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Exploring Intersections of Work Intensity and Professional Learning: Female Teachers' Responses to Research Engagement as Professional Learning

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Abstract: Much research has focused upon the promise of teacher research engagement as a form of professional learning. Yet, little scholarship has looked closely at how female teachers juggle research engagement alongside personal and professional responsibilities. This inquiry into the research experiences of two mid-career teachers provides an up-close look at the ways they attempted to sustain engagement over a three-year period. Attending closely to participants' accounts of time use, as they engaged in research activities, sheds light upon the presence of socio-cultural expectations, in these instances, constraining their efforts and, arguably, impacting the depth of their professional learning.

Introduction

I'd still have walked away [for a year] because I needed to, at the time.
The process takes longer than one might like.
You know, it's not a linear path,
it's sort of a muddled path.
Your life doesn't really stop.
Like family, [laughs] you can't have others
put on hold.
(Susan¹, found poem excerpt; based upon interview October 6, 2015)

In this opening excerpt, an experienced teacher, Susan, looks back upon the experience of developing and carrying out a research-based thesis towards the partial fulfilment of a Master of Education degree. The process, for Susan, was more time-intensive than she had planned; in part, owing to personal obligations traversing with the demands of conducting research. Of importance to this study was understanding the pervasive sense of contaminated time (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003) present across participants' accounts over the three years of the study.

Contaminated time for women, researchers suggest, is a consequence of both role-overload and task density, particularly for women who work while bearing responsibilities associated with child and home care (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2006; Schulte, 2014). The presence of time constraints shaping participants' personal and professional lives revealed competing demands shaping the amount of time, they felt, they could invest in the research process, leading

¹ Participants' names are pseudonyms.

me to wonder about the resonance between these findings and the barriers women experience (Ayyash-Abdo, 2000), as they make personal and professional decisions (Smulyan 2004a, 2004b; Smith 2011) in an era of increasing work intensity (Hargreaves 1994; Phillip & Kunter 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2011).

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: (1) to burrow deeper into the time constraints female teachers reported as they conducted research; (2) and to consider how perceptions of time and the presence of task density and role overload shaped and impacted their research engagement. In what follows, I explore two female teachers' experiences in response to conducting first-time research studies, as a professional learning endeavour. To situate participants' experiences within a broader context, I begin with a discussion of teachers' lives as viewed through the literature of work intensity and professional learning. Each view provides plausible insights into the experiences of teachers and emphasizes the importance of locating the conversation about teachers' lives, and their research engagement, amongst intersections of work intensity and professional learning.

Viewing Female Teachers' Professional Learning through Intersections of Increasing Work Intensity and Research Engagement

Scholars agree that the profession of teaching demands substantial personal investment (Day, 2012; Hansen, 2011), is complex across the trajectory of a career (Day & Gu, 2010; Mockler, 2011), and is shaped by professional and personal pressures (Acker, 1994). Some of the complexity in teachers' lives may be attributed to external forces in the presence of imposed curriculum reform and performance evaluation (Day, 2012), demands for evidence of learning in public schools (Sahlberg, 2011) and agendas of accountability (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008, 2012; Stone-Johnson, 2016). Hargreaves (1994), well known for his research on teacher work intensity, conceptualized an intensification thesis in which the increasing workloads of teachers could be viewed through a set of interrelated temporal constraints. Intensification for teachers, Hargreaves described, appears as reduced time for a variety of activities: for professional learning, for control over long term planning, and for relaxation during the workday, including, for instance, little time for lunch. This set of conditions, Hargreaves emphasized, leads to dependency on externally created resources and outside expertise, a reduction in the quality of service, and reinforces scarcities of preparation time. Globally, recent scholarship on teachers' working lives continues to emphasize the presence of increasing work intensity for teachers (Galton et al., 2004; Bruno et al., 2012; Phillip & Kunter, 2013) as evident in an emphasis on planning, grading, data management (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011) as well as meetings and paperwork (Galton et al., 2002). Regarding the work intensity of Canadian teachers, a recent pan-Canadian survey conducted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2014) in which 8,096 teachers responded, found that 93% of respondents struggled with balancing teaching and home responsibilities, attributing much of their workload stress to classroom composition (91%) compounded by a lack of time for collaborative planning of assessments (86%) and for making and grading student work (85%). Across Canada, researchers have documented teacher workloads as demanding and excessive; for example, in Alberta (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2012; Alberta Education, 2015; Duxbury & Higgins, 2013); in British Columbia (Naylor & White, 2010); in Manitoba (Dyck-Hacault & Alarie, 2010); in Nova Scotia (Kelloway, Thibault, & Francis, 2015; Nova Scotia Teachers Union, 2005); in Newfoundland and Labrador (Dibbon,

