reader.

This is important to me because, despite the way it may seem, I write because it's difficult for me, or at least I write *things*, generally, because *things* in general are difficult for me (Aoki, 2000, p. 367; Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, pp. 186–187). To represent the process in which a world of difficult things keeps me working to understand—this would fill unreadable volumes, or has done already, if we take a world-historical view.

For now, I trust the foreshortened account will do. You issued the challenge of drafting this article as an ethnodrama (Conrad, 2012; Conrad, McCaw, & Gusul, 2009). Instead, I propose that a continued experiment in *kaiwa* as epistolary inquiry (Wiebe & MacDonald, 2011) be a kind of narrative device that carries us through the dilemma that is our quest(ion).

Onward and upward,

—C.

*Dear C,*

Yes—it will do—how could it be otherwise? We are having a conversation in letters, and yet there is always more to say in how we are having that conversation, so much more that in the poststructuralist paradigm a conversation about the conversation could become its own work.

I am thinking of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern here, how the fact of their being dead keeps them alive in new work. Our teacher narratives—four years in a locked filing cabinet—in the grave, so to speak, but never really dead—always provoking, causing us to wonder what it is about them that refuses to be forgotten in us. Fels and Meyer (2013) recommend these kinds of inquiries, the ones that plague and haunt you. Like us, they have recently returned to participant narratives and the collection of conversations they

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had with one another in response to a surprising and particularly knotty question from one of their participants:

[It was] an unexpected question... Our inability to reply to the question in the moment was an uncomfortable experience, bringing us face to face with a curious sense of culpability as educators. Perhaps the question's open-endedness quelled an immediate response. In any case, the context gave us pause, making us think about education and its possibilities...this article is our response. (Fels & Meyer, 2013, pp. 300–301)

And so our question: Why hasn't increasing prep time reduced work intensification? What is it about this question that gives us pause, cause for return? There must be something more going on. As Chambers (2004) might say, it is the right question because "it keeps us awake at night" (p. 9).

Four years after its first asking, we now have somewhat more to say on how teachers bear the pressures of intensification at the workplace, especially with regard to job performance. For me, the equation is not as simple as a quantification of time. More prep time does not equal less work intensity. I am beginning to learn that the popular and profound social expression of *I wish I had more time* is not so much about time and more about the complex variables involved in personal happiness and security. But this is just a start.

Looking forward to your next letter,

—S.

P.S. While awaiting your next letter I seem to have stumbled upon a new formulation of our question: How might teachers justifiably experience recognition (think personal happiness and security) within a system of accountability, where accountability is itself amongst other complex systems?

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## Complexity and Complicity

*Thank you, dear S,*

Your question has landed right in the middle of things here. The notes I've been collecting are piling up on my desk, enough so that it is a feat each morning to find the keyboard. On top of the pile this morning is a sticky note I left myself in response to your last post script: complexity theory and critical theory. Hargreaves (1994), as you know, has located work intensification in the Marxist, critical tradition, time being his key variable. But with the introduction of three new variables in your last reformulation of our question, it seems apropos to now turn to complexity theory as well.

Davis and Sumara (2008) had proposed, in their discussion relating complexity theory to critical theory, a unique term by which to bring a specifically critical focus to the examination of an instance of complexity. Rejecting *Simplexity*, they had asserted that *complicity* would show considerable potential, as it foregrounded

the fact that the observer is always already entangled in the phenomenon observed. We are aspects of grander systems, shaped by and contributing to the shapes of the phenomena in ways and to extents that we simply cannot know. Such realisations render the work of education a profoundly ethical undertaking.  
(p. 174)

Taking such a concept of complicity back to Hargreaves (1994) for comparison, the force of your question seems to be in how recognition and accountability function together. So, if recognition is a primary means of feeling happy, then within the complex system how might teachers be caught up in—complicit in—contributing to their own accountability structures? This complicity may even be unknown to them, for on the surface it would simply appear that they are seeking recognition as part of their own pursuit of happiness. But it's even more complicated than that—for accountability is not only a structure within one system, the workplace, but also part of the larger social system of how we might understand work.

Taking things step by step for now,

— C.



