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**Changing Employment Practices?
Teachers and Principals Discuss "Part-Time" Arrangements
for Alberta Teachers**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The general trend away from "standard" jobs - that is, employment by one employer, involving full-time work with an expectation of being employed indefinitely - has been widely examined and debated (e.g. Betcherman, McMullen, Leckie, & Caron, 1994; Broad, 1991; Handy, 1990; Negrey, 1994; White, 1983). So has the movement toward various forms of "non-standard" employment - such as job sharing, part time, temporary arrangements (e.g. Commission of Inquiry into Part-time Work, 1983; Duffy & Pupo, 1992; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1992; Krahn, 1995; Negrey, 1994; Schellenberg & Clark, 1996; White, 1983). However, we cannot discover any systematic and sustained scholarly attention directed toward this phenomenon as it pertains to Canadian public school teachers. What are the day-to-day realities of living out "non-standard" teaching arrangements, and what politics and ideologies engender those realities?

In order to explore some of those questions, we conducted a study that describes and compares the enactment of three types of part-time employment policies for teachers in one Alberta school district. Using semi-structured interviews, we sought diverse perspectives by talking with approximately 30 teachers and administrators in that district. Each of them is involved in the implementation of one or more of these three different policies. We documented the study participants' views on the advantages and disadvantages (personal, educational/professional and organizational) of the policies.

We report an overview of our findings in this article by organizing and discussing the participants' perspectives according to three general themes -- Motivations, Negotiations, and Implications. Since we have provided some detailed analysis of the first two themes, Motivations and Negotiations, elsewhere (Young & Grieve, 1996), we will emphasize Implications in this paper.

**BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

***Canadian Context***

According to the available research and statistics, part-time teaching employment is a growing phenomenon although not a new one. By 1993-94, the 35000 part-time educators in Canadian public schools constituted 11.5% of the teaching force, the effect of a 30% increase in their numbers over the preceding five years (Statistics Canada, 1996). These percentages are national averages, and the proportions vary from province to province, with Quebec - followed by Alberta - experiencing the largest increases in 1993-94 (CTF, 1996) .

***Alberta Context***

In 1995-96, 14.9% or 3500 of Alberta's 23,600 teachers were part-timers, nearly a 40% increase over five years (Alberta Education, 1996). Almost 93% of the part-timers, compared to 68% of all teachers, were women (Alberta Education, 1996). While the proportions of male and female teachers in the overall teacher workforce have remained about steady at 67-68% female, it is now the case that one in five of the women teachers in AB works part time (Alberta Education, 1996).

Recently implemented provincial government cutbacks have profoundly affected public schooling (Peters & Richards, 1995). Other provincial government policy changes have also had an impact on school administration. Districts have been consolidated and the government has insisted on the devolution of many powers and politics to individual school sites.

Existing Alberta legislation gives employing school districts and their administrators unusual latitude (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 1989) concerning part-time (School Act, 1994, Section 84) employment contracts. The part time contract described in Section 84 pre-dates the current provincial government and states:

When the Board employs a teacher on a part-time contract of employment, the Board may, unless that teacher's contract provides otherwise, vary the amount of time that the teacher is required to teach in the subsequent semester or school year [anywhere in a range from .1 to .9 FTE.

This means that for teachers on those part time contracts, there is no right to receive similar FTE assignments from year to year or to move from full time to part time or the reverse. This legislation is rarely constrained by collective agreements in this province. In 1993, the Alberta Teachers' Association did pass a policy (1995, 5.B.17) urging that the School Act be changed to reduce that latitude but school boards have thus far been very reluctant to bargain this issue.

In 1994, several boards (including the one where our study is situated) introduced policies enabling full time continuing contract teachers to negotiate part time employment (which might or might not involve job sharing) without losing their full time status. These agreements specify the amount of time that the teacher will teach and the duration of the part-time agreement. Teachers are guaranteed the option of returning to full-time appointments at the end of the part-time agreement. Arrangements of this sort are now being incorporated into some collective agreements in the province (Opatril, personal communication, April 12, 1996).

