

The Teacher-Volunteer in Ontario

Michael Mindzak
Brock University

Abstract

This study explored the practice of “teacher-volunteerism” in Ontario, Canada. A teacher-volunteer refers to those teachers who are fully certified to be employed as teachers in Ontario and who remain active in the teaching labour market. Teachers in Ontario, facing a competitive labour market, have increasingly volunteered inside of schools. Drawing on qualitative interviews with unemployed and underemployed teachers in Ontario, the paper examines and discusses experiences concerning volunteerism within this context. Findings revealed that teacher-volunteerism is largely motivated by employment-related concerns, with volunteers engaging in various teaching-related practices inside of schools. Teacher-volunteerism is understood as a new expectation faced by un(der)employed teachers as they seek paid employment. The exploration of teacher-volunteerism leads to further interrogation surrounding the intersections of teachers’ work and labour in the field of education.

Keywords: teachers, work, employment, unemployment, underemployment, volunteerism

Context

In the past decade, thousands of teachers in Ontario, Canada have faced significant challenges with securing employment in the teaching profession. As a result of continued unemployment, teachers have resorted to teaching contingently, relocating and moving abroad, or exiting the teacher labour market altogether (Ontario College of Teachers [OCT], 2013, 2014). Similarly, due to extended periods of underemployment, teachers who have found limited opportunities in teaching have had to accept part-time or contingent employment arrangements rather than full-time, permanent positions (Chalikakis, 2012; Pollock, 2008). Among teachers attempting to gain employment in schools, some also have resorted to the practice of volunteering (OCT, 2012; Pollock, 2010). Such “teacher-volunteers” thus have appeared in the provincial educational landscape in recent years, seemingly in direct relation to continued teaching un(der)employment across Ontario.

Background

Around the year 2000, it appeared that Ontario might face a significant and impending shortage of qualified teachers (Grimmett & Young, 2012; Guppy & Davies, 1996; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; Press & Lawton, 1999; Smith, 1989; Tremblay, 1997). In response, the province introduced policies to increase the supply of new teachers, with teacher-education institutions and accredited programs expanded to meet the anticipated demand as well as the introduction of early retirement incentives. Hence, during the period 1998-2002, teacher demographics alongside these policies created a strong demand for new teachers in Ontario. However, as more teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs, and as internationally educated teachers entered Ontario in greater numbers, the teacher labour market became increasingly competitive from about 2005 onwards (OCT, 2012). Since then, as teacher retirements began to decrease while the supply of new teachers simultaneously increased, new teacher unemployment and underemployment rates surged annually (OCT, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013).

Teacher un(der)employment continues to occur unevenly across Ontario. Variables such as geographical location, teacher specialization, and policy all influence the number of employment opportunities at any given time. However, overall, trends from the past 15 years point to a large surplus of teachers in Ontario. With limited data, it remains difficult to discern the exact number of actual unemployed or underemployed teachers within the labour market. Such estimates would need to clearly define what constitutes teacher unemployment and underemployment as well as consider the number of teachers who have exited teaching employment altogether. Nonetheless, the number of such teachers in the province can be estimated in the tens of thousands (Pearce, 2012). For example, a report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO, 2016) notes that between the years 2006-2011, Ontario produced an estimated 26,000 more qualified teachers than teaching positions province wide. Beginning in September 2015, teacher-education programs in Ontario moved from one-year to two-year degrees, implemented, at least in part, in response to the large teacher oversupply. Nevertheless, while such policy measures have reduced the number of new teachers certified annually, and new teacher un(der)employment rates have stabilized in recent years, a pronounced teacher surplus is still expected moving forward (HEQCO, 2016; OCT, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Teachers and Volunteering