*Exciting! dear C,*

You've opened Davis and Sumara (2008) to just the right place. Listen to how well complicity intersects with Hargreaves (1994): "The rhetoric of professionalism simply seduces teachers into consorting with their own exploitation" (p. 15). Putting two and two together—if only it were that easy—teachers receive recognition by being professionals, but in seeking greater professionalism (as part of their own pursuit of happiness), they are seduced into "consorting with their own exploitation."

Perhaps the *seduction* and *consorting* at play here, with special reference to a discourse of *professionalism* and the ethics for those who profess to teach, could help us to understand teachers' complicity with the school-systems in which they work?

Judging by how well this explains my own work motivations, it seems to me that we are right on track.

Sincerely,

—S.

*My turn, dear S, to be excited,*

It is certainly becoming clear to me why increasing prep time has not decreased work intensity. Do you remember what Perry (pseudonym) wrote in his January 5th entry?

Day 2, today, brought the same sense of uneasiness which was compiled with the idea that my principal was, at any moment, going to walk through the classroom door and see me unorganized. Even though the administration has on various occasions said I am doing a good job, the fear is still there. I think it stems from the continuous comments by past administrators, district staff and department officials that *we* have to be accountable. This makes me uneasy because it seems that we are under a fine-tooth comb. (MacDonald et al., 2010, p. 66)

Complexity theory would ask us to understand the variables of Perry's fear within the larger regime of accountability. Indeed, Perry's natural shift from first person singular to first person plural indicates he is not alone in this widespread, professional dilemma of

being under a fine-tooth comb despite doing a good job. In other words, no matter how much good a teacher can produce, there is no amount that is satisfactory, there is no way to escape measurement.

Now, taking one step into complexity theory, we can say axiomatically that *input does not equal output*. Looking beyond Perry's individual influence to the larger system that regulates, redistributes, and normalizes the input/output discrepancy, it appears there is little or nothing an individual teacher can do to make the input and output balance. With output demands always outpacing the inputs of teachers, we thus have a working theory for why teachers experience increased intensity in their worklives.

This condition reminds me of a discussion of the individual self in Musil's (1930–1932/1965) *The Man Without Qualities*: “each of us knows that our self does not amount to much” (p. 15). Fifty years later, the parallel to Musil's self can be seen in the contemporary fetish for quantifying the self. What drives this? Is it not the knowledge, perhaps the fear, that in its current state our self does not amount to much, and, presumably, on the way to improving it there needs to be a corresponding quantification of it. What is a teacher to do?

But there is something more. In addition to complexity you've mentioned the seduction. The self that appeared in Musil's novel was at once noble and absurd, pursued lofty or utopian goals, but couldn't help doing so *blindly*—and so, the argument seems to go, all of Europe couldn't help falling headlong into its dreams of elegant efficiency and brotherhood. The main character, a high-modern hero, stands as a man of his time: seductive amidst his own fruitlessness. If Musil's hero were a teacher, we might say s/he is seduced by the utopian aim of doing a social good. Children are the future. Teaching matters so much that it can change the world in a single generation. At once noble and absurd. The solidarity implied in producing such an unmeasurable social good cannot help but create a system of professionalism that comes to rule harshly over the teachers who are complicit in its maintenance. What is a teacher to do?

Wondering, now, whether you still think I'm on track, sincerely,

—C.

*As you've mentioned to me before, dear C,*

To go by Hargreaves's (1994) subtitle alone, he developed all kinds of resonances with Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984). In *Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age* (1994), Hargreaves took particular care to construct ideas of complexity/chaos theory (p. 87), especially in his argument for a different experience of time. For if we maintain that a society is always changing, we also demonstrate its binary composition: what is, for instance, and what will be. It seems to me that Hargreaves's binary parallels the input/output dichotomy you have just developed. But let me check my understanding against yours. Taking the input as what is, i.e., the self in its currently recognized state as not amounting to much, then output becomes what will be, the utopian aim that a teacher comes to be measured against. I can see how you are reminded of Musil's self—at once noble and absurd.

I'd say keep pursuing the question of how teachers can be seduced into complicity, but perhaps you might also start to address the question that is nagging you: what is a teacher to do?

