Part-time Teaching in Victorian Government Schools:
The policy frameworks and the dilemmas facing school leaders

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Abstract

This paper discusses the findings of research examining the various interrelated documents that constitute the DEECD work-life policy framework and the dilemmas school leaders face as they seek to accommodate an increasing number of requests by teachers wanting to work part-time. The aim of this research was to address the question: 'What are the difficulties in securing part-time work as a teacher?'

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provided the theoretical framework for this research. Foucault's (1972) approach to discourse analysis was also drawn upon to examine how power and knowledge are utilised, created and sustained in the DEECD work-life policy framework. A key focus of this research was the power relations evident between policy developer (the DEECD and its consultants), policy enactors (school leaders) and policy beneficiaries (teachers) when the policy is implemented.

This study was conducted in two parts. First, the DEECD's work-life policy framework was critiqued. Second, to understand how Victorian government school leaders are meeting requests by teachers wanting to work part-time, a small sample of 7 school leaders were interviewed.

The findings confirmed that increasing numbers of teachers want to work part-time to balance work with caring for their children, to undertake phased retirement or because they feel that working part-time will enable them to achieve greater health and well-being.

The school leaders reported facing a range of dilemmas when faced requests by teachers wanting to work part-time. These included the timetable, the question whether job-sharing works for teaching and learning; and difficulties scheduling face-to-face communication forums in line with part-time teacher availability.

The current model of school organisation that seeks to strike a balance between teacher availability and student learning outcomes by way of a timetable based on one teacher per class seems to impede flexibility. The findings of this study indicate that a more innovative model is required to balance the work needs and preferences of 21st Century teachers with the learning needs of 21st Century students.

Key Words
women, teachers, policy, part-time work, power, school leadership, school organisation

Introduction

This paper presents findings from research examining interrelated documents that constitute the DEECD work-life policy framework and the dilemmas school leaders face as they seek to accommodate an increasing number of requests by teachers wanting part-time work. The research addressed the question: 'What are the difficulties in securing part-time work as a teacher?'

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provided the theoretical framework for this research. It conceptualises the ecological environment topologically as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. These environments are described in terms of their immediacy to the individual concerned as follows: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. This theoretical model allows for phenomenology and social context to be considered in relation to particular settings and in relation to individuals within those settings. In this study, Ecological Systems Theory was drawn upon to examine how economic and social changes over time have resulted in increased workforce participation by women and increased demand for part-time work. The model was also used to conceive the relationship between teachers, their work, their families and the community in which they exist as they seek to balance their career aspirations and financial responsibilities with caring for children.

The application of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) to this study is best explained as follows and summarised in Figure 1.1:

- A *microsystem* is the complex of relations between an individual and his or her immediate setting (Brofenbrenner, 1979). For example, an individual belongs to a home and workplace, and undertakes various roles within each of those settings, which may include partner, parent and employee (teacher).

- A *mesosystem* is the network of microsystems in which a person participates at a particular point in his or her life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For a working mother who is also teaching and studying, the mesosystem would comprise interconnections between family (home), work (school) and study (university).

- An *exosystem* includes specific social structures that influence, delimit or determine what goes on in the immediate settings in which a person is found (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A pertinent example would be access to high-quality, affordable childcare, either by extended family or childcare centres. Another would be the potential of school community members (ie. parents) to affect decisions by school leaders whether or not to accommodate requests by teachers to work part-time.

- A macrosystem is a 'societal blueprint' that refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exo- systems are the concrete manifestations (Voydanoff, 2007). Policy (explicit) and how it is interpreted and enacted (implicit) are examples of macrosystem forces.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model has been applied by Voydanoff (2007) in relation to work, family and community and further adapted by Pocock, Williams & Skinner (2009). Pocock, Williams and Skinner (2009) suggest that understanding the demands and resources created by particular work, family and community ecological systems requires consideration of the concepts of *time*, *space*, *life-stage* and *power*. This study examined the concept of power within the employment relationship between school leaders and teachers when a request to work part-time is negotiated.
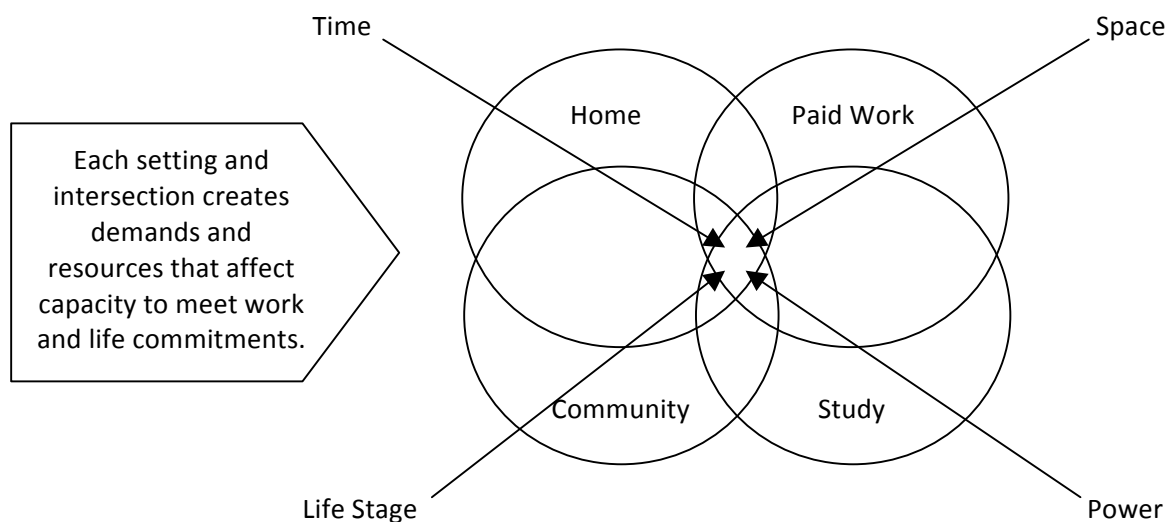
Figure 1.1: Example of mesosystem for a teacher balancing family, work and study commitments. Note: Conceptual approach adapted from Pocock, Skinner & Pisaniello (2010) and Pocock, Williams & Skinner (2009).

