

Paper Title: Collaborating for policy impact: Academic-practitioner collaboration in industrial relations research

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Collaborating for policy impact: Academic-practitioner collaboration in industrial relations research

Abstract

Knowledge co-production between academics and practitioners is increasingly a focus for university workplace contexts. While there is emerging interest in how social science academics can engage with industry to generate impact, little attention has been paid to how one form of practitioner organisation, trade unions, engage with academics to influence policy and member outcomes. In this article, we examine a case of research collaboration with an education trade union based in New South Wales, Australia, to explore the process of knowledge co-production with this partnership and its impact upon education policy. In examining this decade-long partnership, we contribute to literature on union strategy by depicting collaboration with researchers as a unique strategy for influencing policy outcomes (in this case, addressing teacher workload), while also contributing to emerging scholarship on knowledge co-production as a means to generate impact beyond the academy. As such, this article contributes a rare example of ‘cross-over’ between the worlds of academia and industry, which may inform future engagement and impact processes.

Keywords: collaborative research, engagement and impact, education, union strategy, teachers

Research collaboration between academics and practitioners is not uncommon. However, there has been little critical examination of collaboration between employment/industrial relations (IR) scholars and education trade unions, and less still on how collaboration can be a contemporary union strategy for policy impact. Through a critical analysis of academic-practitioner collaboration as a union strategy, the article has two purposes. First, we aim to extend scholarship on union strategy through offering analytical reflection on how unions engage with research processes for political purposes to achieve policy outcomes and enhance the conditions of employment for their members. To date, few empirical studies have documented academic-practitioner collaborations within employment relations and human resource management (HRM) fields, with limited insights on how these collaborations generate both theoretical and practical contributions (Huzzard and Björkman, 2012). Second, in taking a critical and reflexive approach to examining engagement with political organisations like trade unions, we aim to contribute to literature on knowledge co-production through highlighting the opportunities and navigating the dilemmas of such processes when designing research for impact. The research questions guiding this article are: How can collaboration between trade unions and academic researchers influence policy and generate impact? What opportunities and dilemmas arise in research collaborations with trade unions?

To investigate these questions, we present a case study of academic-practitioner research collaboration between a group of university-based researchers and an education union, the New South Wales Teachers' Federation (NSWTF), to understand partnership and collaboration in relation to teacher workload. The intensification of work and expansion of teachers' workload in school education (Author 1) has been a vested concern of education unions over recent years. In the context of forthcoming state and national government elections, and state-level policymaking activity, the NSWTF, which represents public school teachers in the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia, commissioned university-based academics to independently carry out a series

of projects, including a large-scale survey, to investigate the issue of teacher workload. This case is unusual given the impact arising from the research process and the nature of the collaboration, which developed in a manner enabling influence on the policy environment, rather than traditional participatory collaborative research which has a focus on capacity-building between research partners (Corbie-Smith et al., 2015). Reflective coverage on the collaboration in this article may provide insights for IR scholars, and those in social sciences more broadly, about processes of engagement to generate impact, an area that has received limited attention in literature thus far. This contribution is particularly useful given the increasing focus of tertiary institutions on impactful research that generates solutions to problems in broader non-academic contexts.

In what follows, we first provide an overview of trade unions as political actors and existing, though limited accounts, of education union engagement with researchers, followed by an overview of the literature on collaborative management research. The research collaboration case study is then outlined, including how the collaboration emerged, developed and generated impact on policy outcomes for teachers. Discussion follows of partnership as an emergent union strategy, and the opportunities and dilemmas apparent in academic-practitioner collaborations with trade unions, raising matters for future collaborative engagement as a vehicle for policy impact.

Trade union strategy: Knowledge co-production for policy impact

Understanding how unions develop strategies to influence outcomes for workers has been an enduring debate in union renewal literature (Murray, 2017). While education unions have retained comparatively high membership levels, the institutional and regulatory pressures facing such unions have prompted re-evaluation of strategies to generate influence (Author 2). Union activities in many countries today are constrained to some degree by the power of the state and employers. For instance, in NSW, legislative restrictions on strike action (i.e. diminishing

structural power) has prompted the NSWTF to re-evaluate its traditional (industrial) strategies for advancing member conditions of work, and instead position the organisation as an advocate of teachers' industrial and professional interests (Author 2).

However, unions still have some 'power resources' available to them, including political power (Pizzorno, 1978). Political power arises from the pressure of collective action, such as supporting political parties through votes, campaigning, building alliances, and mobilising community support. As political actors, trade unions can use various channels to influence the state's policymaking processes. This is evident in unions' privileged (financial and/or institutional) links with allied political parties (Streeck and Hassel, 2003). Where such links do not exist, or have attenuated, unions must try to achieve political influence through electoral support for the party most sympathetic to their demands, or by supporting or blocking measures from elected party representatives (Streeck and Hassel, 2003).

Within the literature on union strategy, there has been limited scholarly attention to how trade unions engage in collaborative research as a political strategy to influence policymaking and worker outcomes (Huzzard and Björkman, 2012). Most research on trade unions to date has overwhelmingly focused on research *on* unions, or more recently, research *for* unions, with few examples of researchers undertaking research *with* unions through collaborative methods (Huzzard and Björkman, 2012). But as argued by Huzzard and Björkman (2012), declining unionism has prompted unions to consider closer engagement with the research community to support capacity-building and to shape union strategy and outcomes. Indeed, collaborative research can provide an opportunity for union practitioners to use external 'change agents' as a means of pursuing policies and to put union research on a more interventionist footing (Huzzard and Björkman, 2012; Huzzard and Gregory, 2008). The process of undertaking research *with* a trade union, and the implications for engagement and impact, are examined in this article.

The issue of knowledge co-production through collaborating with the academic community is particularly absent in the scholarship on *education* trade unions, despite the strong political attention directed, since the 1990s, towards ‘reforming’ education and teachers’ work, and teaching being one of the most unionised professions globally (Author 2; Robertson, 2012). Education unions face diverse operational and strategic challenges within this policy landscape, particularly as policymaking resides largely with those outside the profession. Couture et al. (2020) highlight how policy actors, such as the OECD, have increasingly occupied the space of global education, ‘reimagined’ in a context of ‘evidence-based’ policy in which particular forms of large-scale, ‘objective’ evidence are valued (Lingard, 2013; Welch, 2015).