2004); in Ontario (Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, 2014); in Prince Edward Island (MacDonald, Wiebe, Goslin, Doiron, & MacDonald, 2010); and in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2013). Issues commonly identified in these studies emphasized, that for many Canadian teachers, workloads are demanding and may be ascribed to related factors: diverse classroom composition and student needs, increased paperwork, inadequate resources, and little time for planning of instruction and assessment.

The Promise of Professional Learning in the Form of Teacher Research

While there is evidence that documents the challenges of this profession, alongside this body of literature is research that authenticates the work of “teachers who remain skillful, knowledgeable, committed, and resilient regardless of circumstance” (Day, 2012, p. 7). Understanding the factors that contribute to teacher commitment and resilience is especially relevant for teacher professional learning, particularly in how teacher-initiated professional learning can motivate collaboration and ongoing interest in the development of pedagogy and practice (Lieberman & Mace, 2010). For professional learning to be relevant for teachers, scholars suggest it needs to be contextually relevant to school and classroom challenges (Birenbaum, Kimron, & Shilton, 2011) and connected to teaching practices and teacher expertise (Zeichner, 2003). Advocates of teacher-driven professional learning emphasize that teachers acting as researchers of their own classrooms potentially leads to improved teaching and informed understanding of instructional decisions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Cornelissen & van den Berg, 2014; Fichtman Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009).

Teacher research is known by a variety of terms; some of which include action research, teacher research, self-study, and practitioner inquiry (Fichtman Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), two well-known advocates of teacher research, use the term practitioner inquiry as an umbrella phrase to capture similarities common to the variety of approaches related to teacher research. In essence, they suggest, common to these different approaches is an understanding of the teacher researcher as a “knower and agent for educational and social change” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 37). Supporters of teacher research contend it plays an important part in teacher professional learning (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Leeman & Wardekker, 2013), particularly the role it has for making visible informed teacher decision-making (Hall, 2009; Wong, 2014). Somekh and Zeichner (2009) as part of university-school collaborations (Arhar et al., 2013), professional learning communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), professional development networks (Rust & Myers, 2006; Fowler & Procter, 2008) as well as university teacher education programs (Castle, 2006; Cornelissen & van den Berg, 2014; Shosh & Rappe Zales, 2007). The benefits of teacher research are well documented, some of which include its positive influence upon classroom practice (Capobianco et al., 2006; Craig, 2009; Grove et al., 2009), a teacher's sense of empowerment (Esposito & Smith, 2006), and the development of an autonomous professional learning mindset (Castle, 2006; Shosh & Rappe Zales, 2007). In contrast to the documented benefits of teacher research, there are also criticisms of its rigour (Huberman, 1996; Hammack, 1997; Anderson & Herr, 1999), particularly in how teachers struggle balancing classroom needs and obligations with the feasibilities of research and its demands for thoroughness (Borg, 2007, 2009; Li, 2006). Other constraints associated with teachers conducting research are attributed to a scarcity of job-embedded incentives (Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015), a lack of institutional funding and resources (Borg, 2010), as well as challenges with disseminating knowledge later in the research process (Gao, Barkhuizen, &