Literature Review
Factors affecting workforce participation among women

Since the 1980s, subsequent Australian governments have recognised how important it is to ensure that working parents have sufficient support to pursue flexible, family-friendly work arrangements to balance time spent at work with time spent with their children. Various microeconomic reforms, together with the introduction of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation, have led to improved opportunities and protections for women in the workplace.

The election of the Howard Liberal government in 1996 signalled a dramatic change in Australian workplace relations. The introduction of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (Cth) marked the first of a series of microeconomic reforms designed to decentralise Australia's industrial relations system and to encourage enterprise bargaining directly between employers and employees. Among a range of other changes, this legislation made it unlawful for employers to discriminate against

employees with family responsibilities. This improved access to part-time work and led many Australians who had been unavailable to work standard full-time hours to re-enter the workforce. Women were particularly responsive to these changes, which gave them the chance to try to balance work and family responsibilities.

Into its third term, the Howard Liberal government proposed the *Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Act 2005* (Cth) to bring about further significant and controversial changes to workplace relations in Australia. This legislation was perceived by many working Australians to disadvantage those without the power or skills to effectively negotiate with their employer: namely those wanting to work part-time or casually, those balancing work and family responsibilities and ethnic minorities (Sutherland, 2007). When the Rudd Labor government was elected in 2007, *WorkChoices* was abolished and transitional measures were introduced to create what the new government described as 'a stronger safety net' of entitlements for employees (*Workplace Relations Amendment (A Stronger Safety Net) Act 2007* (Cth)). The *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) outlines ten new National Employment Standards (NES) as minimum terms and conditions that apply to all national system employees (including Victorian government school teachers). These include the right to request flexible working arrangements, the right to parental leave and related entitlements and the right to personal / carer's leave and compassionate leave. These provisions reflect the Rudd/Gillard Labor government's expectation that employers will assist employees to balance work and family responsibilities. Other means of government support for working families include the new Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme and the Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR) to help parents meet child care costs (Family Assistance Office, 2011; Parliamentary Library, 2005; Parliamentary Library, 2000).

Despite these measures, workforce participation trends suggest that work-life policy in Australia is still a 'work in progress'. Around 58.7 per cent of all Australian women aged fifteen years and over are in the paid workforce, compared with 72.3 per cent of men (ABS, 2010). Nearly half (approximately 46 per cent) of these women work part-time (ABS, 2010). These figures reflect not only changing aspirations, educational and career attainment among women, but also the greater reliance on two incomes to meet increases in costs of living and sustain family spending patterns (OECD, 2007). However, women are still underemployed and underutilised. In 2010, the female rate of underemployment[1] was 9.1 per cent (compared with 5.6 per cent for males) and the

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[1] According to the ILO definition adopted in 1998, time-related underemployment exists when the hours of work of an employed person are below a threshold, and are insufficient in relation to an alternative employment situation in which the person is willing and available to engage (ABS, 2010).

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underutilisation rate[2] was 14.5 per cent (compared with 10.5 per cent for males) (ABS, 2010). One reason for this is that women tend to adapt their workforce participation after childbirth (OECD, 2007). Once parents, many women take leave to care for their children before returning to work part-time, often once their children are all of school age (OECD, 2007; OECD, 2009). The maternal employment rate for women aged 15-64 is 48.3 per cent where the youngest child is aged under five, but increases to 70.5 per cent where the youngest child is school aged (6-16 years) (OECD, 2007, p.46. (note: 2005 ABS data)).