**THE STUDY**

Our exploratory study describes and compares the enactment of three types of "part-time"1 employment arrangements for teachers in one Alberta school district. The most common is the "traditional" part time contract under Section 84 of the School Act (as described in the preceding section). The study participants most often referred to those as "old" contracts. A policy that was recently introduced allows full-time continuing teachers to negotiate a part-time assignment for a defined period of time. A third policy enables job sharing, that is, two teachers taking joint responsibility for the same group of students. These latter two arrangements were often referred to as "new" contracts. 2 Under the collective agreement in this district, all part-time teachers with appointments of 0.2 FTE or greater receive the same benefits package as full-time teachers, except for pension credits, which are pro-rated according to full-time equivalency.

We sought the perspectives of teachers and administrators who are involved in the implementation of these three different types of part-time arrangements. The purpose of the interviews was to learn how those who participate in, organize or administer these arrangements regard and experience such situations. Thirty-two people participated in semi-structured audio-taped interviews. Two-thirds of these participants were teachers (most of them women), some of them employed under each of the three different part-time policies in the district; the female/male breakdown of teachers interviewed is roughly proportionate to that for part-time teachers in this district. The remaining one-third of the participants were administrators (school site and central office) with experience supervising or administering the implementation of the District's various part-time arrangements. The participants taught or administered in various types and sizes of schools and at many different grade levels.

The interviews were conducted in the spring and the fall of 1995, almost always at the schools where the study participants were on staff. Each person was interviewed once only, usually for between 45 minutes and one hour. One researcher interviewed only teachers and the other interviewed only principals, and neither of us discussed the responses from the other group, except in the most general terms. The taped interviews and verbatim transcriptions of them are our primary data source. We circulated preliminary analysis of the interview data to the study participants for their review and comments.

**MOTIVATIONS**

The teachers in this study expressed a number of motives for choosing, or accepting, part time employment as teachers. The motives varied with the individual and between groups of individuals with differing types of circumstances. The principals' motives for offering or agreeing to part-time teaching arrangements in their schools were sometimes, but not always, complementary to the motives articulated by the teachers. Moreover, individual school principals legitimated some of the motives expressed by the teachers but not others (Marshall & Scribner, 1991). The espoused motives might be divided into three, not entirely distinct, categories. Following are brief comparisons of these three types of motivations, as they were identified by teachers and principals in this study.

***Family Responsibilities***.

Both the teachers and the principals who participated in the study took for granted that female teachers would be motivated to work part time for domestic reasons. Indeed, many of the women who were study participants did choose part-time teaching as a way of creating personal space in order to fulfill family and domestic responsibilities, especially child care (Acker, 1995-96; Young, 1992). These women had often held full-time continuing contracts as teachers with the District before moving to part time under Section 84 provisions; more recently, some of the women have had and exercised their option to move to part time under the district's "new" part time policies. When asked, the principals could not recall any male teachers who had worked part time in order to fulfill their family responsibilities.

***Job Intensification***.

A number of teachers indicated that working part time helped them create the professional space to do their jobs without compromising their own standards of professionalism (see also Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 126-128). These teachers valued having more time for mental recuperation from today's demanding school and classroom situations. Because of ever-increasing and increasingly complex workloads (e.g. ATA, 1993; Edmonton Public Teachers, 1996), some teachers saw themselves as "buying" more preparation time by reducing their teaching assignments (and their pay) to a fraction slightly below a full-time load. In some cases, the reduction allowed them to exercise greater control over the specifics of their teaching assignments, such as teaching schedule and subjects/courses. Creating professional space also had the effect of reducing stress, according to the teachers.

While these motives were emphasized by several teachers, they were acknowledged much less often by the administrators in our study. When asked, many of the principals addressed the stress reduction rather than the job intensification (Acker, 1994a; Apple, 1983; Hargreaves, 1994) or job enlargment (Brannon, 1994) aspects of this issue. Those principals did not legitimate the teachers' efforts to define and maintain their own professionalism through part-time employment. Some noted that new teachers who were hired on part-time contracts found their part-time status advantageous, because they were better able to cope with the demands as they got started. Still others pointed out that their own jobs as school-site administrators were becoming more complex and pressured as well, with the increased use of part-time staff contributing to the intensification of their work.