This scenario has prompted the need for building long-term collective efficacy of the profession as part of broader, renewed conversations about the aims of (public) education and the role educators should take (Author 2). Couture et al. (2020) call for renewed strategies to enhance the profession’s capacity for future-oriented knowledge production and governance that encourages alternatives to a global education narrative centred on market-driven, commercialisation agendas. Specifically, they argue for teacher organisations to engage in ‘futures-making’ research and advancing alternatives to neoliberal hegemonic agendas that are supported by engaging with academia in new forms of knowledge production. Such action can recast unions as intellectual leaders reimagining the future of education. Some examples of collaboration among researchers and teacher organisations exist, yet are few (e.g. Hogan et al., 2019; Lingard et al., 2017). This emergent union strategy also reflects broader shifts in (education) union strategy, from traditionally ‘industrial’ towards ‘professional’ approaches where unions attempt to address teachers’ conditions of work while strengthening professional and social justice ethics of teachers (Author 3).

Collaborative management research

Collaborative management research includes the active involvement of practitioners and researchers, in partnership, in framing research agendas, the selection and implementation of methods, and development of implications for action, with an emphasis on influencing a certain system of action (Huzzard and Björkman, 2012; Pasmore et al., 2008). Knowledge ‘production’ and ‘action’ are thus not separate processes, and have potential to produce more powerful and applicable solutions to important organisational and societal issues (Sharni et al., 2004). In this article, we examine a case of ‘high’ involvement where academic researchers and unions co-produce knowledge to influence education policymaking (Ross et al., 2003).

Producing relevant knowledge is one of the greatest contemporary challenges facing researchers. Management research has been criticised for its limited impact on business, policy and society, with governments and critics expressing concern over an apparent ‘gap’ between theory and practice, and rigour and relevance (Radaelli et al., 2014). While knowledge co-production features prominently in some disciplines, it is less prolific in management and related social sciences (Bartunek and McKenzie, 2017 cited in McCabe et al., 2021) and there are few insights in the literature on how these collaborations generate both theoretical and practical contributions, particularly within the IR/HRM fields (Huzzard and Björkman, 2012). This is unusual given the contemporary emphasis on engagement and impact in tertiary institutions and funding organisations.

The debate on research engagement and impact has centred around two distinct approaches: ‘reliable knowledge’, which is legitimised in the academic community and emphasises discipline-based interests; and alternative approaches which emphasise involvement of practitioners and other stakeholders in the research process (Guerci et al., 2019). While some scholars (e.g. Kieser

and Leiner, 2009 cited in Radaelli et al., 2014) are critical of the ‘trade-offs’ that can occur between rigour and relevance, others (Hodgkinson and Leiner, 2009 cited in Radaelli et al., 2014) claim that reconciling these agendas is both possible and necessary. Indeed, there are multiple benefits from collaborative research. Practitioners can access expert advice on methodology and evidence, access a wider evidence base, and reach new audiences through putting insights into action (Pasmore et al., 2008). In return, academics can gain insights about practitioners’ area of work and priorities, as well as an increased awareness, and credibility, of their research among practice and policy professionals (Pasmore et al., 2008). Thus, ‘high’ involvement sees academic and industry partners engage significantly to shape the research process and its outcomes. This contrasts to ‘low’ involvement, more common in management research, where academics lead the research and the organisation endorses and provides legitimacy for the evidence (Ross et al., 2003).

Co-producing knowledge, however, is not a straightforward process. As argued by Gibbons et al. (1994), it requires a sustained and committed cooperative relationship as well as reflection to ensure shared principles of participation are agreed. Amabile et al. (2001) outline various indicators of collaboration success: computability of values; intrinsic motivation towards the research project; institutional support; trust; skill complementarity; regular facilitated meetings; and clarity on commitments, roles, responsibilities, expectations and resources. It is worth noting that the collaborative process can also encounter dilemmas. For instance, an overemphasis on ‘problem relevance’ may displace academics’ concern for rigour, independence and quality (Guerci et al., 2019). Additionally, types of power exercised in the relationship between research partners can also affect knowledge co-production, evident in McCabe et al.’s (2021) recent analysis of Australian Research Council Linkage projects.

At an institutional level, the recent focus of higher education institutions, and business schools in particular, on engagement and impact of research outcomes has made collaborative research a necessity. Government directives focused on integrating public research with stakeholders are founded in enhancing accountability of higher education and evaluating measurable contributions of universities to social and economic development (Pettigrew and Starkey, 2016). For instance, the Research Excellence Framework, widely used in the UK since 1986, assesses the quality of research and informs the distribution of public funds to institutions. The Australian counterpart, the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA), introduced in 2018, also judges research excellence through assessment of ‘case studies’ which demonstrate impact beyond academia. *Engagement* is expected as part of this process, meaning the interaction between researchers and end-users for the mutually beneficial transfer of knowledge, technologies, methods or resources, along with *impact*, meaning the contribution that research makes to solving ‘real world’ problems for the economy, society, environment or culture (ARC, 2019).

We acknowledge, however, the contested meaning of ‘impact’, even within research assessment regimes. For instance, Pettigrew (2011, cited in Huzzard, 2018) depicts several dimensions of impact, not limited to ‘instrumental impact’ (the adoption of product or services by end-users), ‘connectivity impact’ (relationship-building) and ‘capacity building’ (technical and personal skill development). Although academic researchers are encouraged to collaborate with industry to support engagement and impact, the motivations on the part of partner organisations, particularly as a form of strategising, are not always clear. Within this discussion, we note also that, in relation to research partnership more broadly, Australia’s rate of collaboration between industry and researchers has been low compared with its counterparts. In 2015, the latest data available, Australia, at 2-3%, was the lowest in the OECD (DISER, 2015). This relatively low level of collaboration limits understanding of the propensity for industry to engage with the academic

research process, making cases of policy-targeted, partnered research significant instances from which to garner insights.

