

Mary M. Brooks  
Beth Young  
and  
Susan Ansara  
University of Alberta

## Exploring Part-Time Teaching Employment in Alberta

In Canada “non-standard employment” (Krahn, 1995) such as part-time and contract work has been on the rise as fiscal restraint and restructuring have become the norm for both government and private business. Employment arrangements for Alberta teachers reflect this tendency with respect to part-time employment. The number of part-time teachers has increased substantially since 1990 to 15% of teachers—one in five of all female teachers. In 1995-1996 the proportion of part-timers was as high as 25% in some districts (Young, Gray, Alexander, & Ansara, 1998). These statistics, in combination with interviews that we have been conducting, raise questions concerning the effects of government cutbacks and restructuring, teachers’ career growth and advancement possibilities, and job stresses and workload. They also invite further exploration into other reasons for, and effects of, part-time teaching.

The object of this research-in-progress,<sup>1</sup> is to study part-time teaching in selected Alberta school districts from several perspectives. We are interviewing part-time teachers, their full-time colleagues, parents, school and district administrators, and ATA representatives in order to discover the extent and nature of part-time employment in schools, the contexts of that employment, the effects of part-time teaching and teachers on students, staff, administration, and districts, and the benefits and drawbacks of part-time teaching arrangements for everyone involved. An exploratory study was completed in 1995-1996 (Young & Grieve, 1996). Provincial government statistics<sup>2</sup> and a subsequent survey of Alberta school districts in 1997 revealed an increase in the number of part-time teaching positions in Alberta during the 1990s and the overrepresentation of women in the part-time teaching workforce (Young et al., 1998). The continuing research being conducted in various Alberta school districts has uncovered more in-depth information about the possible reasons for, and consequences of, this trend. As we do comparative analysis of the data from these districts, we hope to obtain a more comprehensive picture of part-time employment arrangements in Alberta.

The early stages of this research have revealed the need for schools and school districts to develop a “flexible workforce” in order to deal with the budget reductions implemented by the Klein government and the necessity for principals, now the site-based managers of these diminished monies, to cover

---

Mary Brooks is a master’s student, Susan Ansara is a doctoral student, and Beth Young is a professor in the department of Educational Policy Studies. All three may be reached by telephone at (780) 492-7617; fax (780) 492-2024; e-mail beth.young@ualberta.ca.

the same range of programs with fewer staff. This has sometimes required hiring more teachers, often specialists, to fill part-time positions. The conditions of employment that these teachers face have been of concern to many teachers and to the researchers. The availability of full-time contracts, full pension and other benefits, and part-time appointments that offer a consistent number of hours of employment from year to year appears to be declining (Young, 1999).

As this research progresses, other themes and questions are emerging as important aspects of part-time teaching assignments and the workplaces that require these flexible workers. These include the following issues.

1. *Benefits and drawbacks.* How does part-time teaching benefit individual teachers, students, schools, and districts? Do these benefits outweigh the disadvantages? What are the respective implications of the benefits and disadvantages?
2. *Incentives.* What are districts and individual principals doing to make part-time teaching an attractive alternative? Why are they doing this?
3. *Administration.* How does the increase in part-time staff affect the principal's job as a site-based administrator, especially in small rural schools where principals may teach as much as 80% of the time?
4. *Location.* Do urban and rural school districts differ in their use of part-time teaching staff and their reasons for employing them? Are these differences important enough to be addressed at the provincial level?
5. *Language and meaning.*
  - a. *Voluntary versus involuntary.* What contextual factors influence teachers to choose part-time employment? Given those factors, how voluntary is that choice? What contextual factors influence principals to choose part-time staff? Given those factors, how voluntary is that choice? Are there other choices for teachers and principals?
  - b. *Part-time versus full-time.* When does part-time employment become full-time work in practice?
6. *Trends.* How does the increased use of a part-time teaching option comment on the situation faced by the teaching profession as a whole?

Cross-district comparisons are already indicating wide differences among districts. In particular, district cultures differ regarding the extent to which schools are seen as flexible workplaces where teachers are able to vary their work times to suit their personal needs, and the extent to which teachers are viewed as a flexible workforce whose paid work time is manipulated to fit the needs and objectives of administration. District policies also vary in their inclusion of, and time allocation for, kindergarten teachers and the provision of benefits to part-timers including their entitlement to paid preparation time. This reflects the low priority that part-time teachers have been accorded by the Alberta Teachers' Association. The need for future research is already indicated on issues including early childhood education, rural-urban differences, and the effects of part-time teachers and teaching on young children.

The data collection, using one-to-one interviews in individual districts, is nearing completion. As we proceed with a comparative analysis and synthesis of the data gathered, we will conduct additional selective interviews as indicated by the analysis. Findings will be categorized into themes that will be

situated in the contexts of gender, government-mandated cuts and reorganization, power differentials in organizations, and teacher professionalism. We hope that this analysis will lead to a more comprehensive picture of part-time teaching in Alberta.

Notes

1. The survey and interview data discussed here are drawn from a continuing, multi-year program of research exploring the phenomenon of part-time teaching in Alberta.
2. These statistics have been calculated from aggregate data provided by Alberta Education and based on teachers' self-reported information.

Acknowledgments

This research is funded by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies, and from the Supports for the Advancement of Scholarship Fund, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta.

References

- Krahn, H. (1995). Non-standard work on the rise. *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 7(4), 35-42.
- Young, B. (1999). Is it just a matter of time? Part-time teaching employment in Alberta. In T. Harrison & J. Kachur (Eds.), *Contested classrooms: Education, globalization, and democracy in Alberta* (pp. 139-149). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press and Parkland Institute.
- Young, B., & Grieve, K. (1996). Changing employment practices? Teachers and principals discuss some "part-time" arrangements for Alberta teachers. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*. On-line: <<http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/issue8.html>>.
- Young, B., Gray, H., Alexander, C., & Ansara, S. (1998, May 31-June 1). *Part-time teaching employment in Alberta: The stories that statistics can tell*. Paper presented at the CASWE Institute, Centring on Margins: The Evaded Curriculum, Ottawa.