Within this contemporary context of teacher unemployment and underemployment in Ontario, a growing number of teachers began volunteering. Annual reports such as the OCT's Transition to Teaching series—which survey the employment outcomes of new teacher graduates in the province—called attention to the volunteering activities of new teachers inside of schools (OCT, 2013). From 2013 onwards, these reports found that over 80% of new teacher graduates considered volunteering as a job search strategy, although only about 50% of respondents did volunteer in their first year following graduation. Time spent volunteering in schools also ranged from minimal commitments of just a few hours per week to daily volunteerism for several months; such findings were consistent over time (OCT, 2013, 2014, 2015). Pearce (2012) found similar results in her study of newly certified teachers volunteering in Ontario, also indicating that teachers were volunteering primarily to enhance employment opportunities. Volunteering was perceived as a means of accessing teaching work, and while it did not guarantee future employment, it remained an important activity in a crowded labour market.

Hence, volunteering has become an increasingly common practice for certain teachers in Ontario in order to access teaching employment (Brock & Ryan, 2016). Additionally, the phenomenon of teacher-volunteerism appears to be largely connected (if not directly attributed) to the teacher surplus in Ontario and reduced opportunities for paid employment in the teaching profession. While schools in places such as Ontario have long embraced volunteers (Kompf & Dworet, 1992), recent employment trends thus appear to have manufactured conditions whereby teachers engage in volunteerism specifically for the opportunity to secure future employment.

Literature surrounding volunteerism more generally has noted similar developments in the volunteerism–employment nexus. Canadians give their time and resources to volunteer activities extensively and do so for various reasons, purposes, groups, and organizations (Hall et al., 2009; Vaillancourt, 1994; Vodarek et al., 2007). Nevertheless, research has pointed to new conceptualizations of volunteering (Hustinx et al., 2010; Wilson, 2012) along with a specific need for further research regarding volunteering activities and their connection to employment gains (Hackl et al., 2007; Handy et al., 2010; Wilson, 2012). For example, volunteering rates have substantially increased among postsecondary students in recent years (Griffith, 2010, 2012; Holdsworth, 2010; Ruiter & de Graaf, 2009; Turcotte, 2015), which could be attributed to individuals engaging in volunteer activities primarily to enhance their resumés and/or employment potential. Similarly, young workers, and those in precarious employment, often demonstrate higher rates of volunteerism to improve job opportunities and networking (Martin & Lewchuk, 2018).

The term internship has also become much more ambiguous in recent years: In what has been dubbed the “intern economy” over the past decade, internships appear to be on the rise around the globe (Standing, 2011), particularly for students and young workers seeking employment in the professional sectors (Curiale, 2010; Perlin, 2012; Steffen, 2010; Yamada, 2002). The result of these changes has been what Schugurensky and Mundel (2005) describe as the “intern volunteer” (p. 1004). The emergence of the teacher-volunteer may reflect such trends, where the boundaries surrounding schooling, work (paid

and unpaid), and volunteerism have become increasingly blurred in recent years and require further investigation (Duguid et al., 2013; Standing, 2014a, 2014b).

Methodology

This study sought to explore the perspectives and voices of teachers with respect to volunteering inside of schools. Hence, the central research question being asked is: How is the experience of volunteering understood by un(der)employed teachers in Ontario?

Volunteering here is understood as teacher-volunteering; that is, teachers who have been certified to be employed as K-12 teachers in the province of Ontario, returning to function as school-based volunteers. Such volunteerism is, by definition unpaid and, based on the extant literature reviewed above, appears to be largely motivated by employment-related considerations.

Drawing from a qualitative study of unemployed and underemployed teachers in Ontario, Canada, individual experiences of volunteering were gathered through semi-structured interviews. In this way, the experience of volunteering was directly connected to broader discussions with participants regarding their experiences as unemployed or underemployed teachers in Ontario. Participants were recruited online, primarily through postings in Occasional Teacher Federations of Labour group websites and through social media (Facebook, Twitter). From there, additional participants were located through convenience and snowball sampling (Glense, 1999; Lichtman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, both in-person and online (via Skype), with the latter being the preferred method for the majority of participants. Interviews were conducted once per participant, and each interview lasted approximately one hour.

