Facing the Musical
Workload Intensification for Performing Arts Teachers
The Secondary School Story

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Introduction

It seems that “facing the musical” is becoming increasingly difficult for Performing Arts Teachers. Some of these teachers feel remarkably like Anne Boyd of “Facing the Music”- battling to keep things going as they carry their fully loaded “school bag” into the new millennium. It seems that the system “packing list” for teachers in all areas of education just keeps on growing. Increasingly teachers, and in particular those in the Performing Arts area, have been unable to carry this load for very long distances. This paper examines the workload intensification issues in this specialist area of teaching, and recommends action in order to redress this situation.

Background

In 1999 workload intensification was prioritised for action by the AEU in response to the mounting anecdotal evidence of teacher "burnout" in the teaching Profession - particularly in the Performing Arts area.

Beverly Lambert in her publication “Beating Burnout” 1994 defines burnout as a physical/psychological condition of exhaustion and inability to cope with high levels of stress, with many related symptoms including fatigue, headaches, digestive disorders and depression (see Lambert 1994, p 4). Lambert goes on to outline the causes for burnout as follows: Exposure over a period of time to an environment of “high stress… continuous demands … made on peoples mental, physical and emotional reserves” where “a mismatch occurs between worker’s professional expectations and the daily reality of their job”(Lambert, 1994, p4).

The State Schools Teachers Union “What is Stress” document outlines one of the key factors in peoples experience of stress as being integrally affected by “the support they receive from others in meeting these (work) pressures”(State Schools Teachers Union of W.A. Guide to Workplace Stress, July 1999).

Indeed, a body of quantitative and qualitative research was also developing in the area of the nature of the workload and stress for Australian Teachers. This included the research undertaken by Anne Lierse in 1998 into the issues of the twenty first century and music teacher effectiveness, Deidrie-Russell Bowie’s Teachers Need Help, 1999 and Janette Kelly’s 1999 research into stress factors and music teacher burnout in Queensland (see Lierse, 1998),(see Russell Bowie, 1999) and (see Kelly, 1999).

This body of research indicated that music teaching, one of the three strands of the Performing Arts KLA(see The Arts – A Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools, 1994) has become increasingly stressful. Kelly in her paper stated that it “has evolved into one of the most stressful occupations” and she likened the workload demands of music teachers to those experienced in the high stress occupations of air traffic controllers and medical interns (Kelly, 1999 pp. 108, 114).
In this same year 1999 a working conditions survey for ACT Drama teachers and the resultant report and list of recommendations were raised not only at a territory level, but also at a national level through NADIE (see *A labour of Love NADIE Working Conditions Policy, July 1999*).

Simultaneously, workload intensification was identified as an area of concern not only for all teachers but the broader community as well. Indeed the ACTU ran a “The Time for Life Campaign” in 1999, which promoted a balanced work and home life in response to the cost of high workloads and workplace-related stress.

A survey and case study were conducted with Performing Arts teachers in the ACT, in the strands of Music, Dance and Drama within the Government system. The aim of this research was to obtain further information on the working conditions of teachers in the Performing Arts area, particularly in relation to the nature of their workplace stress.

**Research Methodology**

Initially, the following methodologies were proposed comprising two parts:

1) Survey, and
2) Case Study.

1. **Survey**

This gathered background statistics with the aim of showing current arrangements in the teaching of drama, dance and music in high schools and colleges in the ACT. “Teaching” in this case refers not only to timetabled classes but also to extra-curricula activities around these subject areas, including production work. (see Nicholson, 1999, *Performing Arts Survey*).

The Survey comprised three focus sections of questions. The first section established the staff profile/ work context for each respondent. This context was inclusive of gender, years of experience in teaching their expertise, as well as the band level and broad age range) of their current position (whether senior secondary (years 11 and 12) or junior secondary(years 7 to 10)) (see Nicholson, 1999, *Performing Arts Survey*).

