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August.4.2022

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# The education minister's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad idea\*

By Alison Bedford and Naomi Barnes

**When will governments learn their lesson? Worksheets won't fix workload crisis.**

The teachers of NSW are at breaking point, and the government solution is to take away the part of their work they most expert in – lesson planning. As Queensland's experience shows, this 'quick fix' will not solve the workload issues which underpin NSW's teacher shortage crisis.

The social media response to the [SMH's article](#), which featured the NSW education minister Sarah Mitchell (pictured in the image with department secretary Georgina Harrison) on lesson planning reform has been swift.



**Cass Tonkin**  
@CasAndraAir · [Follow](#)



My world is devoted to education. Constantly building theory to develop my practice. I am a school teacher as well as a lecturer. I cannot express how much frustration I have towards the NSW government and Department. A program/resource will never equal an educator.  
**#education**


7:42 PM · Aug 1, 2022 from Port Macquarie, New South Wales 

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Not one teacher believes the Premier when he says the new lessons on line this will save teachers three hours a week. It is just a lie.

6:43 PM · Aug 1, 2022 

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Teachers are decrying the government strategy. Of most concern, the resources will be produced in under eight weeks, for a curriculum that is currently under review. The lack of transparency about how this feat will happen makes this approach look like this wasteful, impractical splurge on public funds during a time we are all being asked to tighten our belts.

The thing is, resources are already available and attached to the National Curriculum website via Scootle. Many of them arrived there because of a similar initiative by the Queensland Government. So our question is, why hasn't the NSW government done its homework or listened to the teachers before addressing the core issues fuelling the teacher crisis?

### **Lesson planning is not the issue**

While the [Grattan Institute report](#), which forms the basis of the NSW government's strategy, identifies the biggest demand on teacher time is planning, they have neglected that this lesson planning is the part of their work that teachers want to be doing – it is their core work. The top three activities teachers would choose to do if they had a spare hour are working on student assessment, preparing effective classroom instruction, and adapting teaching.

The Grattan report goes on to argue that providing teachers with centralised planning resources will alleviate pressure. But the report's own findings show the issue not the planning per se, but the time needed to undertake it – teachers could develop common lesson plans and resources, tailored to and developed within their school context, with their colleagues, if the time that they identify as the biggest impediment is provided to them.

Increased administrative duties and expanding pastoral care pressures are chewing into time teachers once had to collaborate, plan and prepare their students for success. Time is the issue, but time could be made available by strategies that deal with the adminstrivia of teacher workloads, rather than removing the core work.

### **Queensland tried and failed**

Queensland tried the centralised provision of “curriculum lesson plans, texts and learning materials” a decade ago in the Curriculum to Classroom (C2C) reforms, designed to support the initial implementation of the Australian Curriculum. This project, while well-intentioned, was not as simple as the Queensland Department of Education first imagined. It became plagued by multiple issues which both slowed down the roll out and reduced the quality of the resources in comparison to what a teacher could develop themselves, if given the time. For example, according to Naomi Barnes who was a Senior Writer on the program, copyright meant that only resources which were made freely available by those who owned the copyright, or were out of copyright, were approved for use in the C2C program. This means that in an era where teachers are trying to increase the diversity of texts in their classrooms (which they could do through purchasing class sets and designing their own lessons) they were instead provided with worksheets that referred to dated works that were less prone to copyright issues. To include diverse texts would mean adequately compensating authors, rather than financially cutting corners through inferior resourcing.

Even more concerning was the political interference in the development of the materials, with resources being vetoed by the Newman LNP government at the time. As such, lesson plans were held up to scrutiny via the “Courier Mail test” or whether they would hit the newspaper for content Newman's government might determine was partisan. Issues of diversity and contestability were removed for “safer” options. In other words the government decided what was safe for children to know. This political interference in teacher's work is still [a feature of LNP curriculum governance](#).

C2C also increased workload. Research from both C2C implementation and more recently shows that even with highly proscriptive, resourced lesson plans, teachers viewed and used the materials in a [wide range of ways](#), negating the promise of consistency and workload reduction. For example, Mathematics teachers pointed out that the initial C2C materials did not actually address all elements of the curriculum they were meant to support and so required [significant redevelopment](#). Barton et al's exploration of the initial responses to C2C implementation found [“prescription of curriculum materials only leads to mistrust and a devaluing of teachers’](#)

expertise". [Hardy suggested](#) rather than seeking to standardise teacher work, we instead recognise teachers' professional skills as experts in lesson planning and curriculum implementation, valuing their professional collaborations and practices .

## **Workload correction**

While having a set of resources can be a helpful starting point when planning, it is not going to fix the workload issues facing teachers because teachers will still have to spend time adapting them to their school context, which is what they already do with the myriad of resources already available to teachers in numerous resource banks, like Scootle.