There are many parents who are at home, but would prefer to be in paid work, or to work more hours to generate more family income, but cannot because they have limited access to high-quality, affordable child care (OECD, 2007). More women working has led to increased demand for child care, including before and after school care. Recent research reveals that parents are paying up to 10 per cent of their household income on child care (Doherty, 2010). Community child care costs $65-$85 per child per day while private centres charge $65-$100 per child per day (Doherty, 2010). The concept of 'child care affordability' is complicated: what is considered affordable varies by family depending on the fees charged, the family's income, cash flow and associated eligibility for fee subsidies, the number of children in care and the time spent in care (AIHW, 2006). Changes in any of these factors can affect the affordability of child care. Parental workforce participation often depends on having access to cheap, informal child care provided by relatives and social networks. Parents with pre-school age children find themselves weighing the various costs and benefits of working and considering whether it's feasible for both parents to work. In fact, around one in four Australian employees leave work to care for their children because they cannot access or afford child care (Raising Children Network, 2008). Another quarter reduces their working hours (Raising Children Network, 2008).

The importance of identifying and accommodating working parents' needs and preferences in terms of work-life policies is underlined by the sheer magnitude of their presence in the workforce (Thornthwaite, 2004). Around 30 per cent of all Australian employees have dependent children: sixty two per cent of families with dependent children under the age of fifteen have both parents working outside the home (ABS, 2010). Dual earner couples with children typically choose one of the following strategies to reduce and restructure their work commitments: they place limits on the encroachment of work on family life; prioritise the career of one partner; or engage in 'trading off' whereby partners take turns to focus on their careers (Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba & Lyness,

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[2] In Australia, the labour force underutilisation rate is defined as the sum of the number of people unemployed and the number underemployed, expressed as a proportion of the labour force (ABS, 2010). It can also be viewed as the sum of the unemployment rate and the underemployment rate (ABS, 2010).

2006; Hand & Lewis, 2002; Levner, 2000). In 2007, the one parent working full-time and one parent working part-time dual earnership model was the most common, with 38.1 per cent of couple families with children aged 0-14 years living this way (OECD, 2009). By contrast, only 31 per cent of couple families had only one parent working full time and only 21 per cent had both parents working full-time (OECD, 2009). The work-life juggling act is even more difficult in sole parent households, the majority of which are headed by women (OECD, 2009).

So, exactly what work-life policies should organisations adopt to assist employees achieve work-family balance? For working parents, work-life balance means establishing a way to resolve the multiple and often incompatible demands of two important roles: parent and employee (Thornthwaite, 2004). The idea of 'balance' is shaped by the demands that individuals face in their homes and workplaces, their psychological attachment to the different roles, the opportunities available for establishing balance, and their conceptions as to what is possible (Saltzstein, Ting and Saltzstein, 2001). Employee preferences for flexible, family-friendly work arrangements vary according to gender, occupation, career orientation and country (Thornthwaite, 2004). They also vary according to life-cycle stage and parenting phase, defined by the age of the youngest child in a household (Thornthwaite, 2004). The household model is another factor to be considered: the number of resident parents, the number of income earners, and whether the parents are working full or part-time (Thornthwaite, 2004). Given that such a wide range of factors shape employee needs and preferences, workplace policies that provide for requests to be considered on a case-by-case basis seem appropriate.

Having flexible, family-friendly workplace policies that are routinely and appropriately enacted can motivate current staff, reduce staff turnover, attract new staff, reduce workplace stress and generally enhance worker satisfaction and productivity (OECD, 2007; McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley & Shakespeare-Finch, 2005; Sheridan & Conway, 2001). In these ways, recruitment and training costs are reduced (McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley & Shakespeare-Finch, 2005; Glass & Finley, 2002). Across the OECD, organisations that have introduced flexible, family-friendly measures have reported significant reductions in staff absenteeism and turnover, and an increased likelihood that mothers will return to the original employer upon expiry of maternity leave (OECD, 2007).

Furthermore, various studies have demonstrated that flexible, family-friendly work arrangements significantly improve employee health and well-being while reducing role strain (Glass & Finley, 2002). Employees who have more say over when, where and how much they work have better work-life outcomes (Pocock, Skinner & Pisaniello, 2010; Thornthwaite, 2004). McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley & Shakespeare-Finch (2005) found that the ability to attend work on fewer days, vary start

and finish times and work from home were deemed highly beneficial to work-family balance by employees. These arrangements tended to reduce the need for paid child care and allow greater time to be spent with children during waking hours (McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley & Shakespeare-Finch, 2005).

Having established the economic, social and business cases for flexible, family friendly work arrangements, focus now turns to the teaching profession where there is increasing demand for part-time work.