One of the authors’ viewpoints of ‘The Performing Arts Teacher” providing a rationale behind gathering data in this area may similarly be found in the research of Leong 1995 and Kelly 1999, i.e. the multiplicity of this teachers role. Leong and Kelly in their respective research indicated a strong need for “competency” in the multiplicity of roles music teachers undertake in the classroom and that the level of “expertise” in these different roles is linked to “a potential to experience stress factors”(Kelly, 1999 pp.108-109).

Another focus for the selection of question content in this section was the establishment of the context of length of teaching in the Performing Arts and therefore gain data on the length of time exposure to workload pressures, a condition of burnout(see Lambert, 1994, p.4)(See Kelly 1999, p.113),(see Lierse 1998, p.77).

The 2nd and 3rd focus areas were designed to establish the nature of the respondent’s current workload and their thoughts and feelings on this.

In the second section data was collected on the types and nature of the classes being taught (performance groups, theoretical, particular arts strand/s and so on), the
number of students, extra curricula and other duties, and which of these duties the respondent had sole responsibility for. These questions were designed to establish if isolation of responsibilities and high levels of extra – curricula duties in particular were present in the workload of the respondent. Lierse’s research (1998) indicated that teacher “isolation” in responsibility and duties, excessive workload, a high level of extra-curricula activities were among the factors limiting music teacher effectiveness. Later on in her article she notes a drop in morale, a “sapping of energy levels” and “high anxiety” in the staff, all of which are indicators of stress and possible burnout (see Lambert 1994, p. 4).

Section three and open response section was included for the respondent to include any thoughts feelings on their workload. This area was designed to obtain further information on possible workload issues as well as indicators within their reflective comments on morale and stress level, which may or may not be similar to those kind of comments found in the research of Lierse and Kelly which clearly indicated a low morale in music teachers (See Kelly 1999, p.113),(see Lierse 1998, p.77).

Case Study

Using the statistics from the survey as background information regarding the workloads and working conditions of performing arts teachers in high schools and colleges in the ACT, a small number of workplaces were to be selected for case studies.

Part 1: The Survey

The survey was conducted in Term 4, 1999. Approximately 100 survey forms were issued and 38 were returned. (see McKone, 1999, Survey Analysis)

Overview of Survey Results

Performing Arts Teaching Staff Profile

Gender and Employment
Women outnumber men by more than 3 to 1 overall, but in high schools women outnumber men by more than 5 to 1 while in colleges women outnumber men by only 2 to 1.

Most (84%) are employed full time.

Qualifications
Almost all have degree or higher degree level academic qualifications, many with specific arts components. The quality of arts in education training is probably quite variable, with only 2 teachers (5%) with formal Graduate Diplomas in Dance or Drama in Education.

5 teachers (13%) have Masters or PhD qualifications, but not all of these are specifically in performing arts. The one PhD (in Dance) is employed on a casual
relief basis, juggling timetables to teach classes in up to 3 colleges at a time and without guarantee of continuous employment.

Approximately one third of teachers reported having experience in their performing art beyond their formal academic qualifications. Probably the numbers recorded are an underestimate of teachers’ additional experience.

Although only one teacher reported having a specific technical qualification, one third of Performing Arts teachers indicated that they had sole responsibility for lighting, sound and other electrical equipment, and another third have shared responsibility in this area

The Teaching Situation
Significantly, nearly half the teachers have less than 10 years total teaching experience, increasing to more than half (54%) with less than 10 years teaching performing arts.

13% have less than 5 years total teaching experience, increasing to 24% with less than 5 years teaching performing arts.

These figures suggest that in recent years teachers, even with arts qualifications, do not necessarily begin their careers as specialist arts teachers.

The main pressure for performing arts teachers is the distinction made between “curricular” and “extra-curricular”. In high schools almost all performing arts work is extra-curricula (see also Kelly 1999, p. 108). An interesting survey response came from a Science/Maths high school teacher whose performing arts work in Dance is almost entirely above her standard Science/Maths load. An Arts high school teacher may equally have a full load allocated in Drama/English or Music and be effectively expected to teach performance above load

One set of numbers that are clear shows that most teach in separate arts courses (84%), not in integrated arts courses (10.5%). Integrated arts courses seem to operate only in Year 7.

A second set of figures shows that many classes are vertically streamed, with 16% of teachers having at least one class incorporating different year levels.