During interviews, participants were asked to discuss their experiences in relation to their teaching, work, and lives. Part of this discussion concerning their working-lives as teachers included specific questions surrounding volunteerism. While not all teachers had volunteered since obtaining their teaching credentials, all commented on or discussed the issue of teacher-volunteerism in Ontario. Thus, while the interviews considered a broad range of topics related to teacher work and employment, specific questions surrounding experiences with volunteering as teachers were included in each interview.

In total, 24 participants were interviewed for the study. Four teachers self-identified as male while 20 self-identified as female. Teachers ranged in teaching experience from early-career teachers who had recently completed their degrees to second-career teachers. Geographic location was similarly broad, with participants included from across Ontario, both from more urban and more rural areas as well as from various school boards. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 49, with an average of 32.5 years of age, while holding their teaching credentials for an approximate average of 4.5 years at the time of interviews.

Interviews with un(der)employed teachers were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with the intent of gathering rich and thick descriptions of their experiences (Merriam, 2001, 2009). While the issue of teacher-volunteerism is inevitably complex, connected, and intertwined with several other dimensions of teacher work and un(der)employment, this study set out to identify specifically how teachers experienced and understood volunteering. Hence, reoccurring ideas, themes, and patterns were coded, noted, and placed together to build and further produce meaningful insights (Lichtman, 2013; Vosko, 2006). From there, employing a constant-comparative method (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012), interview responses were further placed into themes and patterns, specifically in relation to volunteering. In addition, the voices of several participants are included in the findings to highlight and emphasize certain common or else unique experiences related to volunteering. The following section outlines the interview findings regarding teacher-volunteerism in further detail.

Findings

Drawing from interviews with un(der)employed teachers, this section outlines the experiences of participants along three emergent and key dimensions: teachers' motivations to volunteer, teachers' experiences of volunteering, and teachers' perceptions of volunteering in Ontario.

Motivations to Volunteer

As noted in the reviewed literature, teachers-volunteerism appears to be a key activity towards accessing work and improving paid employment opportunities. For teachers interviewed, volunteering also was understood primarily in this manner; that is, volunteering was seen as an important (if not necessary) point of entry into the teaching workforce. Volunteering can get one's "foot in the door" and potentially improve later opportunities for teaching employment. For example, if unemployed, volunteering could provide valuable connections or reference letters from key gatekeepers such as teaching staff or school principals. From there, once hired as an occasional (supply) teacher, having additional connections and networks made through volunteering might provide access to more daily paid-teaching work opportunities. As one teacher explained,

If you're not on a board, you obviously want to volunteer so that when they're going through your resumé and they're looking and thinking, "oh, this person's actively looking for work or helping out," whatever. Then when you're on, it helps get jobs because people are more likely to pick you as a supply teacher.

Teachers interviewed engaged in this sort of instrumental volunteering primarily to secure paid employment or improving the chances of securing further teaching opportunities. Such ideas corroborate with motivations for volunteerism found by previous surveys amongst early career teachers in the province (OCT, 2014, 2015). Hence, volunteering typically was understood as a "need" to participate inside of schools or within school boards. Moreover, teacher-volunteering was linked explicitly to volunteerism within Ontario's publicly funded schools—the largest employers and preferred place for teacher employment in Ontario. In this way, motivations to volunteer were typically directed at volunteering specifically within schools in the publicly funded school system, rather than in the private system or any other types of organizations.

Similar to OCT (2013), approximately half of participants were currently, or had previously engaged in volunteer activities since receiving their teaching certification. However, those who did not volunteer noted that they were typically "unable" rather than "unwilling" to volunteer their time. Such inability typically related to their current employment (as teachers or else in other jobs), familial obligations, as well as their socioeconomic position and inability to fiscally engage in volunteer activities (i.e., they "couldn't afford" to do so). In short, not all teachers are able to volunteer, which raised concerns over access, privilege, equity, and control. For example:

I'm then thinking, how do you volunteer and make a living at the same time because it doesn't make sense to me? How do you support someone's quality of life when you're asking someone who has to pay the bills, has to pay a mortgage, or has to financially live to go volunteer their time, which is usually 9:00 to 5:00 [during] school time when they need to be working? ... The other thing I keep thinking about this whole volunteering thing is that it is a privilege to volunteer for some of those teachers. The privilege lies in the fact that if you're financially supported at home, then yeah, you can definitely take the time to volunteer, but that is not everyone's lived reality.