Part 2: A trend towards part-time teaching

The DEECD's 2008 and 2009 Teacher Supply and Demand Reports highlight a range of workforce planning challenges including an ageing and feminised teacher workforce and a teacher shortage in some subject and geographic areas. The Reports also reveal a clear trend towards part-time teaching in Victorian Government schools, rising from 15.5 per cent in 1998 to 22 per cent in 2009 (DEECD, 2009). These are persistent issues that are not unique to the Victorian context (MCEETYA, 2005; MCEETYA, 2004; OECD, 2005). In fact, the OECD undertook a major project, *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* from 2002-2004 which raised concerns that these workforce planning issues have the potential to compromise quality education in most OECD countries (OECD, 2005).

Teaching has long attracted substantial numbers of women, who now account for just over 70 per cent of all Government teaching service staff, and around 80 per cent of all Primary school teachers (DEECD, 2009; MCEETYA, 2004, 2005). Teaching tends to be regarded as a family-friendly career choice given, among other things, society's perception that teachers work school hours and are able to spend the school holidays with their children (see Richardson and Watt, 2005; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Richardson, Watt & Tysvaer, 2007). While teachers work part-time for a range of reasons, the desire to balance a career with family responsibilities is a significant motivator (Williamson & Myhill, 2008; Richardson and Watt, 2005; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Richardson, Watt & Tysvaer, 2007). However, recent research calls into question whether teaching really is family-friendly. Williamson & Myhill (2008) found that many teachers are working in excess of 50 hours per week and spending considerable time working 'out of hours'. Many female participants in their study spoke about the challenge of juggling the demands of teaching with caring for children and running a household (Williamson & Myhill, 2008).

In reality, teachers today are working longer hours at school and at home in an ever-expanding role that includes more non-teaching and administrative duties (Gardner and Williamson, 2004). There

is increasing pressure for teachers to do more in less time, work with larger class sizes, respond to change, be more accountable, meet deadlines and engage in continuing professional development (Lipman, 2009; Williamson & Myhill, 2008). The provision of salary-sacrificed laptop computers to all Victorian government school teachers, together with improved internet access mean teachers can work 'anytime, anywhere': but the ability to do so is blurring the boundaries between work and home (see Lipman (2009), Williamson & Myhill (2008), Gardner & Williamson (2004)). And while a range of information and communication technologies are revolutionising teaching and learning, teachers must find time in an already hectic workload to learn to use these tools effectively (Williamson & Myhill, 2008). Meanwhile, teachers' pay continues to be contentious and reflects that their work is undervalued (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Ultimately, the intensification of teachers' work and the negative impact this is likely to have on their health, well-being and work-life balance, has implications for teachers' ability to perform their job to a high standard and, by extension, quality education (see Williamson & Myhill, 2008; Jepson & Forrest, 2006; de Jesus & Lens, 2005; McKenzie, Santiago & OECD, 2005).

Method

This study was conducted in two parts. First, the DEECD's work-life policy framework as an assemblage of discourse was critiqued. Documents were derived from relevant internet-based texts that were available in the public domain and that contained information regarding the DEECD's work-life policy. These included the *Flexible Work Options Kit* (in four parts: *Guidelines*, *Managers' Guide*, *Staff Guide*, and *Telecommuting Guidelines and Agreement*); the *Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2008*; and various sections of the DEECD's website, HRweb[3]. Together, these inter-related documents constitute a policy response that users (ie. school leaders and teachers) must navigate and make sense of. The depiction of *power* within the documents was considered to be particularly important given its relevance to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model and Pocock, Williams & Skinner's (2009) adaptation to it in relation to work, family and community. Foucault's (1972) approach to discourse analysis was also drawn upon in order to examine how power and knowledge are utilised, created and sustained in the policy framework.

Second, to better understand how Victorian government school leaders are accommodating requests by teachers wanting to work part-time, a small sample of 7 school leaders from a mix of urban and rural Primary and Secondary schools were interviewed by phone. The school leaders interviewed were responsible for enacting the DEECD work-life policy framework, either as the school Principal or Assistant Principal. School leaders were assigned pseudonyms and schools

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[3] HRweb provides access to a vast range of information and support services for managers and employees about the DEECD's human resources policies and practices.

were coded as Melbourne metropolitan (MM) or regional (R). Participant characteristics are described in Table 1.1.

The range of interview questions aimed to find out the extent to which employers understand their legal responsibility to be flexible; reasons why part-time teaching is utilised in schools; and the challenges and important considerations for school leaders when implementing the policy. An Excel spreadsheet was used as a template for recording, examining and comparing participants' responses. Four common themes were identified:

1. School leaders' level of understanding of their responsibilities as employers.
2. How and why part-time work is utilised in schools.
3. The challenges and important considerations for school leaders in accommodating requests by teachers to work part-time.
4. The need for a new whole school approach.