Wai Kwan Chow, 2011; Wong, 2014). Of the constraints, a common finding is the lack of time teachers have for research engagement (Borg, 2007, 2009); this finding is routinely linked to the contextual conditions of schools and teacher work load (Magos, 2012; Thornley et al., 2004). Despite the consistency of this finding in the literature, little is known about the complexity of time constraints informing teachers' research experiences beyond their classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Teacher research may be described as a process of methodical investigation undertaken by teachers to better understand classrooms and schools with the aim of improvement and change; such endeavours include educators located in schools as well as higher education contexts (Borg, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Craig, 2009; Fichtman Dana, 2013). Informing the design of this study into female teachers' research experiences was a narrative view of teacher knowledge and the connections between teachers' experiences in and outside of schools and their professional knowledge, identities, and continued learning (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Further enhancing my thinking was Morison and MacLeod's (2013) performativity-performance approach, a process that acknowledges Butler's (1990) gender theory of performativity working in relationship with narrative-discursive inquiry (Taylor, 2005, 2006; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Morison and MacLeod (2013) describe this approach as a process that enables researchers to better understand "subject positioning and interactional trouble within the micro politics of particular localized discursive contexts... contextualizing and making 'gender trouble' visible in real life settings" (p. 567). Viewing participants' narrative accounts through a process of performativity-performance enabled me to identify instances in which socio-cultural expectations became visible through accounts of relationships, interactions, and perceptions of particular events enabling and/or hindering their research efforts. To better understand time, and more specifically the lack of time present in female teachers' descriptions of their research experiences, I drew upon the notions of time pressure (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011) and gendered social expectations (Mattingly & Sayer, 2006) to pinpoint time-use patterns related to temporal scarcities. In doing so, what became palpable was a pervasive sense of contaminated time in how participants juggled multiple roles and tasks to sustain their research efforts.

Methodology

The design of this study was informed by a qualitative interest in the experiences of female teachers as they engaged in research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define the following characteristics as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive" (p. 15). Maintaining a qualitative focus over a period of three years (2013-2016), I worked closely with three female teachers, as they engaged in research for the purposes of fulfilling the partial requirements of a Master of Education degree in a small university located in Atlantic Canada. For the purposes of this article, I focus on two of the three participants, specifically two women, Susan and Teagan, who defended their theses within three years and had engaged in all stages of the research process. Viewing participants' research experiences qualitatively, I had a particular interest in

their professional learning in the midst of the process, to what they attributed meaning and how they made sense of their research efforts over time. The design of both participants' studies was relevant to their professional practices and identities but are not identified to preserve their anonymity. This study complements a previous study conducted in Turkey (2009-2011) in which I worked closely with three female teacher participants as they engaged in first-time research studies (Mitton-Kükner 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). I met Susan and Teagan as students in graduate courses; in June 2013, I invited them to take part in the study once they were no longer students of mine and I had confirmed they had made the decision to engage in a research-based thesis. Both participants were experienced mid-career teachers (six-plus years), were married, and had children. Between July 2013 and April 2016, I conducted four individual interviews with each participant; each interview was approximately 35-60 minutes apiece. The interviews were timed to coincide with different stages of the formal thesis process (Stage one: Research proposal development and ethics approval application; Stage two: Data collection; Stage three: Data analysis; Stage four: Write up of findings). Other data sources included: field notes and blog entries to a private blog to which we all contributed. Important to the design of the study were relational obligations (Craig, 2010); Susan and Teagan trusted me as their former instructor and were willing to take part in the process. Over the course of three years, we communicated using the private blog, emails, and occasional get together over coffee. To foster open communication, I shared interview transcripts as well as drafts of writing, later in the process, as my understanding of their experiences developed.

Analysis and Representation of Data as Found Poems

I inductively analysed data throughout the inquiry to better understand participants' experiences over the duration of their respective research studies. Inductive analysis fostered my understanding of recurring patterns across Susan and Teagan's narrative accounts and brought to my attention their perceptions of time, particularly a lack of time, as shaping their positioning in varying personal and professional contexts. I was able to pinpoint commonalities, specifically relationships amongst task density and role overload, personal obligations, and research engagement, across both participants' accounts at each stage of the research process. The presence of these tensions seemed to influence Susan and Teagan's perceptions of the amount of time they thought they were able to invest in research activities. Because of this, I decided to represent the data in a form that facilitated understanding (Butler-Kisber, 2002) that would vividly showcase participants' voices of what they had lived. In the decision to represent participants' research experiences as found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002, 2010), I aimed to show how, for Susan and Teagan, task density and role overload, in response to gendered norms, intersected with their research efforts, creating a pervasive sense of contaminated time for them both. Development of the found poems happened recursively and it necessitated multiple readings of transcripts, listening to our recorded conversations, and reviewing field notes and blog entries. It was important my representation of their experiences carried "the stamp" (Addonizio & Laux, 1997, p. 115) of their voices. From the data sources over the three years, I chose chunks of words and phrases (Butler-Kisber, 2010) portraying Susan and Teagan's descriptions of their research engagement. I shared early drafts with participants to create opportunities for additional response and contribution. The following poems are untreated (Butler-Kisber, 2010), in that I made only minor alterations to grammar and arrangement of participants' words. Each portrait represents a three-year period and is comprised of four poems;