Education policy context in Australia and teachers' work

The academic-practitioner collaboration examined in this article is situated in an Australian school education policy environment. Research collaboration focused on addressing teacher workload as an issue of concern for the teachers' union following successive policy reforms that were perceived as impacting teachers' work. Emerging empirical evidence has shown that neoliberal, market-driven reforms in education have profoundly altered teachers' work and professional identity by changing the context in which teaching occurs (Bascia and Stevenson, 2017). The consequences of such reforms include increased workload arising from heightened 'accountability' and teacher 'responsibility', which contributes to feelings of stress and dissatisfaction, as well as attrition from the profession (Author 1). Indeed, international evidence reveals that Australian public school teachers work some of the longest weekly hours among OECD countries, particularly in the state of NSW (Author 4).

An understanding of policymaking processes is essential for any organisation trying to intervene in, and achieve, policy outcomes (Mayne et al., 2018). While public schooling in Australia is the constitutional responsibility of the states and territories, policy is also set at a federal (national) level. At a national level, school education since the 1980s, has been reoriented towards economic imperatives designed to improve efficiency and enhance the nation's global competitiveness (Hogan and Thompson, 2019). At a state (NSW) level, recent policies (e.g. *Local Schools, Local Decisions (LSLD)*, introduced in 2012), have brought renewed attention to devolution and marketisation, by enhancing school principals' authority around staffing and financial management, while encouraging enhanced community involvement in local decision-making

(Author 5). From the view of the NSWTF, neoliberal policies such as LSLD have imposed demanding and time-consuming tasks onto schools at a state-based level, intensifying work and decreasing job security, with the union arguing for many years that devolution of responsibility to individual workplaces (schools), without sufficient resources and support, increases pressure in terms of how work is organised and carried out in schools (Gallop et al., 2021).

It is in response to this policy context that the NSWTF engaged academic researchers in a suite of research projects to investigate the impact of state-based neoliberal policies on teachers' workload. Providing this empirical data was intended to strengthen and legitimise the NSWTF's claims and establish an evidence base from which to shape its industrial campaigning and influence policymaking. This was perceived by the union to be important in influencing the decision- and policymaking of the NSW state government, which develops policy on school education, and the NSW Department of Education (DOE), which is the state education bureaucracy and employer of public school teachers. Significantly, the NSWTF is not affiliated with any political party and the partnership reported herein qualifies as an example of political non-affiliation.

Engaged research with an education union

In the remainder of this article, we present a case study of collaboration between the researchers and partner organisation (PO), the NSWTF, over a series of research projects, in particular an interview study (2017) and large-scale questionnaire (2018), through which the PO sought to leverage researcher expertise. The NSWTF represents the largest body of teachers, those in public schools, in Australia's most populous state. Of the nearly 65,000 public sector teachers in NSW, over 53,000 (82%) are unionised (NSW DOE, 2017: 68; NSWTF, 2017: 70). The NSWTF considers itself both an industrial and professional union concerned with advancing the industrial

interests and working conditions of teachers, as well as improving the educational outcomes of students (Author 3). Here, we detail the process through which the academic-industry partners collaborated and how the research process was navigated, offering a reflective account of the research collaboration from the perspective of the researchers which has been shared with, and supported by, the PO.

Founding of the research partnership

Prior to the major partnered studies in 2017 and 2018, rapport between the research team and PO built incrementally through several ('Phase 1') projects (see Table 1, Rows 1-3). During this stage of the collaboration, the 'low engagement' (Ross et al. 2003) research projects were driven by the academic researchers and focused on the impact of recent reform initiatives, including *LSDL*.

Insert Table 1 here

From 2017, (Phase 2) collaborating with the academic researchers took on enhanced significance for the PO, and for the academics entailed a shift to the union's concerns around teacher workload. At this time, the union was looking two years ahead towards the 'window of opportunity' (Mayne et al., 2018: 7) of a March 2019 NSW State election and May 2019 Federal election, with target stakeholders being state and national political parties and associated government policy-bureaucracies. Campaigning in the lead up to elections is critical for public sector unions like education unions given governments are both the employer of public sector workers and play a fundamental role in shaping policy that impacts workers' conditions (Ford and Ward, 2021).

The NSWTF communicated (via a Senior Executive Officer) to the researchers concerns regarding escalating workload raised by their members at the 2016 Annual Conference¹. Formalised in a widely-supported, binding union-member motion, which a Senior Executive Officer was responsible for delivering upon, this was a catalyst for investigation of teachers' work and workload. The NSWTF sought to determine whether there was a defensible, factual, empirical basis ('platform') on which to make organisational claims for a policy shift that would improve the work and working conditions of school teachers in relation to this issue. While teacher workload was not the researchers' primary focus in earlier projects, this shift resonated strongly with the emerging findings from early phases of the collaboration (e.g. Author 1; Author 6), and was therefore an area that the academic researchers were keen to investigate.

Devising a large-scale survey-questionnaire study

The investigation of teacher workload involved the execution of two closely-linked studies: a moderate-scale 'Interview' study of 31 union members (2017) (Table 1: Row 4), followed by a large-scale 'Survey-questionnaire' study of all union members (2018) (Table 1: Row 5). Each study required standalone decision of the PO's Executive Committee² and an Annual Conference motion, each formalised in a negotiated University contract. Importantly, throughout this process, the research team worked closely with the union's Senior Executive Officer and another PO research officer, whose background (former school principal and doctorate in education) was highly research-suitable. This significant expertise, skill complementarity and knowledge exchange across the PO and research team relating to both the education field and research

¹ Annual Conference brings together 600 NSWTF members annually to debate union policy and determine priority campaigns, often through binding resolution.

² Executive is comprised of the NSWTF's three most senior officers and 15 classroom teachers who meet fortnightly to discuss campaign tactics and other union issues. Executive also represents the administrative and managerial arm of the union.

processes, aided by frequent meetings to discuss PO and researcher needs, are consistent with indicators of collaborative success (Amabile et al. 2001).