Table 1.1: Participant characteristics

Participant pseudonym	School code	Enrolments	Part-time teachers %
Cameron	MM Secondary A	1980	25
Patrick	MM Secondary B	791	25
Sam	MM Secondary C	1139	20
Tim	R Secondary D	1143	20
Gwen	MM Primary E	148	30
Roslyn	MM Primary F	518	10
Violet	R Primary G	316	15

Findings
1. The DEECD work-life policy framework

The DEECD's *Flexible Work Options Kit* was first developed in 1998. It is currently in its second edition following a *Diversity and Inclusiveness Audit* in 2001 and a legal review in 2003, both of which were undertaken by external consultants. Notably, the *Kit* was developed during an extended period of Liberal governance at both the Federal and State levels. The *Guidelines*, *Managers' Guide* and *Staff Guide* provide information, direction and tools to help school leaders and teachers engage in a new process: bargaining at the workplace level.

The *Flexible Work Options Kit* demonstrates that the DEECD:

- Acknowledges the important role of work-life policy to attract and retain skilled employees who may not be able to work standard full-time hours.

- Emphasises that requests to work part-time and/or job-share be evaluated on a school-by-school, case-by-case basis with careful consideration of the needs of the school, school leader and teacher concerned.

- Sees the potential benefits of work-life policy, including the potential to enhance student learning outcomes by matching available teacher skills with student needs. This point is particularly important given the likelihood that school leaders and parents may perceive part-time and job-shared teaching loads to be detrimental to students.

- Encourages a whole school approach, whereby school leaders take a strategic view when developing the school timetable and considering how scheduling might be undertaken more flexibly to balance the needs of part-time teachers and student learning outcomes.

HRweb is used as a source of additional relevant and up-to-date work-life policy information. For example, the web page from which the *Kit* is accessible refers to employer and employee rights and responsibilities under the new National Employment Standards (DEECD, HRweb, Flexible work for work-life balance, 2010). HRweb also reveals attendance stipulations for teachers employed part-time. It states that, unless agreed, teachers employed 0.4FTE to 0.6FTE cannot be required to attend on more than three days per week and teachers employed 0.7FTE to 0.8FTE cannot be required to attend on more than four days per week (DEECD, HRweb, Part-time employment, 2010).

While the creators of the *Flexible Work Options Kit* aimed to ensure that working parents would have sufficient support to pursue flexible work arrangements in order to balance time spent at work with time spent with their children, issues of workforce planning are not of immediate concern to employers. While The *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) stipulates that parents who put forward a case to work part-time must have their request considered, school leaders are entitled to refuse requests on reasonable grounds related to the effect on the education program of the school concerned. This is why the ways in which the DEECD's work-life policy framework is enacted by school leaders was of interest. It was essential to examine and locate this policy framework within the fabric of everyday life for school leaders, school communities and working families in order to fully understand the extent to which it is productive.

2. Working with competing demands: insights from school leaders

School leaders' level of understanding of their responsibilities as employers

School leaders were interviewed to find out the extent to which they understand their legal responsibility to be flexible; reasons why they utilise part-time teaching; and the challenges and important considerations for them when implementing the DEECD's work-life policy framework. The school leaders seemed highly motivated to maintain positive relationships with their teachers, negotiate with them towards mutually acceptable flexible work arrangements and in so doing maintain goodwill and retain quality teachers in their schools. They generally felt that the *Guidelines* set out commonsense approaches already in use at their schools.

How and why part-time work is utilised in schools

The school leaders cited various organisational reasons and examples how and why part-time work is utilised in their schools. A teacher shortage in some curriculum areas seems to mean that those teachers with specific 'in demand' expertise have more power to negotiate terms and conditions of employment that suit their needs, including part-time work. This finding is evidenced by the school leaders consistently citing examples of teachers being employed part-time to cover specialist programs for children with learning difficulties and difficult to fill vacancies in the curriculum areas of art, music, technology and languages other than English (LOTE). The school leaders were highly supportive of teachers working part-time in specialist areas.

According to the school leaders, female teachers generally seek to negotiate to work part-time when returning from maternity or family leave. Patrick (MM Secondary B) noted the complexity in negotiating and accommodating teacher requests to work part-time where parents of pre-school age children are concerned by describing an ongoing flexible work arrangement in place for a highly regarded ESL, English and Indonesian teacher. The teacher in question wants to work 0.6FTE but is only available on specific days of the week when she has access to child care. This example highlights the challenges for school leaders trying to timetable a teacher whose availability to work is dictated by his/her access to suitable child care. As Patrick explained:

> "She is highly sought after and we would like her to work full-time across each of these curriculum areas. But she will only work 3 specific days of the week due to child care constraints. The teacher has been open that this is what is manageable for her until her youngest child is established in Primary school. She would rather teach English, but in order to meet her request she teaches more Indonesian. This is the compromise until she is more fully available. We look forward to her being more fully available."