***Transitions and Buffers.***

Some study participants were teaching part time as a transitional measure. A number of teachers accepted Section 84 part-time employment because it was the only teaching employment available. They hoped that it would lead eventually to a full-time teaching contract in that district. Others requested part time arrangements as they prepared for retirement or another career. These two motivations for working part time were identified and accepted by both teachers and administrators. However, it was usually teachers who pointed out a third motivation related to transitions. That is, some full-time continuing teachers were opting for part time under the "new" policy in order to share the available employment with new teachers who would not otherwise have any opportunity to get employment in teaching. These individuals were in effect volunteering to share the available work.

On the other hand, while principals acknowledged that taking part-time employment did afford teachers a "way in" to the district, they indicated that the traditional pathway from part time contracts to full time continuing employment would not be open to very many new (or returning) teachers in the forseeable future. The principals spoke of wanting to employ teachers part time (and on temporary rather than continuing contracts) in order to have greater flexibility to meet program needs and respond to fluctuating enrolments in times of severely reduced funding. They saw part-time and temporary full-time appointments as the way of the future. Although several principals were troubled because they could no longer reward excellent performance in the traditional manner, some were relishing the challenges and changes they saw in the ways that schools and employment in schools might be organized.

**NEGOTIATIONS**

Schools are continually faced with a variety of complex and often conflicting demands. Students, parents, the school district, and the provincial government have expectations that various (specialized) courses, programs, and services will be offered and that staff and program continuity and other "community standards" will be met in the process. These demands are voiced regardless of existing constraints related to the human and financial resources that are available. Meanwhile, teachers each have their own needs and preferences regarding types of contractual arrangements and the nature and timing of their assignments in the context of those arrangements.

***In "the students' best interests"***

It is the principals who are faced with mediating these multiple demands (Ball & Bowe, 1991; Levin, 1993; Peters & Richards, 1995) while organizing the school with the "best interests of students" in mind, however those interests are construed (Walker, 1995). Both teachers and administrators returned frequently to concerns about students and program needs as the deciding factor in negotiations at various levels. In some cases, defining what that meant was also a matter for negotiation, since such definitions may be contested by some parents, teachers, or students themselves.

***Who has power?***

In the rather politicized local school environments (Ball & Bowe, 1991) depicted by many of the particpants in our study, much depends on informal rather than formal negotiations. Most of these occur at the school rather than the district level. Who has power in these situations? In this study, we have seen that power is continually being negotiated and re-negotiated at each school-site (Ball, 1987). This process occurs between and among principals, parents, full-time continuing teachers, teachers working under "new" policies, the district office, Section 84 part-time teachers with in-demand specialist preparation, students and, finally, other Section 84 part-timers. The power moves around.

The part-time teachers repeatedly articulated an awareness of the difference between their own and their principals' power to determine the conditions of their teaching jobs and professional careers, whether they had "new" or "old" part-time arrangements. They knew the importance of maintaining positive relations with their administrators. Those who were happy with the specifics of their arrangements were quick to credit their principals with a supportive interest in accommodating the teachers' expressed needs and preferences. Principals, rather than teachers, pointed out that some teachers with sought-after specialist qualifications are in a stronger negotiating position than other teachers because there is a "market" for their skills. Principals indicated that they can, and do, make concessions to these teachers in order to obtain their services for the school's benefit.

**IMPLICATIONS**

***"Old" and "New" Concept Part-Time Employment***

The concurrent existence of different types of contractual agreements governing part-time employment arrangements in this school district highlights their comparative advantages and disadvantages, for both teachers and administrators. Taken together, these arrangements illustrate two different but overlapping aspects to what some people predict will be a general restructuring of employment in schools, as well as other organizations (Handy, 1990; Negrey, 1994).