The initial interview study laid important groundwork for the large-scale questionnaire, establishing in its findings the existence of widespread workload problems in the teaching profession. It also permitted the responsible union officer to personally assess the research team's expertise, and facilitated further building of familiarity and confidence which provided the basis upon which the larger study could proceed.

The content of the subsequent survey-questionnaire study included items regarding quantum and change in teachers' working hours, and the drivers of workload change. Teachers' specific work activities were also examined to discern the existence of a workload 'problem'. Additionally, the survey included a set of initiatives to address workload problems, which respondents rank-ordered, providing a vehicle through which the union could propose 'solutions' to workload problems as a platform for change. The PO sought to include specific initiatives (e.g. reduced teaching time to allow more collaboration, greater acknowledgement of professional judgement, increased specialist teacher support for students with special needs) to provide grounds from which to not only 'critique' current policy reforms impacting teachers and contributing to workload problems, but offer constructive ways forward to proposing a policy shift. This reflects the strategy of using evidence to influence policy most effectively (see Mayne et al., 2018).

As with the earlier interview study, the research team deployed methodological expertise (per Cassell and Johnson, 2006 cited in Radaelli et al., 2014) in undertaking research design for the survey-questionnaire, with the two-person PO team also taking an active role in the design by contributing vital, first-hand input to specific issues (per Pasmore et al., 2008). This process involved numerous re-drafts as well as the piloting of survey items with a small workshop of 20

diverse union members organised by the PO. Both the early findings (Table 1 Phase 1), and the interview study findings (Table 1 Phase 2.1), were highly influential in the design of the questionnaire (Table 1 Phase 2.2). Additionally, the academics negotiated with the union personnel for inclusion of some questions that were considered important for subsequent scholarly publication despite these not being needed for the union's purposes. Design was also informed by PO insights from a range of officers and events, like national conference discussions.

Once design of the survey-questionnaire was complete, it was distributed state-wide online to all union members by the PO (to preserve member contact-information confidentiality). This was accompanied by communication about the survey through the union's standard channels. Including both closed and open questions, and though lengthy (half an hour or more to complete), the survey-questionnaire attained a 33.6% response rate (n=18,234), providing particularly strong coverage of the NSW teaching profession. The PO provided data files directly to the researchers who undertook all data analysis and compiled the findings independently, with iterative, but broad, exchange with the PO which guided what outputs from the research were particularly pertinent to the organisation.

Perceived stakeholder benefits in the union-academic collaboration

Through this collaboration over teacher workload, the PO stood to garner benefits including: an academically rigorous research process (illustrating Cassell and Johnson, 2006 cited in Radaelli et al., 2014) and reporting, with external independent assessment of phenomena; peer-reviewed, high status dissemination of professional voice; negotiated input into parts of the member questionnaire to ensure it addressed their needs, particularly through eliciting teachers' views of initiatives to manage their workload, which was their primary industrial relations concern; a comprehensive survey on teachers' work, which was a key strategy for the PO's shift to

professional concerns (Author 3); and ‘branding’ value through collaboration with a highly-reputed university, given that ‘the messenger can be as important as the message’ (Mayne et al., 2018: 7).

Many benefits of ‘high involvement’ collaboration (Ross et al. 2003) for the academic researchers emerged from the research partnership, becoming prominent particularly from the interview study (Phase 2.1) onwards. Working with the PO could provide access to a large, representative (almost total population) sample of NSW public school teachers, and a vehicle for participant engagement and high response rates, particularly important given emphases on large-scale evidence in policy (Welch, 2015). Further, in accordance with Mayne et al. (2018), collaborating with the NSWTF created for academic researchers a context enabling high impact via the PO’s proximity and access to political power brokers and policymakers. Additionally, working with the PO highlighted the weightiness of ‘on-the-ground’ concerns of the teacher workforce, providing increased awareness and empathy, and providing practitioner expertise to enhance the face validity of the research (per Pasmore et al., 2008). Importantly, the collaboration also resonated with the researchers’ values regarding the merits of a robust public education system founded in sustainable and reasonable working conditions for teachers, thus fulfilling Amabile et al.’s (2001) values-consistency and shared PO/researcher motivation criteria. Furthermore, the academic researchers held a sense that the data to be gathered would support University expectations of high-quality scholarly publication, though specific outputs were not explicated at this point.

Outputs and impact

Here we document the outputs of the research partnership and consider the impacts that have emerged, summarised in Table 2. We refer to ‘outputs’ as the tangible products of the research

and ‘impacts’ as developments or consequences which arose from the research over the short, medium and long term.

Insert Table 2 here

Short-term outputs

A preliminary and full report were provided to the PO for both the interview study and survey-questionnaire study. Both studies provided abundant material upon which the PO could compile communications and awareness-raising of its members through numerous online ‘webstories’ and articles (see Table 2: IIa, IIb). While the interview study (formally endorsed at all decision-making levels) attained primarily ‘internal’ outcomes by establishing the rationale and broad direction for the questionnaire focus, the latter was very actively deployed by the PO to achieve impacts through ‘external’ outputs for public attention. These included ‘exclusive’ media coverage of both the preliminary and full reports which gained very widespread readership, and release of the full Survey Report containing the questionnaire findings at the union’s Annual Conference (see Table 2: IIa), reflecting careful strategy around timing (Mayne et al., 2018). The full Report (Author 7) was also subsequently published in both digital and hard copy, with the latter sent to every NSW public school in February 2019. The published version of the Report included a Foreword by the NSWTF summarising their advocacy and the Education Department’s response in the period since initial, public release of findings in mid-2018.

The research established evidence that, while retaining primary focus on matters directly related to working with students in teaching and learning, there had been huge increase in teachers’ workload and a ‘blanketing’ effect with this workload increase evident across the whole state and all (public) school contexts. Documenting the specific activities undertaken by classroom teachers

and school leaders identified the causes of workload increase as excessive administrative work, primarily driven by requirements for compliance with unceasing education policy changes. This has driven teachers' average working hours to 55 per week, into the 'very long hours' category (Author 7). The study also supported discernment of initiatives and recommendations for redressing these problems.