The school leaders also reported that phased retirement has become popular among older teachers who want to reduce their workload over several years as they approach retirement age.

Cameron (MM Secondary A) and Patrick (MM Secondary B) both used the term "work weary" to describe the sentiment among these teachers. Related to this, the issue of teachers wanting to work part-time due to stress and burnout was raised by several of the school leaders.

The school leaders agreed that accommodating requests to work part-time is important to retaining quality teachers in the profession. Cameron (MM Secondary A) described his role as that of HR Manager and emphasised the link between teacher motivation, well-being and performance as follows:

> "My job is to attract the best teachers into our school. It's the teacher in the classroom that makes the difference. Demand for part-time or flexible work is a reality. If I've got a happy person that feels they can do their job well then that's good for the school, the teacher and the kids. Teachers spend so much time working out of hours. We don't want to risk losing good teachers who we might not be able to replace with as good teachers. I believe you've got to put the best teachers in the classroom."

Violet (R Primary G) and Patrick (MM Secondary B) seemed more guarded when expressing their views. Violet summarised the dilemma facing school leaders as follows: "The dilemma I have is that I want to make decisions that are 'best fit' for kids and sometimes there's a conflict between that and 'best fit' for individual teachers." Patrick concurred:

> "The needs of our students are a high priority and we try not to compromise the learning opportunities for the students in order to accommodate a particular request to work part-time. We won't deny a request - we haven't in the four years I've been here - but the request might need to be negotiated."

In this way, the power relations between school leaders and teachers are evident: school leaders will exercise their power to negotiate or possibly refuse a request if they feel doing so is in the best interests of students.

The challenges and important considerations for school leaders

The timetable

Each of the school leaders involved in this study explained that the school timetable and the way it is structured to enable innovative teaching and learning, makes it difficult to meet teacher requests to work part-time. Blocked scheduling, whereby several same-subject classes are timetabled to run at the same time, usually in open learning spaces, was described by Cameron (MM Secondary

A) and Patrick (MM Secondary B) as highly beneficial to student outcomes, but detrimental to the smooth management of teacher allotments. According to Cameron:

> "The biggest issue we face is the tension between some of the competing demands. There is a state-wide push for more innovative models of schooling and learning. That might involve greater use of blocked scheduling and team teaching. The school is at the forefront of these innovations, but this seems to be in conflict with the needs of part-time teachers. The issue is the timetable. We need to be fair and equitable to all staff. Sometimes accommodating a part-time teacher has a negative impact on what other staff may be required to do and student needs."

Patrick described the same dilemma in more detail:

> "The timetable issue is the biggest issue. School structures are moving more and more towards blocks of classes with the same subject and same year level running at the same time. A blocked class will tie three teachers together. This is innovative pedagogical practice that enables the teachers to work in a team and differentiate the curriculum to meet different students' needs. But if one of those teachers is part-time, then all three of those staff will need to fit that part-time teachers' availability. This means a cluster of teachers' timetables will be restricted by one part-time teacher's requirements. And the more you reduce an allotment, the bigger the issues are for the school."

A school's timetable is a form of infrastructure: by its very nature, it will limit school leaders' ability to accommodate teacher requests to work part-time. Team teaching, as described by these school leaders, further limits the level of flexibility possible. Tim (R Secondary D) explained that the only way to overcome the challenges that a school's timetable imposes is to redesign it to make it more flexible. Taking a 'whole school approach' and redesigning his school's timetable has enabled Tim to meet an increasing number of teacher requests to work part-time. He explained:

> "Our [pastoral care] system operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so teachers tend to be required at school on those days to run home room activities. Each subject is timetabled to run up to 3 days per week. This means I can accommodate requests by staff wanting to work 0.6FTE over three full days per week. So, 0.6FTE staff are generally at school on a Wednesday and 0.8FTE staff tend to have Wednesdays off. So it works. We have enough hands on deck on any day of the week. A number of VCE teachers work 0.6FTE or 0.8FTE. It's not a problem. It works for the school and the individuals. Another way I try to be flexible is by encouraging staff to combine face-to-face teaching with virtual teaching... But that's early days."

Does job-sharing work?

While the DEECD's *Flexible Work Options Kit* suggests job-sharing as a possible solution to this problem, the school leaders reported mixed experiences with job-sharing in their schools and/or seemed skeptical whether classroom teaching is the type of job that can be effectively shared between two people. Those school leaders not in favour of teachers job-sharing gave two reasons why these arrangements are not in the best interests of students: first, the continuity of care, instruction and supervision of students may be compromised; and second, there may be a 'clash' of personality and/or teaching philosophy and style.