One dimension reflects greater societal acceptance that there should be opportunities for optional "reduced work" 3 employment arrangements in which employees have some control over the nature of those arrangements. This is categorized as "new concept" part-time work when it is voluntary, permanent, has career potential, the pay is pro-rated to comparable full-time jobs, and the earnings package includes fringe benefits (Negrey, 1994, p.13). Individual employees can then negotiate their paid work arrangements to complement other dimensions of their lives.

The other dimension of restructured employment reflects employers' efforts to increase staffing flexibility and lower their fixed staffing costs as an organizational response to the pressures of financial restraint and escalating competitiveness. This is categorized as market-driven "old concept" reduced work (Negrey, 1994, p.13) in which employees have little influence on the circumstances of their employment.

***Exemplary Alternatives?***

The District's "new" policy part-time employment arrangements appear to be near exemplary illustrations of "new concept" part-time work. Teachers have some power to negotiate part-time work arrangements without forfeiting the long-term security of a full-time continuing contract. The guaranteed option of returning to full-time employment is the feature of the "new" policies that teachers appreciate most -- and the feature most envied by Section 84 part-timers.

The "new" policies institutionalize the recognition that the personal and the professional dimensions of life are interwoven and interactive. In practice, the most common illustration of this occurs when a woman teacher becomes a mother. Like many other women who do paid work outside the home, teachers who are mothers (or primary care-givers for other dependents), juggle the "competing urgencies" (Young, 1992) that arise from multiple roles or identities that, at times, seem to be in conflict. Where it is an option financially, these women may harmonize the discordant demands by emphasizing their identities as mothers/care-givers more strongly than their identities as teachers, by reducing the amount that they teach, particularly when they have young children. Eventually, however, the relation between those identities may shift, and a woman may wish to give greater emphasis to her identity as a teacher. At that point, she is ready to move into full-time teaching again. Will her employer, the school district where she has been teaching part time, permit her identity to evolve? Or are she and her identity now frozen in time as mother first, teacher second?

The new policies allow for and support teachers' shifting personal circumstances and identities. They could have wide and constructive application for both women and men through varying life situations. And, while providing more flexibility for some individual teachers, the District may also realize some real and potential benefits, in the form of reduced costs for replacement staff and the possibility of organizational renewal through the addition of some new teachers.

***"New" meets "old": Marginalizing the marginalized?***

In this district, it also appears that the complex interaction of "new" and "old" concept policies on a single school-site may create new inequities between types of part-time arrangements while minimizing other inequities between standard and non-standard employment (Schellenberger & Clark, 1996). Section 84 employment contracts provide something akin to market-driven "old concept" part-time work (Negrey, 1994, p. 13), because the teachers have minimal control over their hours of work and their teaching schedules. However, they do have benefits packages and school years that are negotiated collectively for all teachers, at the district level. Part-time teachers' status as members of the ATA does afford them some benefits and protections that most part-time workers do not enjoy.

A key dimension for comparison between old and new part-time work arrangements is their relative "negotiability," in both policy and practice. The introduction and use of the new contracts in a school affects the scope of negotiability available to those on the old contracts, because the specific assignments for those who hold the new contracts will be negotiated first. That is, the voluntary "new" policy arrangements are usually negotiated on a case-by-case basis in the spring for the subsequent school year. Many Section 84 arrangements -- voluntary or otherwise -- are not confirmed until the fall, when student enrolments are clear. Even then, the amount of time a Section 84 teacher is assigned (and paid for) may change as a result of fluctuating enrolments and unexpected adjustments to full-time staff.

Our data confirm that there are complex interactions and unanticipated consequences when the "old" and "new" concept policies are being enacted concurrently on one school site. These ripple effects are the source of some resentment between staff members. It appears that the complex interaction of "new" and "old" concept (Negrey, 1994) policies can further marginalize the already marginalized (Acker, 1994b; Sparke, 1994). So, for example, a number of veteran part-time teachers who have served the district's schools - and purposes - for years on Section 84 contracts are among those who now risk being marginalized even further. Some principals, as well as teachers, were quick to note this ripple effect.