Short term impacts: Initial government response to the research findings

Designated by the NSWTF President as a 'landmark study', the initial internal impact of this 'comprehensive and powerful report' (Author 7: 4) was its formal endorsement for action through mid-2018 decisions by the Executive Committee, Council and Annual Conference. However, even prior to this, release of the preliminary findings via news media in May 2018 enabled swift attainment by the NSWTF of early impacts including successful negotiations with the Department of Education which resulted in removal or reduction of multiple policy demands (PLAN2, HSC monitoring, VET and the A-Z tool), and changes by the Department to achieve better timing, coordination and consultation to 'plan for the volume of change' required of schools (Author 7: 4).

The Foreword of the final, published version of the Report evidences the impact of 'the massive response' by union members to the survey which enabled them to 'take action on the findings in the months following its release' (Author 7: 4). Further external impacts of the research included written statement by the NSW Education Minister, Rob Stokes, acknowledging as one of his 'highest priorities' reduction of adverse effects of teachers' administrative burden on their core educational role (Stokes, 2018; Table 2: IIb). The Minister's establishment of a multi-stakeholder working party (inclusive of NSWTF), that met monthly from June 2018 through 2019, to 'provide advice' on workload constitutes additional, significant early impact. As a consequence, some

planned policy roll-outs were rescheduled (Table 2: IIb). However, a key aspect for the NSWTF was to ensure that teachers' professional judgement was acknowledged and that consultation around these changes created educational value and proper resourcing for them. These impacts were communicated to teachers by the Department of Education outlining 'an approach aimed at reducing administrative and compliance tasks and building more system-level support for schools' (NSW DOE, 2018a; NSWTF 2019a), and may be understood as a harbinger of what emerged, in 2021, as a ('Quality Time') plan for reducing teachers' administrative work (Table 2 IIf; NSW DOE, 2021).

The initial government response to the survey findings thus constituted some clear research impacts through gains for the PO and, indeed, the teaching profession. Small but significant changes were made to requirements for work done in schools. Despite these positive shifts, the union was not entirely satisfied, arguing that most of the measures outlined would only 'tinker at the edges' of workload, that some targeted only principals rather than teachers, and that others would potentially exacerbate workload at particular times of the year. The PO accepted the changes as positive but insufficient and, consistent with the recommendations of the full Report, continued to argue for other, somewhat more radical (and costly) suggestions, including a reduction in face-to-face teaching time, and a need to continue to focus on issues of school funding, pursuing these objectives in the medium and longer term.

Medium and longer-term outputs and impacts: Union election campaign and Independent Inquiry

In governmental developments, issues raised in the major Report were included in the union's campaigning priorities for both the 2019 state and federal elections (NSWTF, 2019b) which resulted in wins for Liberal-Coalition governments. In the state of NSW, and following the NSWTF lodging election-campaign claims upon all political parties to enhance conditions of work for teachers (Table 2: IIId), the new government installed Sarah Mitchell as Minister for Education.

As a medium-term development, Mitchell stated she would maintain the focus on reducing workload avowed by predecessor Rob Stokes (Henebery, 2019). One notable longer-term change has been Mitchell's backdown from the devolutionary reform *LSLD* due to acknowledgements of both work 'overload', but also, and primarily, a perceived lack of effective accountability (Baker, 2020a; Table 2: IIf).

Bearing out the impact of the two studies, changes around workload continue as a key item on the NSWTF agenda via 2020 renegotiation of the Staffing Agreement (which sets terms and conditions for teachers negotiated three-yearly), providing a foundation to enhance staffing entitlements to address teacher workload, and ongoing pursuit of increased 'release time' from class teaching (NSWTF, 2020), a key workload reduction strategy requested by teachers in the survey-questionnaire and evident in the 2018 Report. The NSWTF's continued focus on workload and ongoing impact of the collaborative research is, however, most resoundingly evident in the 2020/21 independent public inquiry on 'Valuing the Teaching Profession' established by the NSWTF and led by former state premier Geoff Gallop (not to be confused with an earlier, disbanded National Parliamentary inquiry, Table 2: IIa). Notably, impact of the 2018 Survey Report was manifested through it being the first-cited catalyst propelling establishment of this inquiry (Baker 2020b), and in shaping the inquiry's prominent focus on teachers' work (Gallop et al., 2021).

Key elements of the 2018 Survey Report and the research team's written and expert witness submissions to the public inquiry (Table 2: IIe-f) were closely mirrored in findings and recommendations in the Inquiry Report, particularly the identified factors contributing to work intensification and call for reduction of face-to-face teaching hours (Gallop et al., 2021). These have informed the NSWTF's 2021-22 (Teachers deserve) 'More Than Thanks' campaign aimed at achieving changes to workload, hours and pay as part of the union's award renegotiations. This

campaign aims to achieve a significantly higher wage increase than allowed under the legislated 2.5% cap on NSW annual public sector wage increases. While it becomes difficult to trace impact exactly through successive undertakings and initiatives, the effects of the partnered research are borne out in campaign television advertising which referred to teachers' '55 hours of work per week', a datapoint with origin only in the collaborative survey-questionnaire research, suggesting this has become an 'evidentiary fact', part of the 'assumptive worlds' (Lingard, 2013: 114) of practitioners and potentially policy-makers, and an additional 'type' of research impact to those identified by Pettigrew (2011 cited in Huzzard, 2018) above. Further, in 2021, in response to a blog published by the research team on teachers' work, the DOE sought direct consultation with the academic team regarding a proposal for system-wide change to achieve a 20% (40 hours/year) reduction in administrative worktime for teachers (NSW DOE, 2021: 2). Following a two-year gestation that commenced around 2019 shortly after the release of the survey-questionnaire findings and multi-stakeholder working party meetings, this again could suggest that, along with input from other sources, the messages of the collaborative research are finding forward momentum. Further impacts include a commissioned report on teacher's workload in Western Australia (Table 2: IIb-d) and a survey of teachers' workload during COVID-19 remote teaching (Table 2: IIe).