Virtually all performing arts teachers use lunchtimes to rehearse, even though in high schools it was consistently reported that they also had to take the standard playground duties. Throughout the survey responses, the burden of extra-curricula work outside school hours (including lunchtimes) was consistently commented on. This was consistent with Kelly’s research findings of Queensland’s music teachers (see Kelly 1999, pp.110-111)

In addition the numbers in Areas of Responsibility questions, supported by consistent written comments, show that probably half of performing arts teachers have to take sole responsibility with little support from other non-performing arts staff. This finding was consistent with Lierse’s research findings of a high degree of teacher isolation in responsibilities (see Lierse 1998, p.76) Even where the responsibility is shared, it was often reported that it was with only 1 other person. And further, none
of the performing arts work is supported by clerical or technical assistance from APS staff as is common in areas within the curriculum such as Science or Hospitality.

Summary of survey results

The pressure shown in the numbers and the heart-felt pleas for help in written comments may make one wonder why performing arts teachers take the burden on.

It is clear from the commentaries that these teachers gain a great deal of personal satisfaction from the creation of performances. It is also clear that they are satisfying a need among the students, which they feel they cannot deny. Some point out that they work with many students who are not formally enrolled in a course but who want to perform and need the teacher to provide them with the opportunity. Some teachers work during a year with just about every student in their school. Providing access to the arts is a strong motivation.

Another motivation, is the desire on the part of the teacher to create quality performance work as part of the students’ learning experience. Many teachers are very frustrated that working conditions prevent them from creating the quality of experience that their students deserve.

A major area of frustration is that school management and other staff have high expectations of performing arts (see also Kelly, 1999 p. 111), (see also Lierse 1998, p.73), (see also Leong, 1995 p. 138), both as quality productions and especially as promotion of the school in the public arena, while turning a blind eye to the lack of financial, material and human resources support given to the performing arts teachers(See also Russell-Bowie 1999, p. 77). However keenly performing arts teachers are committed to the work, comments throughout the survey, from teachers with a few years’ experience to those with several decades’ experience, are consistently tinged with bitterness at the lack of recognition and practical support they receive.

Part 2: Case Studies

Outline:
This action research established specific case background information, which further amplified the findings of the survey and clarified the specific workload intensification issues for Performing Arts teachers. The case background information gathered was inclusive of the following areas:

- Teaching qualifications
- Industry experience
- The number of years in the profession
- High School and College experience
- Personal health status/history
- Professional morale
- Professional development history
- Current working conditions.

Data includes:
- Case Study Interview transcripts
• Two teacher diaries of one sample day
• Written responses to discussion amongst Performing Arts teachers - faxed, or sent in
• Anecdotal Illustrations of classroom & school based issues, which were volunteered to the researcher by interested teachers

Case Study Interview transcripts methodology

Sample Selection criteria: Teachers were asked to volunteer for further in depth action research in the last section of the survey questionnaire. A sample was selected from the nine who volunteered according to three criteria:

1) Availability for interview
2) The depth and necessity for clarification of open-ended responses (These responses have been transcribed and included in the appendices.)
3) Representation of each of the three strands of the Performing Arts as well as the sectors: High School and College, and categories of employment - permanent and contract/casual, full-time and part-time, as evident in the results of the survey.

Three volunteers were chosen on this basis. One from each of the strands: Dance, Drama and Music. They were interviewed utilising a series of questions designed to explore their responses in the four categories of the survey in greater depth, to make more transparent the result patterns found across the Performing Arts, and to establish any links between any of the survey categories. (See Ballard, 2000 Survey Analysis)

CASE STUDY FINDINGS

The findings of the case studies further amplified the results indicated by the survey in some areas as follows.

Level of responsibility, category of employment and qualifications

Relationships between level and areas of responsibility, technical, educational and professional qualifications in Performing Arts rather than the category of teacher, and workload intensification issues were found as follows:

Comments made by all three case studies indicated a relationship between technical, educational and professional qualifications in Performing Arts and the level of responsibility they are expected to take on.

No relationship was made between category or FT, PT status and level of responsibility.