Such concerns highlighted the "need" to volunteer facing un(der)employed teachers in the province, which underpinned teachers' motivations to volunteer in public schools.

These demands appear to be connected not only to the structural conditions of the surplus labour market but also to the instructions or advice teachers received from fellow education professionals. Here, a teacher recounts how she was encouraged to volunteer while completing her teacher-education degree:

Yeah, they pretty much just say go make connections with ... people in the school, principals and whoever try and get your foot in the door that way. They also told me to volunteer, but I obviously can't afford that; that's ridiculous. ... If you know somebody, you probably will be able to get in...

While another teacher reflects on returning to Ontario:

I went overseas for a few years to teach, and when I came back, I contacted that same principal who hired me [previously], and I said, "I'm back in Canada after six years can you give me feedback from what the job market is like?" and he said "go to the schools, meet with the principals, offer to volunteer, and you will get on the supply list."

As noted, volunteering in schools can provide un(der)employed teachers with the opportunity to gain classroom experience, receive letters of support, and gain connections—to “be noticed” by other educators in the school or school board. While this would explain their behaviour in terms of an economic “rational choice,” teachers noted how they were informed that volunteerism was not only important but also perhaps a necessary step to secure employment within a school or school board. Teachers mentioned how they were informed that volunteering in schools would be beneficial towards improving their employability as teachers in the local school or school board. While such advice typically came from friends and colleagues, and was likely well-intentioned, it appears other education professionals (e.g., classroom teachers, school principals, and board administrators) may directly or indirectly “nudge” un(der)employed teachers towards school volunteerism.

Experiences with Volunteering

With the motivation to volunteer in mind, the teachers interviewed sought to volunteer in schools or school boards where they had some previous connection and/or where they aspired to secure (permanent) employment. As noted, other educators appeared to suggest that un(der)employed teachers should engage in school volunteerism, and thus often also supported their volunteer efforts within their own schools. Hence, several teachers returned to familiar schools, such as neighbourhood schools they had previously attended or in which they completed their teacher practicum placements. For some teachers, this was out of necessity rather than choice, as they had returned to live at home (often with parents) due to financial concerns, and thus currently resided in close proximity of schools they formerly attended.

As participants discussed some of their volunteering experiences, it became apparent that the work of teacher-volunteers could not always be easily differentiated from the work of the classroom teacher. Generally, teachers interviewed described how they would support their associate teacher¹ in a variety of ways—from more auxiliary support functions such as photocopying and participating in field trips to more instructional activities such as lesson planning and, at times, providing instruction to students in the classroom. As one teacher noted,

I pretty much just photocopy lessons, worksheets for students, or helping set up for labs because I'm in the science classroom for chemistry and science in Grade 10 and all that, so help set up for labs. Occasionally I teach a lesson because they know that I want the experience and they trust me.

Another teacher took part in more extensive volunteerism while still unemployed:

I was trying to do full days of volunteering. The associate teacher, he was okay with me coming in for the full day. He had an IEP [student] that I would work with, or even flat out just like, "Hey, you want to lead this class? Here's the lesson plan. Just teach it." We would both work in the class together. I did that for 1 year, then last year, I bumped it up and started doing 4 or 5 days a week. ... That was my life, those things: volunteer, go to work, go home, sleep. Volunteer, go to work, go home, sleep; that was it.