Discussion

At the outset it was observed that few empirical studies have documented academic-practitioner collaborations within the IR or HRM fields (Huzzard and Björkman, 2012). Our case study of research partnership extends knowledge on union strategy, identifying how unions can engage with research processes for political purpose to achieve policy outcomes and enhance members' employment conditions. In this case, researcher engagement with the PO focused on giving greater strength to the union's claims around increased teacher workload to enable the union to

articulate the professional voice of its members, engage in negotiations with the employer towards improving teachers' working conditions especially workload, and establish a platform on which to support the PO's campaign in the lead up to key political elections.

This also draws attention to the importance of considering research *methods* when collaborating to achieve policy impact. In this case, the large-scale, empirical questionnaire was a key element of academic-practitioner collaboration in terms of the design of the survey questions and attainment of a high survey response rate (33% of union members or 28% of all public school teachers). The resulting capacity to offer a representative 'voice' for the teaching profession distinctly increased the attention it drew from the DOE (see Table 2 IIb). Combined with carefully crafting initiatives for managing workload, the large-scale survey-questionnaire enabled the union to engage in 'futures-making' research and knowledge production supported by engagement with academia that could advocate for alternatives to current neoliberal regimes (Couture et al., 2020).

Such strategising is particularly crucial at a time when global education reform has instituted an ideological attack against the values upon which public education systems have been built (Bascia and Stevenson, 2017). Neoliberal bureaucrats and critical commentators have often cast teacher unions as resistant and militant organisations that have a default stance of opposing reform and maintaining the status quo (see Bascia and Stevenson, 2017). In this case, the union demonstrated a political and strategic sense of how to invoke research assistance and craft research instruments to navigate political processes and achieve viable outcomes. This reflects the imperative of acting 'politically' in the construction and critique of education policy (Mayne et al., 2018). Moreover, it signals distinct potential for academic-practitioner collaboration around improving the industrial conditions of teachers, wherein academic researchers can bring theoretical and methodological insight to strengthen and add authority to the capture of union membership voice. This point is significant given that while the NSWTF is an organisation representing the interests

of professional workers, the issue in contention (workload) is an inherent industrial issue. Thus, it may be possible that such a strategy and collaborative practice could be relevant to other unions.

Using the survey-questionnaire and its report as a discursive instrument also proved crucial to not only advance the union's social justice concerns, but for political success, drawing in participants to gain 'a seat at the table' in influencing teachers' working conditions, demonstrable through early action taken by the DOE to implement policy changes. While it is not possible to directly compare the outcomes and impact of the survey as a repertoire of action to more militant union tactics, such as industrial action, there is value in considering large-scale surveys as political instruments in their own right (Brady, 2000). Rather than engaging in 'resistance'-style tactics on an industrial issue such as teacher workload, the approach of developing a survey in which to establish the union's claims demonstrates the union shifting to a mode of 'professional unionism', which can be considered effective to advance social justice concerns (Author 3). While it is difficult to precisely quantify or measure the changes in policy related to the study reported upon in this article, they are real, with real-world, lived effects for stakeholders, in this case teachers, living and working 'at the chalkface'.

In considering challenges of knowledge co-production as a form of union strategy, we also contribute to the literature on collaborative research in management about the nuances and challenges of the collaborative process itself, and the characteristics that define success – important for IR and HRM scholars undertaking collaborative projects. As noted above, Amabile et al. (2001) highlight the importance of compatibility of values: the need to ensure 'win-win' for the parties. In this case, there was joint ownership and research motivation from both parties through shared overall research design within the broad frame of the project's purpose, joint creation of research questions, and negotiation of PO and researcher needs in survey development. As such, both groups had clear, intrinsic motivations for the research (also noted by Amabile et

al., 2001), including around the role of the union in working for its members' interests as well as, on the other hand, satisfying scholarly curiosity. Practitioners became very notably active in the research, effectively acting as co-researchers; both parties were genuinely and jointly driving the research, contrasting with the Phase 1 projects driven by the academics.

During this process there was also clear 'skill complementarity' (Amabile et al., 2001), shared resources and reciprocal learning with both parties extending themselves to understand the other, which are key. Academics could bring insights from the literature (e.g. the impact of neoliberalism, conceptual understanding of the effects of devolution and heightened local-level autonomy) and research methods, which combined iteratively with the PO's experiential and tacit knowledge (e.g. detailed knowledge of government education policies and their impact on teachers, fine-grained knowledge of how new policies influence teachers' specific work activities). Relationship- and trust-building occurred gradually at first and was augmented through the second-phase major studies, enabled by comfortable, frank conversation in frequent meetings with a disposition of inclusive communication. This produced 'clarity on commitments, roles, responsibilities, expectations and resource needs' (Amabile et al., 2001), reinforcing a sustained, committed, cooperative relationship (Gibbons et al., 1994). Reflecting that communication is vital, meetings were also held regularly (Amabile et al., 2001); through these, for instance, in the data analysis phase, in-progress research findings were provided by the academics which the PO team assisted in interpreting, adding meaning, and guiding further analysis.

However, conducting collaborative research is no simple endeavour. Guerci et al. (2019) note that a collaborative research process can generate dilemmas whereby overemphasis on 'problem relevance' may displace academic rigour, and issues of independence and quality may arise. Unions may seek evidence for what they hold as day-to-day, 'tacit' knowledge, raising concerns of academics regarding 'independence'. Conducting research in a sufficiently 'arms length'

manner, with scope for contrary, as well as consistent, outcomes, can render this less of an issue. Some negotiation was required around the questionnaire items and sample design. In these instances, researcher expertise proved valuable. Independence from research subjects was attained through arm's length research methods: telephone interviews (Interview Study) and an online, anonymous online survey (Questionnaire Study). Respondent anonymity, discussed with the PO, was ensured through data anonymisation and the PO maintaining confidentiality of members' contact information by undertaking the survey dissemination. Svensson et al. (2007) also note potential complication in connecting 'local' and 'holistic' perspectives. This issue was absent, as situating local (school) employment policy and practice within wider (state- and national) contexts was a key element of the research. In this case, the researchers' perception is that rigor, independence and quality were satisfactorily managed.