Both the drama and music respondents noted that Sound and Lighting technical tasks were allocated to them due to their experience or qualification in this area. This responsibility resulted in many hours of work over their allocated load. For example: an average event took up to 2½ days equivalent of time to set up and pull down.

All three respondents, despite their Band 1 status (one on casual contract),
noted that they carried Level 2 responsibilities, specifically in the areas of course writing and budgeting.

**Responsibility as in class and/or extra-curricula duties**

The survey findings of High School Performing Art work being all extra-curricula was not fully supported. However, it was found to be very heavily extra curricula.

The Drama teacher stated that in excess of 300 hours were spent in extra curricula duties - related to one major production, in one year. This was documented and submitted to this teachers’ Principal in an attempt to acquire a time allowance for these duties at the high school level.

Anecdotal comments indicated that this was prevalent particularly at the high school level, rather than college level, as time in lieu allowances were more difficult to obtain. This teacher noted that college Drama teachers received a more consistent allocation of allowances than those at a high school. Over all, the allowances given at the high school level were inconsistent and were usually won through negotiation supported by anecdotal records of time spent in producing quality product for the broader school community.

The links between areas of responsibility and components of these as in class and/or extra-curricula duties were not strong for the dance or music respondents in the interview transcripts. However, it is worthy of note that in other data collected, the Diary of a Day, the Music teacher had started work at 8.30 am and returned after school for an evening of work finishing at 10.30 pm in support of a drama production currently in rehearsal.

The responsibility for extra-curricula duties was particularly strong for the Drama strand of Performing Arts. Specific duties noted were Sound and Lighting for events including weekly assemblies, school community events, as well as departmental productions. These were carried out consistently by this one staff member over a number of years and a variety of workplaces – as no one else could or would train to do it.

**Vertical streaming – implications for effective curriculum delivery**

Two out of the three indicated a high level of vertical streaming as a contributing factor to inefficient and ineffective delivery of the curriculum. Up to 4 different student groups were indicated in the college classes from both interview data and information offered the team via fax for both music and dance.

The dance respondent noted that vertical streaming made it almost impossible to teach dance effectively. However, this teacher was expected to teach in this type of environment in order to keep the numbers of students high enough to keep classes open and therefore keep her position at the school.

This difficulty was also reported in the music strand of the Performing Arts through a humorous I.T. metaphor of the music classroom where all students are at different brand machines, using different programs, some literate with IT, others not and trying to complete the teacher’s set task – with the sound blaring of course. An impossible situation.
Philosophy for education in the Arts and personal commitment to Education in their Art form

All respondents indicated high personal commitment to Education in their Art form despite the workload issues outlined. Specifically, this commitment to the high quality of educational service for the community was evidenced in their provision of high quality productions and classroom learning experiences which they see as providing the preparation and basis for the student’s future in the Arts industry or in the student’s life long learning in general.

It is worthy of note at this point that this commitment to quality educational service is the key factor by which these committed teachers can become entangled in an exhausting cycle of overwork (see also Kelly 1999 p.114)

All of the respondents noted that there are expectations of them as a professional in their Arts area to provide a quality product, and what’s more, to provide this visibly and publicly - to be a substantial part of “the face of the public education” provided by the school in it’s community (see also Kelly 1999 p.111). Why? One draws the conclusion that this is tied up with educational image. If it looks and is good quality, it attracts student numbers to the school. A winner for all.

The expectations of Performing Arts Teachers for the provision of this quality product are perceived by these teachers as coming from all levels of the school community, departmental to student, and are sometimes delivered in very subtle ways. For example staff and parent comments reported were inclusive of the sentiments, “It would be such a shame if the production didn’t go on this year…” or that other staff in the faculty or school make it known that they do not feel supported if the very collegial voluntary work of these staff is not forthcoming. There is also the very real problem once again of numbers at the classroom level. Without the numbers the jobs go. Teacher concern for their job security was one of the key factor’s contributing to teacher anxiety noted in the research of Anne Lierse (see Lierse 1998, p. 77).

It was reported that student numbers in the classes drop in the Performing Arts area when teacher absence occurs, or a drop in the quality of product occurs.