As the examples above illustrate, teacher-volunteers appeared to be engaged in a wide range of teaching-related activities—both curricular and pedagogical functions. However, what remains unclear is the full extent to which teacher-volunteers were assisting or working *with* teachers as opposed to

¹ Associate teacher here refers to the teacher in charge or responsible for the classroom. Other common terms used in education parlance might include: *partner teacher, regular teacher, classroom teacher or permanent teacher.*

possibly working *for* teachers in the classroom. In sum, teachers interviewed did not all indicate that their experiences with volunteering were overtly problematic. However, they nevertheless felt compelled to participate as teacher-volunteers due to labour market conditions.

Perceptions of Volunteering

Discussions by un(der)employed teachers regarding volunteerism contained both positive and negative interpretations of the experience. Nevertheless, while responses varied, the overall perception may be summarized as an understanding that teacher-volunteerism was an expectation rather than a choice in the current labour market.

Again, for un(der)employed teachers, volunteering was viewed primarily as instrumental in relation to access to teaching employment. While their discussions around volunteering included motivations for informal learning and improved pedagogical practices, the impetus for such volunteerism remained rooted in securing connections, personal/professional references, networks, and future employment opportunities. For others, such as the teacher quoted here, it was interpreted as unfair and exploitative:

I don't find [volunteering] gratifying anymore, and I don't find it helpful, because I volunteered for 10 years of my life before getting into teacher's college and during and after ... and it's literally gotten me nowhere.

Hence, teacher-volunteerism was perceived as a job-search strategy and point of access into paid teaching employment, rather than a more altruistic or developmental activity. This was just part of the current system in place, another “hoop to jump through” towards securing permanent employment.

The extensiveness and long-term nature of volunteer participation as noted above, raised the question surrounding who actually benefits from teacher-volunteerism. As another teacher argued,

New teachers are really not benefiting from volunteering. There is one teacher at the school that I volunteer to read; she always has a volunteer every single day in her classroom. They sometimes help with the reading program, and they tell me, “yeah she's going to let me teach this thing and I did a whole lesson on this!” And it's like yeah of course, you are smart and good and now she doesn't have to do it, one less thing she has to plan. So, I look at it as it's to her advantage, she's not doing it to help you. Sure, you get some experience, but it's really to benefit the [classroom] teacher.

As noted earlier, in some cases, the expectation or demand for volunteering efforts appeared to come from other educators in more established positions. Such individuals, often in positions of power or influence, may possibly grant or deny access to further or future employment. One teacher described this feeling as “walking on eggshells” while working or volunteering inside of schools. When discussing such issues, teachers noted their perceptions concerning access, privilege, and equity—as not all could afford to engage in unpaid volunteerism as a result of their continued un(der)employment. This often led to further conversations surrounding inequities in the current world of teaching work in Ontario, as well as the numerous challenges surrounding continued un(der)employment and precarity in the teaching profession (see also Chalikakis, 2012).

Summary of Findings

Overall, interviews with un(der)employed teachers largely confirmed what had been noted by the OCT (2015, 2016), supporting the notion that teacher-volunteerism is largely driven by employment-related concerns. Thus, the motivation to volunteer inside of Ontario's publicly funded schools was tied to access into the teaching profession and towards future employment. While volunteerism provides the opportunity to gain valuable experience and connect with other professional educators, it remained rooted in instrumental aspirations as volunteering meant the possibility of gaining access to key schools, stakeholders, or gatekeepers who could potentially provide further access to enhanced employment opportunities. What activities teacher-volunteers engaged in once inside of schools appeared to be largely “teaching-related” as well. Finally, while perceptions of volunteerism varied, teachers explained how

they would not be volunteering if not for their un(der)employment situation. Hence, they felt a demand or pressure to volunteer in order to enhance or improve their own career trajectories.

Discussion

Returning to the research question: How is the experience of volunteering understood by un(der)employed teachers in Ontario? The study's findings support the overall idea of teacher-volunteers engaging in largely pragmatic and economically orientated forms of volunteerism. This intersection of teaching, employment, and volunteerism can be further examined through various lenses. Hence, the next section addresses and interrogates five dimensions regarding teacher-volunteers in relation to educational work, labour, and employment in the contemporary period.