We also add further reflective insights to these considerations for academic-practitioner engagement, one being timeframes. It is well-recognised that academic publishing timelines often fail to keep pace with industry practices (e.g. Mayne et al., 2018). Researchers may need to assist partner organisations to understand the necessary processes for conducting quality academic/applied research, and to accept that later production of academic publications is an important part of reciprocal partnership. In a co-produced way of working, 'academic papers typically come after the impact has been generated, not before' (Nightingale and Vine, 2022). Agreement regarding intellectual property is vital to support this, covered in this case, as part of the funding agreement. Additionally, academics must meet multiple demands on their time and resources, not limited to teaching requirements, which can slow the research process, requiring management of industry partner expectations regarding deliverables.

Timeframes for generating impact is a separate though related matter that Mayne et al. (2018) observe must be built into research design. Research impacts are unpredictable and timeframes

can vary significantly, creating issues if attempting to fit with externally-determined reporting/auditing arrangements such as the ERA. In this case, major impact regarding teacher workload was achieved, which span the short, medium and longer terms, with the directness of ‘evidence’ of those impacts being clearest in the short-term. Though longer-term impacts became more diffuse, so too they appeared to become wider and deeper while remaining consistent with the union’s intentions of deploying the research strategically. Considering how impact can be ‘built into’ projects at the early design phase can assist both academics and practitioners to achieve important public engagement and impact outcomes from research, and improve outcomes for industry partners. What constitutes ‘impact’ also warrants consideration. That the early, low-engagement research positioned the academics so they were ‘noticed’ by the union at the point when it sought high-engagement, partnered research can be considered an ‘impact’ though one that is unlikely to be ‘counted’ in an impact ‘report’. Academics may also face difficulty in tracing and documenting impacts. Mutually-agreed arrangements with the partner organisation to enable impact reporting by academics would have better facilitated the mapping of effects from our partnered arrangement.

Finally, university actions of support and incentive may boost impactful, partnered research. At the time of the Phase 2 studies, the relevant University Faculty had discretion to moderate research cost through waiving of a University-wide overhead levy and, in some circumstances, permitted partner-funded support towards teaching offset for lead academic researchers, supporting completion within the requisite time-frame. Such initiatives have been less common amidst COVID-19 financial adversities but may return as the sector rejuvenates. Reflecting heightened institutional expectations, a university-wide incentive/reward initiative has embedded demonstrable impacts from engaged research as bona fide in academic promotion.

Conclusion

This article has examined an instance of collaborative academic-practitioner research partnership to discern and reflect upon elements of knowledge co-production in the IR/HRM field. It is apparent that the partnered research elicited impacts sought by the union, and for the academic researchers there were profound benefits of close-up insights about internal union processes, priorities and strengths, long-lasting rapport with a prominent and successful worker-representative body, and a wealth of data to analyse, reflect upon and extend for the purpose of scholarly publication. Writing about partnered union-academic research is not common, yet further case studies that extend the one offered here have prospect to build knowledge and capacity for this practice. Such qualitative inquiry could be augmented through wider-scale coverage, such as survey research to extend the contributions of this paper and deepen knowledge of union/academic collaboration.

The first research question guiding this article concerned how collaboration between trade unions and academic researchers can influence policy and generate impact. The type of collaborative partnership reported in this article constitutes a unique, and relatively unexplored, strategy through which trade unions can advance their claims and potentially influence policy. Critically, the partnered research projects provided an empirical means to strengthen and legitimise the union's claims, by providing 'voice' to their membership and enabling the union's demands to shift from ambit and anecdotal rhetoric, towards an evidentiary space with greater potential to influence policymaking. Given there is a social agenda behind any survey (Brady, 2000), in this case, the initiatives to address teacher workload presented a political agenda to communicate to the employer and government, in a large-scale quantitative 'language' that would translate effectively for policy-makers (Welch, 2015). This approach reflects a broad overall shift in trade union strategy and the imperative of acting 'politically' in the construction and 'critique' of policy

(Author 2). This strategy also reflects renewed efforts by education unions to build discursive power and intellectual leadership that enables these organisations to define the terms upon which the social world is perceived, and thus resist ill-conceived policy agendas (Author 2). In this case, collaboration with academic researchers represented an expanded repertoire of action for the union in its strategy of building discursive power, underpinned by cognitive and interpretive frames that presented solutions to identifiable problems (Author 2).

The second research question called for consideration of opportunities and dilemmas that can arise in research collaborations with trade unions. Amongst the most important, respect for the others' value set; flexibility to accommodate the partner's needs and priorities; and continuing, frequent dialogue particularly contribute to capturing the opportunities presented by partnered research. Establishing mutually-agreed timeframes, plus understandings about independence, research rigor, reporting, publication, and the documentation of impacts can all contribute to favourable outcomes.

The collaborative studies with the NSWTF are consistent with the argument that, ultimately, it is the purpose of research to make the world a better place, even if this may only occur slowly or indirectly (Lingard, 2013). In addition to highlighting opportunities and constraints, through this case of collaboration with an education union, we have demonstrated how partnered research may provide not only necessary data and evidence, but actually constitute part of union strategy, and a form of strategy that is perceived as relevant to current times and builds union capacity. Despite the distinctively high membership of education unions, other unions and academics may gain insights from this case illustration to capture the benefits of research collaboration.

