TEACHERS' COMMITMENT TO "HEALTH WORK" IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

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Introduction: Curriculum change and student performance accountability are becoming increasingly more demanding on school teachers' resources. Yet, schools are also being positioned as critical in the promotion of children and young people's health and well-being. Therefore, there is a need to understand the nature of health-related work being undertaken by teachers in Australian schools and what facilitates and constrains this work. The aim of the broader study is to examine the nature and extent of the health-related work undertaken by teachers and schools and consider the professional and personal cost/benefit of teachers undertaking this work.

Methods: This project is working with 15 schools and approximately 800 teachers across Queensland and the Northern Territory. The schools are a balance of primary, special and secondary in metropolitan and regional locations. Mixed-method data collection includes policy analysis, questionnaires and case studies. Two underpinning theoretical frameworks are Bourdieu's concepts of field and practice to locate and understand teacher's work, and Foucault's notion of biopolitics to understand how it is individuals and populations come to comply with or resist responsible citizenship as it is enacted within schooling.

Results: Early questionnaire data suggests that teachers spend on average 10 hours and 23 minutes per week involved in health-related work. A large proportion of this time is providing pastoral care which also scores most highly in terms of teacher satisfaction of health-related tasks. Other areas where teachers report feeling highly satisfied are communicating with parents about the health and well-being of their child, and leading extra-curricular physical activity. High levels of satisfaction in these areas appear to correlate to teachers' high levels of confidence and expertise in undertaking these activities. In contrast, teachers reported feeling least confident in delivering health education to students, and providing extra-curricular guidance and advice on food and nutrition where perceived expertise in these areas was reported to be low.

Conclusions: Preliminary data suggests that teachers spend a significant part of their contact with students undertaking a range of health-related work. Subsequent case studies will enrich our understanding of what, and how much, health-related work teachers undertake and how prepared they perceive they are to do this work. Results will provide a new direction for informing education, health and industrial policies and for teachers' preparation as "health workers" if, indeed, this significant dimension of their work is appropriate.