Sincerely,

—S.

*Taking your advice directly, dear S,*

I'll attempt to answer my own question. If professionalism is a seduction, I feel compelled to imagine that teachers seduced by their own professionalism may not always be cared for as they feel called to care. They may at times be treated unfairly, used, and abandoned. They may appear, as *human resources*, to be *employed* and so reduced, degraded in witness to their own (desired) professional discourse. But being seduced—for that is the nature of seduction—they *consort* with their own exploitation.

What if the seduction could be exposed? What if, somehow, in the worklife phenomena of public school systems, teachers could draw the line in the amount of good they might produce, perhaps even identify a subjective instrument of measure for “how much is enough,” or “how much is too much?” Drawing the line, or defining effective

input may help to point out ways of avoiding the *compromising position* in which (at the risk of using overly crude language) professionals may sometimes be seen as *putting out*. And it is a question of what teachers wish to put up with—a question of where they'd prefer to mete out their complicity, or to draw the line sometimes.

Further, while input isn't equal to output, a phenomenological curiosity could invent terms like *upput* (imagined, like *upload*, as a mediated form of input directed through a network or system) and *downput* (where a power relationship is derived and applied, so far as it affects a party to the process who doesn't necessarily agree with part or all of the otherwise defined—especially contractual—relationship). If there is, in thermodynamic and other systems, an orientation toward balance, never achieved without entropy, let us for the moment entertain an orienting equilibrium of upput and downput for teachers in school systems.

While there is more to say on what a teacher might do, thinking of professional worklife as inputs and outputs is at least a starting point. It is not, as some might argue, a reduction of complexity (the simplicity I described to you earlier) but an acknowledgment of the necessity to examine how outputs exceed inputs when it is human beings who are the resources in the system—how Marx understood profit. Is that an idea you'd like me to develop?

Sincerely,

—C.

*Dear C,*

As our conversation moves to human beings defined in relation to a social system, let's keep Marx in the background, for now, and instead keep ready at hand *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984).

I agree that imagining teacher inputs as *upputs* moving upwards through the hierarchical system is one way of counteracting the power implied in seduction. As you note, a *downput* coming down through the system derives power where there is complicity but not necessarily agreement. As for a terminal reference-point, or an imagined equilibrium and stability for a school system, let me press a little further.

I can imagine some benefit in discussing the complexity that follows when we posit a society as a *system*. This is the context in which Lyotard (1979/1984) identifies troubling questions of identity after the system is assumed. Is the relation of an individual to a society ever really understood, or is the system rather incommensurable with the individuality which appears necessary for understanding in general? If commensurable on the basis of binary logic, does it allow for a knowable third space in which the imagined individual consciousness relates itself to a binary society? Is the other possible relationship not then binary (one complex individual, a complex physical system at every level of detail, in relation to one complex society), leaving no room for knowable content except on the grounds of complexity, which blurs the boundaries, from molecular to juridical levels of relationality?

These questions seem especially suitable to the extension of our narrative study, where the personal *worklife* of the local teacher was the arena for the participants' struggles. Our participants emphasized the struggle immanent to understanding themselves outside the binary that defined them as teachers within a system (not so much a *downput* but assumed in the structure). We learn from their accounts how much a mistake it is to suppose that understanding is a matter of clarity. In this sense, neither of the following statements are true: a teacher is a teacher; a teacher is not a teacher. In the relation of an individual to a society, these ontological and epistemological terms are in struggle. A teacher is not so much a teacher but a self in struggle for a third space to understand what it means to be a teacher in a system of incommensurable inputs and outputs. By introducing struggle into the binary that seeks to define and stabilize roles, this opens us to the question of what kind of *upputs* matter, a question of hope or agency, or as you put it above, a kind of binary that is not a binary at all—where on the one hand there is *what is* and on the other this is *what will be*.

Standing by,

—S.

## The Personal/Professional Struggle

*Following up, dear S,*

On your argument for struggle, I am reminded of one participant's entry that points out how teachers are expected to homogenize their teaching through "team planning" which "ignores the differences created within classes (climate/abilities etc.) and differences with teacher styles" whereas "beyond professional duties, we do have personalities and they do affect how we deliver our lessons, interact with our students and co-teachers."