one poem for each stage of the research process. I look upon the portraits as time-lapse texts in that the entire process of conducting and completing a research study is presented succinctly, removing the duration of time in between each stage.

Findings: Portraits of Time Pressure: Female Teacher Research Engagement across Three Years

The following portraits demonstrate what participants' research engagement reportedly felt like amongst competing demands as they worked towards the completion of a research-based thesis. Susan and Teagan consistently identified certain activities as responsible for their lack of time alongside their efforts to create time for the research process. These acts; however, seemed to create some tension, as they both described feelings of guilt in how they perceived research engagement as sacrificing time from their families.

Susan

1. Post thesis proposal defence: Susan July 13, 2013

So, there are writing struggles for sure.
Also, many late nights in my office
At my office, I am able to think.
At home, even if somebody is not asking me for something,
I still feel obligated to do something,
like housework or laundry, dishes, food preparation.
I have to physically remove myself from the situation

2. Post data collection: Susan November 28, 2013

I wish somebody talked to me about
what it [a research study] might look like in terms of time.
To really consider that it is not you [just] being a student,
who has no responsibilities outside of this particular project.
As an educator,
there is always something going on,
you are responding to students,
so, it is never just that time you are in the office.
Plus, I have a teenager and I have a toddler who requires some time.

3. In the midst of analysis and writing: Susan July 13, 2014

My plan was to start data analysis and writing,
which did not happen.
We had two deaths in the family and
I had to evaluate where I was spending time.
I wanted a balance between family and work.
and the thesis went on the back burner.
I am in the cycle right now where I am asking,

“Why did I think this was a good idea?”

In some ways, I wish I could be in the program full time,
but that’s not life,
that’s not my reality,
there are other variables, and
thinking about those other variables makes it fine.

4. Post thesis defence: Susan October 6, 2015

I’d still have walked away [for a year] because I needed to, at the time.
The process takes longer than one might like.
You know, it’s not a *linear* path,
it’s sort of a muddled path.
Your life doesn’t really stop.
Like family, [laughs] you can’t have others
put on hold.
Times when I was absolutely exhausted;
that’s why I needed to walk away.
I just don’t think right now is the right time [for further studies].
I really do need to walk away.
I’m not ready for it to go deeper,
or to push what I understand.

Teagan

1. Developing thesis proposal: Teagan November 20, 2013

What I am going to have a challenge with is
putting aside the time that I need.
There are things that happen every night:
 the girls and [my partner] are in Taekwondo;
 then we have to dedicate family time on the weekends,
 so that takes up afternoons.
The only time I have to work is in the evenings,
after 8 o’clock when the kids go to bed.
That’s my time.
It is great when [my partner] has Taekwondo
because the house is quiet for an hour
when he’s gone,
after the girls go to bed.
I just sort of buckle down and get a bulk of work done.

2. In the midst of thesis proposal defence writing: Teagan April 2, 2014

Just passed in my chapter 2 to my supervisor on Friday.
This is so new to me;
I’m not comfortable with the process so much.
I think my family is the biggest right now.
It’s just the regular mum stuff, you know?

Taking the kids, you know where they need go:

Taekwondo classes at 5.15 Mondays and Wednesdays.

Massive chaos after work to get there;

I'm off work at 4.

I can get supper started,

go to taekwondo,

come home and finish supper.

I feel I would have all the time in the world,

if I wasn't married, if I didn't have kids,

I'd be all over this.

3. In the midst of data analysis and writing: Teagan June 11, 2015

I'm in a happier space than I was.

like up to this point, this was HARD.

This whole process is HARD.

So, if I was to do it over again

I think I would have taken time off.

Maybe I will still, I don't know.

But holy cow!