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Table 1: Partnered Research: Phase 1 and 2 study focus, roles and effects

Row	Date	Study Focus	Funding	Role/Activity		Effects
				Academics	NSWTF (PO)	
PHASE 1 ‘Low involvement’ collaboration						
1	2011-13	Small study of marketisation in the NSW public school system	None	Independent research activity	Nominated a small number of schools for academics to access as part of data collection	Rapport-building between academics and union
2	2014-15	Pilot project of educational devolution in two Australian states, including NSW	University-supported seed grant requiring cash/in-kind contribution from 3 POs. NSWTF contributed small quantum.	Founding of research partnership Conduct research	Access to schools and principals’ organisation facilitated by PO	Continued rapport-building. Multi-disciplinary academic research expertise augmented and consolidated
3	2015	Application for major external grant focusing on effects of devolutionary education policy	PO gave commitment to significant financial support (in conjunction with 3 other organisations)	Researchers proposed research project	Gained internal Executive support for project financing	Continued rapport-building. Application was unsuccessful
PHASE 2 ‘High involvement’ collaboration						
4	2017	Phase 2.1 Interview study of teacher work and workload (March-September)	Moderate funding by PO under research-contract terms	Functioning as research partners Collaborative design of study between PO and academic research team. Undertook research interviews, data analysis, interpretation. Wrote report	PO input to study design including extensive tacit knowledge. Sampling: Provided list of schools for researchers to approach	Demonstrated existence of widespread workload problems in teaching. Allowed Executive Officer to assess research credibility/expertise of research team. Continued rapport-building

5	2018	Phase 2.2 Major online questionnaire study of teacher work and workload (November 2017-July 2018)	Substantial funding by PO under research-contract terms	Functioning as research partners		Established quantitative, evidence base, documenting attributes of teacher work and workload. Established a 'platform' for union requests for policy change and political commitments
			Led joint design of survey instrument. Data analysis. Literature review. Wrote major report	Joint design of survey. Dissemination of survey to members including workplace delegate communication		

Table 2: Outputs and impacts of partnered research [Phase 2]

I. Interview Study

(a) Outputs

- Preliminary and Full Report (Author 8)
- 1 academic conference presentation

(b) Impacts – Short Term (within 8 months of Preliminary Findings)

- Proof of concept: existence of a ‘problem’ and capability of research team established
-

II. Questionnaire Study

Short term (within 8 months of Preliminary Findings)

(a) Outputs

- Preliminary and Full Report (Author 7)*
- Exclusive news media stories of Preliminary and Full findings (Baker, 2018a; Patty, 2018)
- University Media release (July 2018) and additional media coverage
- Keynote Presentation by academics at July 2018 Annual Conference
- Written Executive resolution and Annual Conference Motion to action study findings
- Key findings of full report disseminated to union members via ‘webstories’ and numerous *Education* journal articles (see <https://news.nswtf.org.au/>)
- Written submission by academic researchers to the Commonwealth Government House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquiry (*‘Valuing Australia’s Teachers’*) into the status of the teaching profession (Submission 30)
- Expert witness to Parliamentary Inquiry public hearings (disbanded early 2019)
- 6 academic conference presentations

(b) Impacts

- Findings of the study were endorsed by NSWTF Executive, Council and the Annual Conference which unanimously voted the study into action via binding Resolution, ‘to be incorporated into a unified claim as part of Federation’s state election strategy’ (NSWTF, 2018a: 13).
 - Survey Study designated a ‘landmark study’ (NSWTF President)
 - DOE acknowledgement of ‘massive [survey] response’ meant it could not be ignored (Union Senior Executive Officer, personal communication. 23.11.2018), provided a robust base for Federation to take action on the findings and enabled NSWTF to present evidence of excessive workload, perceived causes and seek policy change via meetings with DOE Senior Officers (NSWTF, 2018b)
 - Arising from meetings and media, immediate Ministerial commitment to reduce teachers’ administrative workload as ‘highest priority’, citing the Survey Report. Written response by Minister to NSWTF: ‘I have instructed the Department to provide me advice as to the best way in which we can work with
-

all stakeholders, including the NSW Teachers Federation, to find workable solutions'. And 'reducing this [administrative] burden [is one of my] highest priorities' (Stokes, 2018; Lemaire, 2018)

- Formation of a government working party to identify ways to reduce teachers' administrative burden (Baker, 2018b).
- Cancelling of compliance reporting requirements upon teachers for 3 recent policy initiatives (NSW DOE, 2018b)
- Extensive further media coverage involving academics across radio and print. Audience reach of media coverage for report's first co-author during full report release-period, 8-29 July 2018, was approximately 715,000
- Invitation and formal contract to undertake counterpart to Survey Study in WA for education union

Medium Term (approx. 9-20 months after Preliminary Findings)

(c) Outputs

- Full Report on WA Study (Author 9)
- 5 academic conference presentations
- 1 academic journal publication

(d) Impacts

- Established platform for requests to all political parties in 2019 NSW State (March) (NSWTF, 2018b: 13) and National (May) elections
- WA study informs enterprise bargaining negotiations
- Disbanding of House of Representatives Parliamentary Inquiry due to onset of Federal election campaign period

Long Term (20+ months after Preliminary Findings)

(e) Outputs

- Written submission to Gallop Inquiry
- Expert witness appearance at Gallop Inquiry public hearings
- 'Teachers work in COVID-19' unfunded survey (April 2020), conducted by academics in collaboration with NSWTF
- 2 university research impact awards
- 1 academic conference presentation (reduced by COVID-19 cancellations)
- 6 academic journal publications (further 6 in publication pipeline), November 2021

(f) Impacts

- Major NSW Survey Study - First-cited evidence source propelling establishment (February 2020) of a high-level, independent inquiry (Gallop Inquiry) into teachers' work (Baker, 2020b)
- Cancellation of some components of the *LSLD* devolutionary reform package, partially on the basis of work overload
- NSWTF/DOE negotiation of Staffing Agreement includes provisions for attaining workload (staffing entitlement, 'release' time)
- Indirect impact through release of Gallop Inquiry (February 2021) and NSWTF (2021) 'More Than Thanks' pay and work-time campaign

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- 55 hours weekly working hours of teachers revealed by Interview and Survey Studies (and adopted in the Gallop Report) taken into common parlance as an uncited 'evidentiary fact' (e.g. ABC TV 'More Than Thanks' advertising)
 - NSW DOE 2021 '*Quality Time Action Plan*' to reduce administrative work practices in schools reflects key elements of collaborative research

* Full Report to PO publicly released July 2018. Formally published ('Final' version) and widely distributed end 2018-February 2019