***Gender Issues***

Negrey (1994) addresses the particular significance that part-time work has for many women. Research suggests that family and domestic responsibilities are still primarily in the female realm. Although scholars have called for a range of flexible paid work arrangements for both women and men, in order to accommodate domestic responsibilities as well as professional ones, (e.g. Young, 1992), the teachers who opt for reduced-work arrangements are usually women. These women are looking for ways to reconcile the multiplying demands of their professional and domestic responsibilities, as they - and significant others - interpret those responsibilities (e.g. Apple, 1983; Acker, 1995-96; Biklen, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Morrison, 1994; White, 1983).

Their doing so reinforces the established sexual division of labour as a social structure. Not only is it women who voluntarily take up part-time employment but they do it in order to provide direct caregiving for others, which is traditionally assumed to be the responsibility of women. That responsibility may not even be regarded as acceptable for, or by, some men.

This pattern of choices and assumptions sustains a particular gendered interpretation of what "family responsibilities" are, and of how they differ, for women and for men. The dominant discourse that men are the primary breadwinners is underscored. Thus, it is middle-class wives (supported by male primary breadwinners) who can most often "afford' to teach part time, voluntarily. These arrangements take for granted the rationale of the traditional gender order, which is reflected in the gender regime (Connell, 1987) of this District and its schools, where the ideology of the good mother appears to be shared by teachers and administrators alike (Marshall & Scribner, 1991, p. 350-351).

Where are the men, when it comes to part-time teaching? With the introduction of "new" policy arrangements, will more men opt for part-time employment? If they do so, will it be to participate more directly in care-giving activities? If they try, will they be supported by their administrators? colleagues? students and their parents? The existing pattern of part-time teaching in this District strongly reinforces traditional gender roles. However, the involuntary, Section 84 part-time employment that is now being emphasized by the District does cut across genders (although the impact on women is greater, since there are so many women in teaching). Will "old concept" part-time employment, rather than "new concept" arrangements have the effect of undermining the existing gender order?

***"Postmodern" Employment***

The increased use of part-time and temporary workers has been discussed widely as a characteristic of postmodern organizations - and the merits of this trend have been debated (e.g. Handy, 1990; Negrey, 1994). This approach to staffing is of course manifested in very limited opportunities to obtain (or regain, in some cases) the traditional sort of full-time continuing employment.

***Institutionalizing Uncertainty?***

The principals in this study confirmed that fewer traditional, full-time jobs are on offer as they and the employing school district seek to increase flexibility and lower costs by using more part-time (and temporary) staff (Young & Grieve, 1996). On the one hand, school administrators are engaging in what they regard as a necessary form of "uncertainty absorption" (March & Simon, 1958 cited in Marshall & Scribner, 1991, p. 351). On the other hand, this approach to employment institutionalizes uncertainty (Hargreaves, 1994; Treller, 1994) for the teachers who are affected.

Given the difficulties that school administrators are facing as they attempt to mediate multiple, and often conflicting, demands at the school-site level, none of them was willing to give away the range of negotiability that is currently available to them under Section 84. They placed their need for a staffing "buffer zone" (Sparke, 1994) in the context of declining financial resources and greater emphasis on school-site budgeting. The micro dimensions of school-site financial management and accountability, particularly in small schools, appeared to be making principals even more cautious about staffing commitments since they have a very small range of financial discretion.

To some extent, uncertainty is also a reality for the administrators, because they cannot take for granted the same kind of long-term commitment or availability from part-time and/or temporary teaching staff that they can from those on full-time continuing contracts. And, as some principals noted, the more recent administrative appointments in their District are now for specified terms (although these administrators' do have full-time continuing contracts as teachers). That policy change seemed to contribute -- from the principals' viewpoints -- to the acceptability of this approach to staffing for teachers.