I almost quit. [Laughs]

I was very close to just packing it in...

We were in the middle of selling the house.

There was a lot of stuff going on in the background

Way too much on my plate,

and something had to give.

Parking this [the proposal]; for four months,

was the easiest thing to do.

I was an unfortunate [laughs] victim of

life in general.

4. Post thesis defence: Teagan April 20, 2016

Took four years,

it is a long time to do a master's thesis.

I have ideas,

but to be able to harness that takes time.

Why [was] the first half of it so difficult?

Besides the fact that [family] stuff was going on.

Being a mum;

just the expectations of being a mum.

Having to make sure everything was ready to go for the kids;

they grew up.

1 and 4 [now] 5 and 7;

they are little, and they need a mum.

I can't just tap out...

I probably could have shared more with [my partner].

If I was to do it again I would make sure I let go some of that...

I would like to see the research used in some way, shape or form,
but I don't know how that's going to happen yet.
I just need a time out.

Looking across Susan and Teagan's Experiences

For Susan and Teagan, finding time for research engagement seemed to rub against the structures of their lives, particularly in the ways they felt they had to be mindful of familial obligations in the form of children, partners, and home-related tasks. While both, also, mentioned professional responsibilities that required their attention, overwhelmingly a lack of time was attributed to the busyness of life at home and childcare. In their efforts to create time for research Susan and Teagan opened up spaces within the demands of their schedules and created conditions in which they could focus solely on their work. Such labour largely entailed working late at night, once the children had gone to bed. For Susan, this meant leaving the house to work in her office at school and for Teagan, this required wearing headphones, while at home, to drown out surrounding noise. Although Susan and Teagan found ways to work research engagement into their busy schedules, they also described the large amounts of time that such activities demanded. For example, such tasks like the development of a literature review, transcribing interviews, analyzing data, and composing initial drafts required large amounts of time, energy, and alertness. For Susan and Teagan, time was a two-fold entity: Time was needed for the completion of practical purposes (e.g. interviewing participants) and time was needed for the intensity of thinking needed for the production of quality (e.g. analyzing qualitative data for recurring themes).

Despite their efforts, it was reportedly challenging for them to maintain consistent connections to their studies, and, at different points in the process, both considered quitting. For example, following stressful events that included deaths in the family for Susan and buying a new home for Teagan seemed to create tipping points in which they each took a break and questioned if they should continue. Participants' rationale for their lack of time suggests the entrenchment of gender norms (Morison & MacLeod, 2013) influencing the amount of time they thought they were able to invest in the research process and reveals Susan and Teagan's efforts to maintain their gendered identities (Butler, 1990) in response to perceived obligations.

Susan and Teagan were aware of these tensions and acknowledged that the research process might have been a different experience had they been single. Susan and Teagan's accounts of attempting to regularly engage in research brought forward not only a perceived lack of time, but also uncovered a continuum of negative emotions, particularly stress, guilt and worry that their efforts to professionally develop and learn were selfish because it took them away from their children. In the final interview with both, as they looked back upon the process of engaging in research, both Susan and Teagan described the need for a break. Viewing Susan and Teagan's research experiences in terms of positioning, troubling, and repairing² (Butler, 1990; Morison & MacLeod, 2013) suggests that both women were time pressured throughout this process and the act of doing research was, in many ways, a subversive act, in how they

² Morison and MacLeod (2013) describe positioning, troubling, and repairing as key concepts to understanding how participants are positioned within particular contexts and the ways they question (trouble) their own positioning and, later, revise these earlier doubts (repair) through affirmation of their gendered identities.

troubled engrained gendered expectations by making time for the effort. These tensions were made visible when Susan and Teagan described research engagement as sacrificing family time, arguably revealing Susan and Teagan's attempts to repair their gendered identities and forestall criticism from larger societal narratives (Morison & MacLeod, 2013).