Returning to Hargreaves (1994) for commentary, I hear him using the word "consort" again: that teachers may "voluntarily consort with the imperative of intensification" (p. 121, quoting Apple, 1986). Hargreaves (1994) also points out that professionalism legitimates and reinforces intensification because it "reduces areas of personal discretion, inhibits involvement in and control over longer-term planning, and fosters dependency on externally produced materials and expertise" (p. 118). Since this is the process of homogenization our participants experience, how are we to understand the context of their struggle against it?

Supposing the first question is seduction, then, as you point out, the second question is what matters.

A complete seduction draws teachers away, takes them aside and calls them from their commitments—into the habitual but often unexamined everyday use of the word *professional*—a word that can be applied to neckties with just as much conviction as to work environments. This is where all teachers are perhaps beckoned to feel privileged, and then to discover that their sense of professionalism is meaningless unless they can prove that they belong to a professional group. Yet, only individuals can *profess* anything, if it's the profoundly ethical statement we believe it should be: of readiness to practice a particular skill in a public forum.

What matters, thus, becomes the struggle to counteract the power implied in seduction. These are the teacher inputs as "upputs," moving upwards through the hierarchical system. Upputs are a means of troubling the systemic identity of *teacher*; that assumed identity that consumes the individual self.

At your suggestion, I have kept Lyotard ready at hand, and I can see how perfectly his theorizing fits our narrative study. Lyotard (1979/1984) advocates the *paralogisms*,

the nonconforming logics, of *petits récits*, *small accounts* or *little narratives*, as a category for the individual's imaginative trajectory, one that necessarily disturbs, no matter what the speech act, the grand narratives to which it will eventually be recollected and held accountable.

Returning to these thoughts again tomorrow,

—C.

*This appears directly relevant, dear C,*

To the narrative efforts of our teacher participants precisely because *petits récits* are nonconforming. These *petits récits* are upputs, and are at the heart of how we might understand the teacher's struggle against the grand narrative of their profession, this being not only the social system of education that seduces with the promise that teachers hold the keys to the future, but also being a networked system of accountability through juridical relationships.

Apologies for the brevity of this reply, also struggling, as you know, with my own *petits récits*, sincerely,

—S.

*Dear S,*

The participants in the inquiry differentiated themselves by eliciting comparison to the proverbial chickens with their heads cut off—by describing themselves, at times, as those chickens, in a barnyard full of other headless chickens. They wrote themselves, paralogically, out of such a situation, or offered their *petits récits* as upput, into relief against the situation. They were different—even if they meant to express only “what everybody's thinking”—because “nobody else will say it.” By “saying it,” they seemed to find their way, to become different and take on meaning. They could be seen.

The differentiation involved here may well be a matter of differentiating between oneself and other teachers—it is a reflection on teachers' shared experience, but can be

voiced in an individual's own account, carrying a qualitative difference into the picture, insofar as the picture could otherwise be framed without a teacher witnessing the iconography. The teacher who bears witness can also emerge, differentiated from the general background; the background itself may be adequately captured in a statistical survey or another quantifying approach. But participants in our study highlighted not only that they lived and breathed and had personal experiences in this wider context, but that the complexity of their professional context was also a deeply personal experience—for the individual human, embodied life is also a matter of complex systems, of differentiated cells and organs, with different behaviours and challenges, again generally resisting entropy.

Perhaps the chicken with its head cut off is a particularly apt image, not only as it's so often evoked but particularly for the unique representation it provides: of how best to participate, to integrate and consort, to work out complicity with the exploiting system that we are called to witness in this barnyard. It is the same barnyard where the chickens have lived their entire lives, perhaps; it has boundaries, but the chickens may not even know of them, before or after their heads are cut off. Here we find them: running about and resisting entropy, struggling to prove that it doesn't have to end this way. And when each embodied system finds rest and balance, it becomes subject to another system: left on its own, it may degrade and, over time, become indistinguishable from the ground of the barnyard itself.