Violet (R Primary G) described an experience that led her to conclude that job-sharing is fraught:

> "Two part-time teachers were job-sharing one class. There was basically a personality conflict that resulted in one teacher leaving the school after the first term. These teachers simply could not work together. By the end of the year, the same person had 'burnt out' their second job-share partner, who also wanted to leave the school. Fortunately, the teacher was able to be retained. As individual teachers, those concerned were professional - their planning and execution in the classroom was spot-on. In fact, the parents may not have been aware of the issues. I think this may have added to the strain in the job-sharing arrangement."

Violet went on to say that job-sharing arrangements like the one described above also have the potential to affect parents' view of the school and question whether their children are receiving a quality education. She was firm in her view that "[teachers working] part-time is not always in the interests of kids and their learning."

Roslyn (MM Primary F) was even more emphatic:

> "I would not accommodate a request to job-share classroom teaching unless I absolutely had to... Our Executive and our parent population would not accept two part-time teachers job sharing classroom teaching. In the case where a teacher was ill and looking to reduce her teaching, we had parents anticipate and strongly oppose this happening."

She described a recent request by a male classroom teacher. He and his wife both approached their employers to work part-time to balance caring for their pre-school age child. The onus was on the teacher to propose a range of options which were submitted to the school's Executive Committee. The request to work part-time was refused on reasonable grounds related to the effect on the education program of the school and the teacher is now on 12 months leave without pay. Roslyn was the only school leader in this study to report refusing a request in accordance with the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth). She also reported the lowest rate of teachers working part-time. This points to the important role of school leadership and school culture in implementing effective flexible, family-friendly work arrangements.

By contrast, Gwen (MM Primary E) believed that job-sharing can be effective provided the job-sharers have a similar or compatible teaching philosophy and style. She described a situation where job-sharing was implemented to meet a classroom teacher's request to work 0.6FTE. This request conveniently coincided with the school's need to release a newly appointed Assistant Principal out of classroom teaching to a 0.4FTE time fraction. Gwen described this arrangement as successful:

> "Both these teachers were recognised within the school and had similar teaching philosophies and styles. They got on really well. They made sure there was a crossover in their [working] times so that they could have long discussions about what was going on in the classroom."

Difficulties communicating with part-time staff

Each of the school leaders spoke about the difficulties they encounter scheduling face-to-face communication forums in line with part-time teacher availability. They seemed concerned and sometimes frustrated by the question whether all staff must attend meetings and professional development. Cameron (MM Secondary A) explained:

> "There is the issue of communication and flow of information. Teachers must attend up to 3 hours meeting time per week. Meetings and PD are held on Mondays and Tuesdays. However, part-time teachers not at work on these days miss out. Any mandatory PD - such as updating Mandatory Reporting training - must therefore be scheduled twice to ensure all staff can attend. Part-time staff who attend on their day off often ask for time in lieu or additional pay."

No doubt part-time teachers are concerned by this issue too. It is not so easy for parents to arrange to attend meetings or PD when they are usually unavailable to work because alternative childcare arrangements need to be made. This is particularly difficult for those who do not have access to cheap, informal child care provided by relatives and social networks.

Gwen (MM Primary E) was comfortable that email can be used to overcome this issue:

> "Our part-time [Music] teacher works Thursdays and Fridays. Thursdays there is an administration meeting and we take minutes which are forwarded to all staff by email. But on Tuesdays we have professional learning sessions and sometimes things crop up in that. Now, because she doesn't work on Tuesdays she doesn't attend those professional learning sessions unless I make a particular point that it's important that she's there. So we have to make sure everything is documented and circulated to staff by email and the expectation is that part-time staff will keep up with the information they miss."

Here, ICT is portrayed as a solution: however, as explained in the literature review, ICT can be a double-edged sword (see Lipman (2009), Williamson & Myhill (2008), Gardner & Williamson (2004)). The issue in this example is the expectation that part-time staff, who want to work less,

not more, will somehow find time to make up for not being available to attend meetings and PD. The intensification of teachers' work is also evident in this example: additional work has been created for the teachers who must ensure that important face-to-face communications are fully documented.

The school leaders were asked to describe a part-time work arrangement that has been particularly successful at their school. Tim (R Secondary D) described a highly innovative part-time work arrangement for a leading VCE Biology teacher. The teacher concerned is renowned for his work with ICT in the 'virtual classroom'. The teacher in question has reduced his teaching load to 0.6FTE so that he can be available to deliver PD to other schools and teachers across Victoria. He typically combines face-to-face and virtual teaching and learning for the best student outcomes:

> "In a typical week, there would be one face-to-face class and one evening session in the virtual classroom. He also teaches a virtual class of 40 students from across Victoria. Five or six teachers from other rural schools are also involved in this virtual classroom. The program is currently funded by the Country Education Project."