But the uncertainty was felt the most keenly by the Section 84 teachers themselves, whether new or long-time employees of the District. No matter what level of schooling they worked in or how long they had been employed in that school or the district, most Section 84 teachers lived with annual uncertainty about their assignments and, as a corollary, their pay. Teachers articulated a variety of experiences and views about the timing of administrators' decisions concerning work arrangements and subsequent adjustments. Some high school teachers found their appointments could vary dramatically, on very short notice, from one semester to the next. Principals saw these as necessary adjustments related to changes in student enrolments. Where they felt they had the latitude, they too wanted to minimize the uncertainty. However, in the minds of many of the teachers, the uncertainty never really went away.

This is the most forceful illustration of the way in which Section 84 teachers serve - involuntarily - as the staffing "buffer zone" for schools (Sparke, 1994, p. 303; Treller, 1994). Market-driven part-time and temporary employment leaves teachers with very few rights and no privileges except in a case where they have sought-after qualifications. Even then, they are vulnerable to funding and program-priority shifts.

***The Market/ing Model?***

New teachers contracted under Section 84 reported that they were engaging in various marketing strategies to secure their own continued or increased employment. Recruiting more students was one marketing strategy. The idea was to attract adequate enrolment, so that the accumulated per pupil funding would be sufficient to justify the teacher's salary. Part-timers have a particular vested interest in maintaining high student enrolments in their school; therefore, they were out marketing the school and its course offerings. They were also marketing themselves, and their own courses and programs. This scenario plays out vividly the labor market internal to a school and district (see Acker, 1995-96; Lindley, 1994). There may be similar negotiations going on between full time continuing teachers and their principals about the details of their assignments, but for those teachers the right to full-time employment is protected. For part-timers, employment itself (or enough paid employment to provide adequate income) may be at stake.

A second strategy was to impress the principal. Principals themselves commented that new teachers would "do anything" to distinguish themselves as desirable employees. These teachers were "extra milers" (Blase, 1989, p. 120), taking on responsibilities well beyond those the principal assigned. Indeed, many principals observed that part-timers were "working time-and-a-half for part-time pay." This eagerness and dedication was being carried to such an extreme that some principals spoke of urging the newcomers on staff to curtail their activities. The micro-politics of timetabling (Hargreaves, 1994) and staffing negotiations were, in some cases, promoting acquiescent and ingratiating behaviour (Blase, 1989; Treller, 1994) on the part of those teachers who have little power to control the conditions of their employment.

**How much more, with how much less, for how long?**

A number of principals, as well as teachers, wondered how much more could be done, with how much less, for how long. Some principals predicted that part timers will become less inclined to go the "extra mile" when they realize that there is no prospect of obtaining a full-time continuing appointment. Both teachers and principals noted that people can't live on part-time pay forever and many will leave teaching or be constrained by the necessity of earning money through other part-time jobs. As a partial response to this concern, there has been a change in district policy concerning substitute teaching. Part-timers may now substitute teach in the school/s where they have partial FTE appointments. This is seen as a mutually beneficial alternative to outside employment for some individuals, although this policy in turn causes dislocations for those who have been working as substitutes.

In addition, both administrators and teachers saw the provision of a full benefits package as a way that this district (unlike some others) recognized the contributions of its part-timers. Some principals and teachers also noted that there were financial disadvantages to this arrangement, for the district. So far, however, this "cost" associated the employment of part-timers was not identified as a crucial consideration compared with the perceived "benefits" of, and to, part-timers.

In the current and projected situation for public schools in Alberta, the use of part-time and temporary staff seems to be gaining increased acceptance. The cutbacks in school funding together with the decentralization of budgets to school sites, leaves school administrators with limited discretionary monies. Principals, especially of small schools, stated that they were unwilling to risk long-term staffing commitments. It appears that many beginning teachers, as well as those already on Section 84 contracts, now face the prospect of part-time employment, initially and perhaps as the only foreseeable option. This suggests that we might see the re-casualization (Broad, 1991) of teachers' employment. It is certainly clear that in the district where our study was situated, various forms of part-time and temporary employment arrangements are assuming increased importance and legitimacy as an administrative strategy.