The reflections of teachers' worklives are personal, standing out individually against the systems they describe, even as they give their reader something to know about what those systems are. These paralogics, or paralogues, disturb a system where issues of accountability matter but hardly tolerate specific individuals' ethical commitments, the depths of their moral experiences. The possibilities and alternatives for optimal performance within these systems are very much *at issue*, or perhaps *at risk*, in these utterances.

Trusting we're getting somewhere,

—C.



## Agency/Ethics Beyond Accountability

*Thinking of chickens, Dear C,*

And further to your remarks in your last letter, Lyotard has helped us to understand a society that runs in vicious circles with any imagined or posited individual. To assume a society is, perhaps, to negate the individual, to leave no personal entity independent, and to limit its concern for selfhood in such a way that the self addresses the state in agency alone, and only in light of extremely limited, particular instances from which intention is to be extrapolated at best, where meaning can only be hypothesized (and only after the fact).

On the other hand, narrating an individual life experience, with its innumerable points of contact in the society of others, implies at least a partially *knowing* point of view, commensurate with the search for knowledge, and the knowledge we find here is of intentional action.

To reset the purpose of this article, perhaps we can say this, tongue in cheek à la Lyotard. Imaginatively in the name of experimentation and disorder, as agents against functionalism or, if possible, without merely speaking from within “the system,” the society in which we are performed/have functions/meet purposes which are supposed to be “simply there,” we offer the present view of a school-system, highlighting the need that narrative participants have unanimously voiced: for time to reflect and purposefully articulate what seems to be working and what doesn’t, what the desired role or function is in each case, and the number of ways in which it may be performed.

Confident we’re on a good track,

—S.

*Let me reflect, dear S,*

What I think we’ve both found extraordinary is how spontaneously and easily teachers’ stories cohere, not only with each other but also with the data from the survey, logbook, and focus group branches of the report. All these branches intended to examine teachers’

worklife (MacDonald et al., 2010). Now, here's the crux of the issue. We approached this narrative inquiry with an interest in ethics, in agencies expressed through a narrator's choices: choices in the classroom or another space of everyday lived experience; choices in the telling of what went on there. Stepping back now, and regarding these narrations as the expression of a kind of society, we're now exploring the ethical possibilities, precisely, in letting go of an imaginary individual. Or perhaps, now that we've gathered up a point of view, we're occupying that third space, of individual consciousness(es) integrating what it can mean to be inside a system with what it could mean to be outside a system. Well here I am, expressing an either/or. (It seems to be my way, like in learning and teaching as the two fundamental positions for knowledge).

More to come on this,

—C.

*Remember, dear C,*

Perry's comments, on having been told he was doing "a good job," yet feeling that *the fear was still there*. The school-system, as his vignette instantiates it, promises accountability on the part of everybody on the payroll, and this is where a new issue arises which has relatively little to do, directly, with observable qualities in a *teacher's* work (such as we may assume they could be traced without reference to disembodied standards). Especially pertinent to our concern is the issue and risk of measurement. To put it one way: what system of performance-measurement would be adequate, within a school-system that must concern itself with the application of all its available resources, human as well as capital? We may define the performance at issue as quantifiable input and output ready for rationalization. But I would suggest that such quantification, serving the rationalization of resources, is *qualitatively different, incommensurable*, with respect to the individual teacher's work. What the individual requires, in contrast, is personal happiness and security; as well as recognition from colleagues, the school-system and society at large. For teachers in the study, this appeared to be the most fundamental issue.

Referring again to Lyotard (1979/1984), a key point comes to bear: performativity, the ratio of optimally low input to optimally high output, a measure for the extraction

of surplus value. In knowledge systems (such as schools), performance is a root concern when

all that is needed is for the surplus-value to be realized, in other words, for the product of the task performed to be sold. And the system can be sealed in the following way: a portion of the sale is recycled into... a fund dedicated to further performance improvement. (p. 45)

This is where I propose that we dig in and prepare to resist notions of accountability, if only long enough to assert qualities of our own, brought to light as we read, sympathetically, the writing pertaining to the worklife of our participants. I think we may begin by asserting that, taking a teacher's *existence* into account, as the mode in which any given volume of work may be done, input and output cannot be compared in their relative quantities because, after we've widened our contextual scope from *work* to *life*, they are at bottom qualitatively different.