Also, lets not forget the real bargaining power of the “good show” for equipment and resources. Ticket sales bring money to the school. This often translates into more money for the faculty to buy better gear to further increase the quality.

Last but not least is the personal as well as public benchmark set by “that terrific show done in whatever year it was….?”

Perhaps it is the professional ego? We always want to do it as well as we always have

So in short, all levels of the school community want quality. But what’s the cost?

Misconceptions of support required and workload involved

An expectation of quality does lead to the realistic expectation of commensurate time being given to produce this quality. We draw you back to a point made earlier where in excess of 300 extra-curricula hours, over and above the allocated workload for a given teacher, were spent in achieving a quality production. (Even this teacher was
surprised by the volume of unpaid voluntary work this process of documentation highlighted. Or the extra few hours every week spent setting up the hall (which may double, as it did in this case, as the drama and dance classroom) and sound system for the assembly.

Indeed all of the respondents in the case study interviews reported that there were misconceptions by senior school staff as well as others as to support required to produce this kind of quality product and the kind of time involved in the smallest of Performing Arts tasks e.g. rigging a light.

The nature of the Workload
The time involved in preparation for production, preparation for vertically streamed classes with up to four different levels of content required for any one lesson, problems with multiple levels in the classroom and differing needs imposed by this difficult teaching situation were all reported as misunderstood by senior staff. One respondent, a casual employee, working at three different government schools to the equivalent of a full time load, noted that the time taken in travel between schools was very time consuming.

Another common misconception about Performing Arts teaching professionals was in the nature of the initial and ongoing training for this area of teaching. All of the respondents noted that they drew heavily on their own professional skills in the industry for their classroom content base and as such needed to keep themselves professionally involved at this level – over and above their day to day teaching. Where do they get the time in a schedule already loaded with extra curricula activities related to their employment as a teacher?

Some comments indicated that it was indeed incredibly difficult to keep it all going. However, they wouldn’t have made it this far without this professional involvement to draw upon in the classroom and to “keep them fresh”. A point worthy of note here is that all of the respondents observed that there was a dearth of professional development opportunities for Performing Arts teachers provided through the system, and so this kind of professional involvement was their P.D.

High level of personal stress related to the teaching workload

Just as a high level of personal stress related to this situation as a "flow on effect" was indicated in the survey open-ended responses, all of the case study respondents reported associated health issues in their comments. Two of the three indicated a lifespan for teaching in their area and the necessity for a break away from teaching during their career. In the anecdotal data offered the researchers, one teacher reported an 80% drop out rate among those who were awarded their teaching degree at the same time. All of these teachers have suffered major health issues.

Despite commitment to their teaching, all indicated low morale in relation to their job as a Performing Arts Teacher as a result of workload demands and issues arising from this.
Stress was also reported as clearly related to time spent on extra curricula activities and equipment related issues: rehearsal preparation for shows, designated teaching spaces for teaching to be shared, equipment breakdowns, set – up, etc.

**Equipment and funding:**
All the respondents identified maintenance and upgrading of equipment and the provision of adequate facilities as factors contributing to their workload and stress level. This was an area of response delivered with great passion.

It entailed time spent in the maintenance of raising funds for equipment, struggling with the sharing of work spaces or equipment with multiple groups (at times requiring dismantling and reconstruction of sets on numerous occasions), associated difficulties in maintaining group focus and motivation, or simply not having enough equipment for class use (one set of headphones between 20 students) or an adequate teaching space (the main school hall – utilized for many other purposes), etc.

In the highly equipment driven Arts areas, Drama and Music, equipment problems were often solved by the use of the teacher’s or students’ own equipment or through the purchase of second hand gear in order to provide for class/production needs.

There is an overwhelming perception of having to "fight for " funds for the Arts area over a number of years, before gaining it. There is also a sense of proving one's worth (related to performance quality) as a marginalized area of the total school curriculum. Comments such as “It took me four to five years to get that rolling” (separate budget account for repairs) were prevalent. This same kind of continual justification and advocacy for the Performing Arts area was noted in Lierse’s research in the context of “fighting for Curriculum time (against other subjects)” (Lierse 1998, p.76), she notes at this point how energy draining and anxiety provoking (see Lierse 1998, pp.76,77) the subjects of her research found this process to be.