***The part time solution?***

There is considerable evidence that public school teaching and school-site administration are becoming increasingly complex and stressful (e.g. ATA, 1993; Ball and Bowe, 1991; Edmonton Public Teachers, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Levin 1993; Peters & Richards, 1995). Adapting to these changes involves modifying priorities or work styles (Brannon, 1994). For those who are unwilling or unable to adapt, the availability of certain kinds of "part-time" employment options is increasingly important.

Such options may serve both the individual and the organization well, although they do not resolve underlying issues about the relation between job intensification and professionalism (Acker, 1994a; Apple, 1983; Hargreaves, 1994). In some cases, the freedom to choose part time assignments affords some educators a means of continuing to work to their own professional standards (Hargreaves, 1994). That way, they can still feel satisfied with their own performance. In other cases, part-time teaching is a way to reduce the workload and time demands that are contributing to widespread teacher stress or burnout (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1994; King & Peart, 1992; Jevne & Zingle, 1990; Manitoba Teachers' Society, 1989). Part-time arrangements that contribute to individual teachers' well-being by giving them some control over their own working conditions while also maintaining sound learning environments in schools are certainly desirable.

But, does the use of part-time employment for the purposes just described amount to penalizing the conscientious? Paid-work reduction of this sort, even when it is voluntary, is an individualistic solution to - and may also reinforce - organizational or structural trends to job intensification. Is part time teaching the solution or does it intensify the problem?

**CLOSING COMMENT**

The apparent trend toward both voluntary and involuntary part-time employment arrangements for teachers is a phenomenon of contemporary conceptual and practical interest. It is a phenomenon that has particular - but not exclusive - significance for women, who make up two-thirds of the province's teachers (Alberta Education, 1996). It is a phenomenon that also has particular significance for aspiring teachers, whether male or female. And, this phenomenon is important because of its possible consequences for the provision of good teaching-learning environments, to the extent that those environments are affected by the organization of teaching (e.g. Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 131-135) and of schools.

When compared to the taken-for-granted, "standard" form of teaching employment, the educational and organizational implications of diverse part-time staffing arrangements, are not yet clear. Moreover, each type of arrangement has some controversial aspects, benefits, and drawbacks, which vary according to one's viewpoint.

The school district in which our exploratory study was situated has been a fruitful site for the comparative analysis of different types of policies and the interaction among them. Including both teachers and administrators as study participants has broadened the range of perspectives that we have been able to document and consider. We began this study with an interest in learning more about "voluntary" part-time arrangements. However, given the employment climate of our times, we came to understand very quickly that many part-time arrangements were not so voluntary. And now, we wonder how much meaning words like voluntary and involuntary have, given the complex array of choices and assumptions that underpins those terms and blurs many of the distinctions between them.

In this article, we have presented and commented on the perspectives of some teachers and principals who are involved in part-time employment arrangements. We have described the motivations that those teachers and principals have expressed for engaging in part-time teaching arrangements and the informal negotiations associated with those arrangements. Finally, we have highlighted what we see as some major implications of the arrangements we have learned about. Those we have framed as questions that merit exploration beyond a single-district study.

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**End Notes**

1 White (1993, p. 119) defines part-time work as "part-week work, including both regular and casual work of less than the usual full-time weekly hours of work." The employment contracts themselves may be temporary (i.e. for a specified period of time) or continuing (i.e. tenured employment).

2 Throughout this report, we will use the descriptors "Section 84," "traditional," and "old" interchangeably to refer to part-time arrangements as outlined in Section 84 of the School Act and the terms "alternative" and "new" interchangeably to refer to the two policies recently introduced in the school district where our study was situated.

3 Negrey (1994) uses the term "reduced work" to refer to those forms of paid employment, such as part time and job or work sharing, that involve a reduction in the overall hours of paid compared to the full-time continuing employment arrangements that have been regarded as normative in the past few decades.