Signing off,  
—C.

## Existential Guilt

*To sum up, dear C,*

In a key finding from our 2010 report, teachers in Prince Edward Island struggle increasingly with work intensification despite increasing “prep” time and decreasing “class” time during the average school day. Hargreaves (1994), to whom we owe the most in our reading of this intensification, proposed the following remedies—as *alternatives* to manipulating both the time available to teachers and also the accountability-level demands on that time: a) curb or refocus the ethic of personal care by which teachers invest emotionally in “the individual child,” or b) form smaller and more specifically intentional communities of practice in which teachers may conceptualize their work in their own terms, setting their own standards and limits for professionalism (p. 156). In a school-system as Hargreaves portrays it, there are drives for school effectiveness and for school improvement which, like Lyotard's (1979/1984) drily objectified performativity,

leave the unit of measurement somewhat beyond the individual participant, in an assumed collectivity existing at the level of *one school district* or, at least, *one (contrived) collegial and collaborative unit* (p. 186). Individualism isn't a desired trait amongst teachers in this system, and the result for individual teachers who cannot help existing, Hargreaves argues, is guilt—and this is precisely where he offers the above alternatives.

It's important, here, that the guilt which mirrors intensification for teachers can most obviously be alleviated by supplying "more time" for the peripheral duties, but that, again, has already been done to the point where a teacher's guilt can begin to find even more iterations:

I've got all this time to do my other duties, and feel like time out of class is diminishing my working relationship with the kids in class—and even when I'm with them, after the rush to get all my paperwork under control (not to say finished—it's never that) I feel so rushed, just a little less prepared than I feel I should be—and it leaves me feeling even more, or newly, like I'm not performing to the best of my abilities, according to my own standards. (MacDonald et al., p. 80; underline in original)

This was an overarching message in the "focus group" work we did in our study (MacDonald et al., 2010). Upon examination, having pursued narrative inquiry with a few participants, we have arrived at Hargreaves's "b" option. Option "a" remains, for better or worse, repellent to the dedicated teachers from whom we've gathered stories. We have begun to observe our participants' struggle in a desperate setting, where they must fight to be what they profess (the autonomous caring teacher), or else simply cease to be that.

Against their personally felt challenges, our participants were writing from a time and place in which the most obvious had already been carried out, and the desired "addition" of "preparation time" had already been brought to bear on teachers' timetables—in order to give them increased scope for the many daily tasks which could not be achieved during previously assumed blocks of "instructional time." Cumulatively, this added "prep time" had diminished instructional time itself, taking teachers further and further away from the desired condition for their profession, their intention to remain dedicated, to hold fast to the experience of being in the immediate practice of the pedagogical relationship (MacDonald et al., 2010). Prep time had been added over recent years as an expanding catch-all, not so much (or not exclusively) for the preparation and planning

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that inform the immediate practice of the teaching profession—but, increasingly, for tasks which remain *other* than the teacher’s own intentional practice. These changes, again, demonstrate our desire for a balance, between *what is* and *what is not yet*.

It becomes a sustained experience of stress, frustration, and guilt; it evokes not only varying degrees of resentment but also, as the teacher narratives reveal, a certain amount of critique. We gathered firsthand accounts of conditions that begged the questions of whether we need to be on guard for the “misrecognized professionalism” which Hargreaves (1994) associated with work intensification for teachers, and what we really mean by professionalism in teaching, where “pressures accumulate and innovations multiply under conditions of work that fail to keep pace with these changes and even fall behind” (p. 15). These are perhaps not the conditions we had in mind when we entered a system that had called to us with dreams of elegant efficiency, solidarity, or recognition.

Looking forward to your own summarizing comments, I remain yours,

—S.

*Well, dear S,*

It’s been nearly two years since our first push to form this article. In returning I imagine you and I both could find something personal to say about matters of worklife intensification! However, I’m happy to be writing from a safe place now, having recovered from what had, surely, advanced to the final stages of burnout by this time three years or so ago. And now I’m prepared to offer a brief example of my own upput. It is, as noted earlier, what I imagine as a mediated form of input directed through a network or system. I enact it, imaginatively for the moment, against the downput of a power-relationship derived and applied to me personally. I guess what I’m seeing is a kind of equilibrium, always getting nearer in some sense.