Troubling the Challenges of Time Constraints Shaping Research Engagement: Insights into Female Teacher Professional Learning

This study uncovered some of the ways two female teacher researchers experienced research engagement as part of requirements to complete a postgraduate degree in education. In contrast to other studies that examined the impact of research upon teacher learning as participants looked back upon the process (Babkie & Provost, 2004; Castle, 2006; Capobianco & Joyal, 2008), this study entailed looking closely at participants' lives, over time, particularly the fine details shaping their efforts to conduct research. While this study upholds what is known about the challenges that teachers experience, as they attempt to sustain their research efforts (Borg, 2010; Tavakoli & Howard, 2012), what also emerged was significantly different in how participants attributed a lack of time to family-related responsibilities. Although it is impossible to make claims that familial obligations were placed more heavily on Susan and Teagan than their partners, as I relied exclusively on their personal accounts, I do note that both identified a lack of time in each interview over the three-year period. Also, important to emphasize, however, is their success, as both completed their studies and successfully defended their theses. Viewed from this perspective it is possible to ignore the pressures that occurred; although, I suggest, their ability to endure routines of multitasking (Author, 2015) may have had some impact on the depth of their learning. Undoubtedly, the burden of such a pace was evident at the end of the process when both were explicit about their need for a break. Susan described the desire "to walk away" and Teagan defined it as a requisite "time out". These statements could be read as a desire for rest; but they can also be interpreted as a desire to dial down the pressure of limited time.

Understanding the complexity of Susan and Teagan's time constraints provides understanding into why research felt like an additional task, particularly as the only time it could happen was during the little leisure time they had. Mattingly and Bianchi (2003) suggest that what Susan and Teagan experienced was not unusual, as women tend to "experience lower-quality free time and less total free time than men, likely as result of their heavier burden of traditional caregiving responsibilities...the time they do have is often contaminated by other activities or altered by women's sole responsibility for children" (p. 1025). Susan and Teagan's experiences reveal the complexity of their time constraints and the impact they had upon their research engagement. To provide additional insights in what follows I situate the discussion around the gendered nature of schools and the increasing workloads of teachers.

Insight 1: Socio-Cultural Expectations Influencing the Potential of Autonomous Professional Learning

Globally, gender imbalances are reflected in professional fields with women under-represented in science and engineering and over-represented in the field of education (OECD, 2016). The profession of teaching in Western societies is commonly described as gender

imbalanced (Drudy, 2008; OECD, 2016), and school contexts are typically depicted as highly feminized (Kelleher et al., 2011; Moreau, Osgood, & Halsall, 2007). Researchers suggest the over representation of women teaching globally is related to issues of economic development, urbanization, positioning in society, and societal expectations regarding children and childcare (Drudy, Martin, Woods, & O’Flynn, 2005; Drudy, 2008). In Canada, women represent significant numbers of the teaching population and increasingly comprise occupations related to education at the preschool, elementary as well as secondary levels (Turcotte, 2011). Providing contextualization for the discussion of Susan and Teagan’s experiences is scholarship that examines the complexity of female teachers’ lives in and outside of schools (Ayyash-Abdo, 2000; Cin & Walker, 2013), particularly the presence of socio-cultural expectations intersecting with professional demands and aims (Smulyan, 2004a, 2004b; Smith, 2011). The results of this study portray female teachers’ time constraints as multifaceted, with the potential to impede teacher research, as a form of autonomous professional learning (Castle, 2006, Shosh & Rappe Zales, 2007, Cornelissen & van den Berg, 2014).

Insight 2: Increasing Work Intensity Adding Further Complexity to Female Teachers’ Lives

The literature acknowledges the intensification of teachers’ workload as a global phenomenon (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008) and the reasons for teacher job-stress are numerous and context-dependent (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) leading scholars to look at the relationship amongst teacher burnout, job satisfaction, and school context (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Buchanan, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2010, 2011). Introducing a gender lens to this body of work is critical, as it provides another layer to understanding the complexity of teachers’ lives. Research focused upon female teachers and their teaching practices is well-established (Acker, 1994, 1995; Smulyan, 2004b), as is the literature on gender inequities in educational contexts (Sari, 2012). Of particular importance is how scholars have problematized traditional notions of teaching as a feminized profession (Skelton, 2002; Smulyan, 2004a) and the decisions women undertake entering the profession (Smulyan, 2004b). For example, some decades earlier, Acker (1995), discussing the frustration female teachers experienced when their efforts with students failed to actualize, suggested one possibility might be related to work “intensification and accountability as ingredients in the production of teacher guilt” (p. 33). More recently, Froese-Germain (2014) in an overview of the research looking specifically at the workloads of Canadian teachers noted that traditional notions of “labour at home between women and men does not appear to have changed as much as we might like to think—women are more likely than men to report that they have the primary responsibility for childcare in their families” (p. 5). Thinking in this manner offers a perspective on how the increasing demands of teaching intersect with socio-cultural expectations, complicating and shaping women’s lives, in and outside of schools, as revealed in Susan and Teagan’s experiences.