The teachers interviewed reported personal financial losses, throughout the production period in particular. Hectic schedules and last minute breakdowns were reported as often resolved by the teachers dipping into their own financial resources to provide necessary items for “the show to go on” and mislaying the receipts so that redemption of funds was impossible.
The key findings of the survey and follow up case study were:

- There is a high demand for service and responsibility from Performing Arts teachers in spite of the low level of resourcing provided for the fulfilment of these.
- There are misconceptions of the nature of Performing Arts teaching area: the support required and workload involved.
- There are high personal and professional costs for teachers of the Performing Arts: personal stress, low morale, professional burnout.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is generally accepted that Performing Arts teachers work hard. What is really needed is more tangible support offered to these people who are feeling overworked, undervalued and stressed to the point of leaving their profession.

Teachers seem to find themselves in a circular bind, requiring long working hours in order to produce quality Performing Arts work, which in turn generates the basis for argument for better resourcing and/or gaining student numbers to a marginalized area of the curriculum. Once this level of quality service is set, it becomes the benchmark for further expectation on all levels of the educational community.

Professional involvement in the broader Arts community becomes increasingly difficult to maintain over a long period. All respondents saw this involvement as the essential "lifeblood" of the profession.

The tension of this "squeeze" over a prolonged period is evidenced in the reported stress related illness, drop in morale and the recognized "Lifespan" in the profession of the Performing Arts educator.

Further research/ project work:

We recommend that further research/ project work be completed in the following areas:

1. An in-depth look at workload and timetabling implications for performing arts teachers, including whether it is good for a performing arts teacher to only teach in one area to maintain focus and develop quality productions, or to also teach outside or across all performing arts as a broadening experience (diversification) or as a relief from pressure.
Examination of Professional development issues for performing arts teachers and their links to the arts community. Specifically, the integral links between professional involvement in the broader Arts community and the delivery of a quality arts curriculum and quality educational practice. In addition to this, examination of the necessity to make some provision in workload expectations for this involvement.

Investigation of issues related to vocational education, including the articulation between the senior years of secondary education and the curriculum at TAFE colleges and universities.

Similar surveys conducted in other states and territories in both government and non-government schools with a specific focus on:

- The exploration of reasonableness of personal and workload impact of the demands for the expertise of Performing Arts teachers over a range of tasks that are not related to the delivery of their specific course content (on class teaching) and that rather serve the needs of the general school community, as well as the intra-curricula possibilities of some of these demands

- The depth of extra-curricula work undertaken by Performing Arts staff, and take some measures to include this quality educational practice within rather than alongside these teachers’ normal classroom and administrative workload.

- The expectations of our Performing Arts teachers who want to provide a quality Performing Arts education for their students

- The range of responsibilities normally undertaken by the teacher classification level 2, which, due to the specialist expertise in this area, are in real terms carried out by level 1 permanent and contract staff

- The competitiveness between schools attracting numbers and flow on effects for Performing Arts teachers’ workloads.

A scrutiny of Industry standards and their implications for safe practice, maintenance and management of equipment, and in-service related issues. Specifically, the use and handling of electronic equipment such as sound and lighting equipment and how they relate to the work of performing arts teachers.

A mapping of Arts curriculum frameworks by state and territory and a comparison drawn between this and the results of the ACT research with regard to expectations on performing arts teachers.

A comparative analysis of the relationship between teaching Performing Arts as opposed to other KLAs and the length of time spent in the teaching profession. Specifically exploring the personal and professional cost of the professional expectations placed on Performing Arts Teachers and the cost to the wider profession of teaching and the long term delivery of a quality education for our students.
Investigation of funding/resources and numbers issues as linked to quality and marginalisation of area:

- The perceived need to prove oneself and one’s area to improve conditions
- The relationship between quality performances, numbers, and improvement of working conditions at high school and college levels
- The criteria for provision of technical equipment and designated teaching spaces.

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