The need for a new whole school approach

Cameron (MM Secondary A), Patrick (MM Secondary B) and Tim (R Secondary D) suggested that new models of school organisation hold the key to being more flexible and accommodating teacher requests to work part-time. Tim (R Secondary D), who has already taken 'whole school approach' by redesigning his school's timetable, was most confident to elaborate about the possibility of a new model of school organisation that takes teaching and learning further into the virtual realm:

> "Due to increasing enrolments, we're now looking to expand the school day beyond 9am-3.30pm. It might mean introducing a staggered timetable of sorts. It might mean staggering break time and lunch hours. We also want to be more involved in virtual learning."

He went on to explain that, in regional areas, 'Regeneration Projects' are bringing schools together to make decisions that will provide high quality education to students in their communities. Based on the success of the virtual learning programs at his school, he suggested that ICT provides a way for regional schools to pool their resources and come together to teach and learn cooperatively online. When asked about the impact of virtual learning programs on students, Tim was adamant:

> "Student results have improved. But we have an outstanding teacher [implementing the program] who was already achieving outstanding results, better results than you'd expect. The difficulty is in skilling teachers and giving them the confidence to have a go and make this work."

Tim's responses revealed the greatest insight into the work needs and preferences of 21st Century teachers and the learning needs of 21st Century students. He conveyed an understanding that the continued success of his school will be dependent on pioneering a model of school organisation that attends to both of these considerations in the right balance.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the DEECD work-life policy framework and how it is interpreted and enacted are what Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls *macrosystem* forces, this study sought to more fully understand the school-teacher *microsystem*, particularly the elements of school *settings* that impact school leaders' ability to meet requests by teachers wanting to work part-time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interviews with school leaders provided insights into the work-family *mesosystem*; that is, the interrelations among work (school) and family (home) for teachers working or wanting to work part-time. The findings further confirm the adaptation to Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem by Pocock, Williams and Skinner (2009), whereby the concepts of *time*, *space*, *life-stage* and *power* are key to understanding the work-family *mesosystem*. Teachers are likely to call upon the DEECD work-life policy framework at different *times* and *life-stages* when there is a tendency to want to work less, not more: initially during their child bearing and rearing years and again as they approach retirement age. School leadership and school culture have the potential to influence whether flexible work arrangements will be possible and effective. As leadership and culture inevitably vary from school to school (*space*), so too do the opportunities for teachers to work part-time. Finally, some teachers seem to have more *power* within the employment relationship than others in order to successfully negotiate to work part-time. Teachers with specific, 'in demand' expertise in specialist curriculum areas or curriculum areas where there is a teacher shortage (art, music, reading recovery, technology and LOTE) may have more *power* than colleagues who teach in curriculum areas where there is adequate teacher supply. In effect, these factors limit the ability of the DEECD to ensure fair and equitable application of any work-life policy framework within and between Victorian Government schools.

Government and workplace policies designed to increase workforce participation among women are essential to economic prosperity and to building labour supply in typically feminised workforces like teaching. This study found that school leaders are motivated to maintain positive relationships with teachers wanting to work part-time, confident to engage in bargaining at the workplace level and capable of making decisions in line with the legislative and policy frameworks.

Nearly half (approximately 46%) of all Australian women that participate in the paid workforce work part-time (ABS, 2010). Teaching is a highly feminised workforce. So, one might expect that the school leaders interviewed for this study would report higher rates of teachers working part-time than 15-30%. This study offers an explanation why this is not the case. Accommodating requests by teachers to work part-time involves negotiation because school leaders must manage what are often competing needs: school objectives, teacher needs and preferences and student learning outcomes. School leaders are constrained in their ability to meet requests by teachers wanting to work part-time by three complex and interrelated organisational issues: the timetable, whether classroom teaching can be effectively shared, and communication issues. The negotiation process may be particularly complex where teachers with pre-school aged children are concerned given that access to high quality, affordable childcare is generally limited. The current model of school organisation that seeks to strike a balance between teacher availability and student learning outcomes by way of a timetable based on one teacher per class seems to impede flexibility.

Of serious concern is the fact that some teachers want to work part-time due to the intensification of their work and the negative impact this is having on their health, well-being and work-life balance. This finding points to the need to restructure teachers' work so that they are able to focus on teaching to a high standard. This has obvious implications for the quality of education.

While job-sharing seems the ultimate 'quick fix', school leaders and parents may be skeptical as to whether classroom teaching is the type of job that can be effectively shared. Teaching is a unique and demanding job. Certainly, unless the job-sharers are compatible in teaching philosophy and style and make time to communicate about their shared responsibilities, such arrangements have the potential to do more harm than good.

Resolving the dilemmas for school leaders identified in this study means reinventing the current model of school organisation and reengineering teachers' workloads. New models of 21st Century teaching and learning may hold the key to school leaders being able to be more flexible. It's not as easy as it sounds: within any school, taking a whole school approach to reinventing the timetable is an extremely complex process that has implications for teachers' work and students' learning. Gains in one area could be offset by losses in another. The answer may also lie in innovative use of information and communications technology.

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