Volunteerism and Extracurricular Activities

It appears teacher-volunteerism has been readily normalized into the current world of teaching work; however, such a perception may not be viewed as significantly distinct from that of full-time, permanent teachers who typically engage in extracurricular activities as part of their work. As Lin (2008) notes, elementary and secondary school teachers across Canada work an average of 7.6 hours of unpaid overtime per week. Additionally, studies examining teacher workload find that K-12 teachers often work more than 50 hours per week with unpaid overtime (Froese-Germain, 2014; Leithwood, 2006). This model of unpaid work for educators continues to focus on the extracurricular activities of employed educators who engage in such work outside of their formalized job requirements. While unpaid overtime and extracurricular activities continue to challenge teachers and education-workers, the topic of unpaid work of teachers outside of the standard paid employment relationship has received far less attention (Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario, 2017; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 2014).

As a labour issue, the presence of an increasing number of teacher-volunteers inside of schools creates the possibility that they are engaging in unpaid work and/or carrying out the work and responsibilities of employed teachers. While this study highlights some aspects of this relationship, it remains unclear what exactly constitutes the general dynamic between employed and unemployed teachers working and volunteering together in the classroom. Moreover, it is unclear where exactly the "idea" of volunteerism emerged and why teachers believe such volunteerism intersects with employment opportunities. Such questions and concerns are noteworthy for teachers as well as for the labour organizations that represent the majority of education-workers in Ontario. While issues surrounding teachers' unpaid labour in the form of extracurricular activities, unpaid overtime, and the expenditure of personal resources to fund classrooms all remain extremely problematic, the issue of teacher-volunteerism represents a distinct paradigm. Specifically, such teachers engage in unpaid labour without the benefit of job security, income security, or economic security (Standing, 2009). Hence, teacher-volunteerism not only represents a form of unpaid "extra" work, but also points to a new form of unpaid labour inside of schools by a certain subset of marginalized teachers in a crowded labour market.

Work-for-Labour

According to Standing (2011, 2013), unpaid work (in its various forms) remains symptomatic of the growth in precarious forms of work and labour in a tertiary economy. As precarious forms of work continue to propagate, workers inevitably will move into low-wage or even no-wage work to attempt to escape precarity (Standing, 2014b). According to Standing (2014a), this trend can be best understood as "work-for-labour." Fundamentally, he argues that workers increasingly must engage in large amounts of unpaid work in order to secure opportunities for paid labour. This work could include volunteerism, as well as other common practices in the labour market such as extensive job searches and applications, time-consuming interview practices, working outside of formal working hours, as well as the upgrading of new skills and credentials (Standing, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). The phenomenon of teacher-volunteerism appears to fit into this trend, whereby unpaid work activities remain inextricably tied to furthering employment opportunities. As an example, as a result of policy changes in Ontario (Regulation 274) which instituted more comprehensive seniority-based hiring practices, teacher-volunteers may engage in more extensive volunteerism within a particular school board to secure employment gains rather than seek employment opportunities elsewhere.

As an equity issue, if volunteering is an important determinant of accessing paid employment, then volunteering risks becoming a de facto requirement for entry into the teaching profession. This may then privilege individuals who have the resources and capacity to volunteer over other candidates who may not. As noted, this “pay to play” model leads to further marginalization for those who cannot afford to play the volunteering game (Ryan et al., 2009). Labour market trends, such as unpaid internships, highlight this situation for numerous professions and groups of workers (Perlin 2012; Zieba, 2012). Moreover, intensive competition for limited positions inevitably affects collegial and cooperative relationships and ethics within the teaching profession, and as such, may impact student learning outcomes as well. In the long term, work-for-labour can be understood as increasing the precariousness of both paid and unpaid workers (Standing, 2009, 2011).