Insight 3: Female Teachers' Multitasking Masking Attempts to Move Forward Professionally and Economically

Both Susan and Teagan described research engagement as part of intricate cycles of personal and professional obligations. They attempted to make it a part of their complex schedules, yet, struggled to maintain consistent connections. Ongoing multitasking seemed to promote an assortment of negative emotions for both, particularly disappointment, guilt, and worry, as they wondered why the completion of the thesis was so time intensive and how it impacted time with their families. Although both women successfully defended their theses, if not looked at closely, arguably, their abilities to multitask disguised the challenges they experienced. Spink, Cole, and Waller (2008) describe multitasking as a common human behavior in response to the demands of several competing tasks; yet, they emphasize, mindfully juggling tasks is short-lived and decreases when the cognitive complexity of the task is high. Susan and Teagan's reported accounts of multitasking as a way to make time for research suggests this might be a common strategy for many women in their attempts to professionally develop and learn. Leaving one to wonder whether Susan and Teagan might engage in research outside the supports and challenges of a postgraduate degree, which suggests there are limitations in how teacher research may support a mind-set for further autonomous professional learning (Castle, 2006; Shosh & Rappe Zales, 2007; Cornelissen & van den Berg, 2014). Understanding the presence of time constraints shaping participants' personal and professional lives, revealed competing demands and provides insights into the barriers (Smith, 2011) women experience as they attempt to move forward professionally and economically. Although women make up the majority of the teaching population in most nations, their representation tends to decrease at leadership levels; especially important to consider, as moving into leadership positions is partially based upon the completion of postgraduate degrees, principals are generally hired from the ranks of teachers, and salaries tend to increase at successive levels (Coleman, 2001; OECD, 2016; Tucker & Marian, 2014).

Conclusion

This inquiry into the research experiences of two mid-career teachers provides an up-close look at the ways they attempted to sustain engagement over a three-year period. Attending closely to participants' accounts of time use, as they engaged in research activities, sheds light upon the presence of socio-cultural expectations, in these instances, constraining their efforts and, arguably, impacting the depth of their professional learning. In this paper, sharing found poetry had a two-fold purpose in that it was imperative to create a vivid representation of their experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2002) and to provide an opportunity for resonance in how readers might interact with the texts in ways that are relevant to their experiences and contexts (Xu, Connelly, & Phillion, 2007). While I am an advocate of teacher research as a profound form of professional learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and believe in its potential to promote professional autonomy (Castle, 2006), I am mindful that the teacher research conversation has been largely disconnected from the very real presence of socio-cultural expectations and increasing workloads. Viewed in this light, understanding time constraints and their impact upon female teachers, reveals how competing demands might restrict a woman's efforts to deepen her professional learning; arguably, constraining the possibilities for career development and growth.

Lastly, knowing what Susan and Teagan experienced over time, raises questions for me as a teacher educator, and as someone who attempts to be a supportive mentor (Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006). As a thesis advisor, I engage in practices that I know work: regular meetings, ongoing descriptive feedback, positive, consistent, relational interactions, and opportunities for graduate students to participate in research events/studies (to name but a few). I am aware, however, that what I am advocating for, and willing to do, is not an easy path for many women, and while tensions associated with learning may be educative (Dewey, 1983), these tensions are not created in isolation. Simply, they are interconnected with larger societal narratives that are, at times, well beyond my reach as a thesis advisor, particularly true for women who are married, for those who have children, and for women who are from diverse, historically underrepresented backgrounds (Daniel, 2009; Maton et al., 2011). And, yet, I continue to encourage female graduate students to pursue a thesis-based degree for, I believe, it is in the messiness of such engagement that the mindset, and voice, of a researcher emerges, creating opportunities for impact and influence.

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