With the focus of recent edits to our article, I want to now weave together some threads, tightly enough to trace the tentative texture of concepts which shift in meaning as they relate to each other in the weaving. One thread we’ve left for another article is how an explicitly Marxist critique of labour could enrich our understanding of misrecognized professionalism as part of the intensification thesis. While that may stand as work done

elsewhere or on another day (Wiebe & MacDonald, 2013), I think there is one dimension of autonomy which can't be ignored right now: the dimension in which it allows teachers to engage ethically and is therefore necessary for the production of critical, paralogical narratives. This, I think we can advance, is a key issue for improving today's teachers' worklife conditions.

If the contractual workday has given marginal preference to preparation time, and therefore less instructional time to prepare for, then it's time to examine Hargreaves's (1994) alternatives. Let's focus on teachers' production of *petits récits* as one possible example of "smaller and more specifically intentional communities of practice in which teachers may conceptualize their work in their own terms, setting their own standards and limits for professionalism" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 156). What seems fair is to cast teachers as human beings struggling for autonomy, for care of their own and each-other's humanity, within a social system that appears to threaten the humanity of a teacher who might, by design, be able to conceptualize teachers' work in a teacher's terms.

Drives for "best practices" and "school improvement" or "grading schools" keep the focus, uncompromisingly, on performativity. Within a teacher's intensifying worklife experience, the measure of school success can certainly appear to lie well beyond the scope of human concerns; in the assumed professional-accountable collective, the individual takes on value and function in an already assumed binary, a unit of human resources within the bounds of the system. The system, meanwhile, may only seem to function to the extent that the teacher's performativity is what the future market for human resources depends on.

Teachers, meanwhile, want to "teach." The heart that holds this conviction is at bottom a heart aspiring to and professing a need to personally care for the individual student—and this, too, may call for another chapter of our work together. But that moment, the pedagogical moment of interpersonal relationship, the moment a student says "aha"—for many, this is the moment that teachers appear most determined to hold fast and bear witness. It is, sadly, a moment for which not enough time has been made.

Time needs reclaiming, not only in order to have such moments, but to reflect and celebrate them—or, if necessary, to lament their loss, the loss of time for reflection or conversation that is at once professional and personal. I wonder if teachers can find the option, should they want it, of attending to less paperwork or fewer meetings of other kinds, and so reach out to each other to begin expressing and examining what's on their

minds. In this way, I hope, there can be a time when teachers have achieved the autonomy to draw the line when they need to, and to say *enough is enough* if they need to. But they'll need to be able to produce their *petits récits* and paralogues before it's time to *call it a day*, for it's a practice which allows shared responsibility.

Responsibility also needs to be taken, perhaps to be taken a step away from accountability as such. I mean responsibility for decisions, not only regarding how much time to spend on the job each day, but (because there are only so many hours in a day) which tasks can reasonably take priority, which may be safely or prudently ignored. This would be the responsibility of a reflexive contractual engagement with the state, which I believe is precisely the locus for Lyotard's (1979/1984) *petits récits*. Because individuals with autonomy who care for one another's humanity cannot "be accounted for" or quantified in the structure of what is valued, the result is that teachers, as individuals, can feel guilt for being human, for caring, for seeking to have a stake in the order of things. A summative point that can be realized in the narratives to which we, in turn, now bear witness is that the participants were *unanimously* teachers who struggled. They struggled to actively and intentionally profess and invest their lives, narrate their lives and confess being subject to intensification.

There are two points to be made regarding the struggle so visible in the narratives. There is, on one side, the pressure of intensification, which must be overcome to some extent if teachers are to discover that they find it hard to find time, not only to talk to each other, but, to cite another popular theme, even to pass an evening with family. Meanwhile, the accountability by which their "professionalism" is measured and rationalized, with its standards and "ethics," threatens to diminish who they are as individuals, unless they are willing to define, in public engagement, their own preferences for defining the profession.

Hoping this wraps up the work at hand, and calling it a day, I am pro-/confessionally yours,

—C.

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