Volunteerism and Employment

A growing body of research has examined the intersection of volunteerism and employment. Indeed, according to Wilson (2012), volunteerism in countries such as Canada has become a normative expectation in terms of postsecondary degree completion and job attainment. For example, as resumé building continues to grow, students often respond with higher rates of volunteerism (Handy et al., 2010). Moreover, volunteering can “pay off” by contributing to improved job compensation, job status, and improved connections within organizations (Hackl et al., 2007; Ruiters & De Graaf, 2009). In a Canadian study, Day and Devlin (1998) found that volunteering can increase individual earnings by an average of 7%. Nevertheless, as Prouteau and Wolff (2005) note, volunteering does not always lead to wage increases, and must be viewed as a costly activity, both economically and in terms of time. In a study of Canadian immigrant workers, Schugurensky, Slade, and Luo (2005) found extensive volunteerism practices, as individuals attempted to match skills in the labour market and gain “Canadian” work experiences. Finally, Lewchuk et al. (2015), examining precarious workers in the Greater Toronto Area, found that insecure workers are twice as likely to volunteer to improve employment opportunities. Overall then, the practice of volunteering appears to be increasingly intertwined to labour market opportunities within the contemporary world of work.

Regarding teacher-volunteers, having qualified teachers working in schools in an unpaid capacity may be critically viewed as a means of exploiting volunteers, reducing paid teaching staff, and contributing to the perpetual underfunding of public education. Such concerns connect to issues surrounding precarious forms of work, underemployment, and underemployment, as well as the continued marginalization facing certain demographic groups in the labour market (Ryan et al., 2009). This again becomes a significant issue regarding access, where only those teachers who can afford to volunteer will be allowed access into the teaching profession. Problems such as these require responses that limit the use of unpaid labour, as well as those that contribute to more transparent, fair, and equitable hiring practices.

Volunteerism Ethics and Occupational Communities

Un(der)employed teachers appear to be engaged in a large amount of work but remain unable to secure enough employment. Such an arrangement can breed feelings of pessimism, frustration, and anger (Standing, 2011, 2013, 2015a, 2015b) as well as an internalized passivity—especially for teachers who find themselves largely in the position of supplicant within the current workforce hierarchy (Pollock, 2008; Standing, 2014b). Teacher-volunteerism supports this perception, as un(der)employed teachers continue to face a marginalized position within the teaching workforce (Chalikakis, 2012; Pollock, 2008). Such tensions surrounding intergenerational equity and fairness may lead to further occupational fracturing and a loss of solidarity within the community of teachers. Hence, the examination of teacher-volunteerism further highlights legitimate concerns surrounding not only unpaid work but also the meaning and purpose of a profession and professionalism for teachers.

Such apprehensions highlight significant ethical questions, not only surrounding the practice of volunteerism as unpaid labour but also for the teaching profession. For instance, if teacher-volunteerism is understood as the exploitation of unpaid labour, is it a practice that should continue? Having an increasing number of teacher-volunteers inside of schools may bring benefits to fully employed teachers, school administrators, students, and perhaps even to the volunteers themselves. However, the unintended consequences of such practices are not yet fully understood, and the long-term effects of perpetual un(der)

employment and unpaid forms of work may have long-term repercussions for teachers and the teaching profession as a whole moving forward.

The Concept of Volunteering

Finally, as a conceptual issue, teacher-volunteerism underlines what appears to be a growing ambiguity between work, employment, and volunteering. While the definition of volunteerism remains highly contextual (Cnaan et al., 1996), traditional volunteerism activities imply degrees of freedom, choice, and altruism. If volunteer activities are deemed necessary or else required informally in some way, can they then still be considered voluntary? Such questions also have arisen in places such as Ontario where contemporary issues regarding precarious forms of employment indicates the blurring of paid and unpaid work (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012; Lewchuk et al., 2013; Lewchuk et al., 2015).

The structural forces of the labour market can and do appear to exert considerable pressure onto workers currently seeking access to jobs and paid employment (Bauman, 2000, 2007; Beck, 1992, 2000; Pedaci, 2010; Sennett, 1998, 2006; Standing, 2009). Indeed, economic downturns inevitably raise questions regarding the relationships between volunteerism and labour force participation (Wilson, 2012). Livingstone (2003) notes the emergence of new forms of unpaid labour and credentialism as a consequence of neoliberal efforts towards further privatization and commodification. Thus, if volunteer activities are undertaken largely (if not purely) for instrumental purposes in relation to the labour market, the extent to which they are still voluntary (Baer, 2007; Cnaan et al., 1996; Hall et al., 2009; Hustinx et al., 2010; Hustinx et al., 2012; Wilson, 2000, 2012; Wilson & Musick, 1997; Yang, 2017) requires further consideration.

Volunteering in the contemporary era thus appears to exist within a complicated nexus involving both paid and unpaid work (Edgell, 2006). The experiences of teacher-volunteers appear to suggest that the act of volunteering remains a vital component of the modern teaching labour market—particularly with respect to job access and employment opportunities. In this way, voluntary activities move away from acts of altruism and take on a commodity form under the conditions of economic competition. If an act of volunteerism is undertaken solely to improve one's resumé, professional networks, and connections, then such volunteering appears to function as a form of labour.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of the “teacher-volunteer” in Ontario. This phenomenon appears to be driven largely by the continued oversupply of qualified teachers in the province, with the personal antecedents to volunteering similarly motivated by employment-related concerns. This research reveals the current problematic relationship between schools, volunteerism, and paid employment in a period increasingly marked by precarious forms of work and labour. While the phenomenon of teacher volunteerism appears rooted in specific labour market conditions, manifestations of new forms of unpaid work in relation to labour market access remains challenging for teachers and workers more generally.

Economic restructuring continues to exert downward pressure on wages, working conditions and labour market access in places such as Ontario, and many new entrants to the labour market continue to face disproportionately high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and precarious forms of work (Fong, 2012; Foster, 2012; Geoby, 2012; Law Commission of Ontario, 2012; Lewchuk et al., 2013; Lewchuk et al., 2015; Tal, 2013, 2015; Tiessen, 2014; Vosko, 2000). Accessing teaching employment in Ontario highlights this trend, where a significant number of new entrants to the labour market continue to face barriers and challenges when attempting to secure employment in the profession (see OCT, 2007–2016). New forms of unpaid work and labour compound such challenges, as they materialize into requirements for access or entry to paid employment opportunities (Kalleberg, 2011; Standing, 2011, 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

As the time to acquire a full-time, permanent teaching position can span anywhere from 5-7 years or more for new teachers in Ontario (OCT, 2014, 2015), challenges surrounding unemployment, underemployment, and precarious work remain salient for thousands of teachers across the province. While every job, trade, or profession remains unique, with its own set of rules, regulations, values, and normative standards, teacher-volunteerism forms part of “the game” (Sharone, 2014) of securing teaching employ-

ment in Ontario. Volunteerism may be viewed as a new “demand” facing teachers and one that potentially can lead to further economic insecurity, exploitation, and occupational marginalization (Pearce, 2012; Pearce & Pollock, 2012; Pollock, 2010). The net effect of this sort of volunteerism serves to increase the precarious nature of un(der)employed teachers’ work and lives.

Further research in Ontario or elsewhere may seek to examine the practices of workers such as teacher-volunteers in more detail, particularly towards identifying the exact roles, functions, and tasks they perform inside of schools or as part of the job-search process (Robinson & Rennie, 2014; Thompson & Russell, 2017). Anticipated labour-market demands remain difficult to accurately predict, yet policymakers could also seek to more closely monitor teacher supply and demand dynamics, both provincially and across Canada. While teacher-volunteerism likely has occurred under the structural conditions of a labour surplus particular to Ontario, policymakers, labour organizations, and school leaders should not shy away from addressing the issue directly where it may emerge in other jurisdictions. Finally, the issues surrounding teacher-volunteerism may persist due to the historical and normative expectations of unpaid labour in the work of educators.

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