A full-time teacher is currently allocated approximately 3.5- 4 hours a week as non-contact or preparation and correction time. A standard teaching load is 4-6 classes, so this is less 30 minutes per week during the school day to plan for learning and mark assessment. The Grattan report pointed out that 28% of teacher time is devoted to non-teaching activity (ie over one full day a week – more than their allocated non-contact time). As one example, the introduction of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) has significantly increased the administrative workload for teachers in maintaining detailed lesson plans and tracking individual resources to ensure funding is allocated to students with additional needs or disabilities ([Union survey highlights data overload \(informit.org\)](#)). Properly funding learning support staff who can assist classroom teachers both with the planning for and administration of differentiated materials would be one welcome change. A reduction in teacher's cocurricular loads would also be another easy-to-implement solution, as would reviewing the extent of classroom teacher involvement in pastoral care work, which has only increased with the increased disruption and distress of COVID and bouts of lockdown and homeschooling.

The issue is that the proportion of non-teaching activity is taking up their allocated time to prepare for their core work – lesson planning and differentiated delivery. Rather than spending money on creating (already available) resources the funds NSW has to spend on this project would be better spent investing in additional school staff to take up some of this administrative load.

The clear and obvious solution to relieving pressure on teachers is an ongoing investment in additional staff: learning support experts, sports and arts co-curricular supervisors, and professional pastoral staff. Recognising teachers' professional expertise as educators and giving them the time to do their core business well is the real answer to the teaching crisis, not handing out another worksheet.

***\*Headline with apologies to Alexander and to Judith Viorst***



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*Dr Naomi Barnes is a network analyst and theorist interested in how ideas influence education policy. She is a senior lecturer in literacy teaching and has worked for Education Queensland as a senior writer and has worked as a secondary English, history and geography teacher in government, Catholic and independent schools.*

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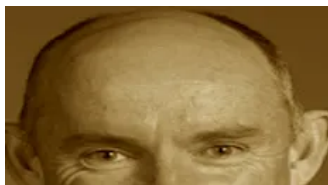
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## 8 thoughts on "The education minister's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad idea"



**Jill Abell**

August 4, 2022 at 7:44 am

Also reveals another hidden impact of under-resourced teachers without access to, and a decline of well-staffed libraries or central resource centres with specialists managing adequate budgets for expert selection of current curriculum and class-ready, breadth and depth of both physical and curated online resources...

**REPLY**



**Alison Bedford**

August 4, 2022 at 2:31 pm

Hi Jill,

Absolutely, hiring more library staff who know their school context and students would be another great investment. Having that expert knowledge available to teachers as they plan student learning would be much more effective than generic materials!

**REPLY**



**Heather Hobbs**

August 4, 2022 at 11:03 am





I'm not sure you'll never make non-teachers understand the issues here. The best teachers are those who can respond to the individuals sitting in front of them with tasks and activities that promote sequential, developmental learning within each student's ZPD. This takes an enormous amount of time and experience to do well. Pre-prepared lesson plans written for some hypothetical class can never come near that.

It's like pretending that a McDonald's meal can take the place of healthy home cooking.

#### REPLY



**Alison Bedford**

August 4, 2022 at 2:35 pm

Hi Heather,

I love the fast food analogy. It's consistent and available everywhere, but doesn't meet everyone's needs. This is why consulting extensively to understand not only what the pressure points are but what teachers actually want would be much more effective!

#### REPLY



**Graham J Moloney**

August 4, 2022 at 12:52 pm

I was General Secretary of the QUT at the time of C2C in Queensland. I acknowledge Naomi's statements about copyright issues and political interference, both real and continuing issues.

I think potential for workload reduction still remains though nowhere near enough to deal with current work overload.

The utility of C2C was compromised (fatally?) by the Director-General mistakenly referring to it as "mandated." What was supposed to be a collection of resources was treated by at least some as a syllabus or textbook that had to be taught from cover-to-cover with resultant unnecessary stress for teachers and students.

There is a balance to be struck between differentiating for your students and re-inventing every wheel.

#### REPLY

Pingback: [The education minister's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad idea\\* | EduResearch Matters – Foundation for Learning and Literacy](#)



**Naomi Barnes**

August 4, 2022 at 6:14 pm

I agree, Graham. I think it's time to speak out about C2C from a pragmatic political position, rather than arguing about its pedagogical merit. There were other issues related to its planned commercialisation which NSW should look at as they are tendering. Would be good to chat more about this sometime.

#### REPLY





**Alison Bedford** August 4, 2022 at 6:43 pm

Hi Graham,

thank you for your candid reflection on your first hand experience with C2C. I think the way it works now, as a resource bank available to all Queensland schools without it being foregrounded as the focus of planning or resourcing works well – being able to dip into the materials as needed is great, and as an ITE lecturer I know many beginning teachers appreciate having the C2C content as another source they can use in their planning. It was the 'mandated' and the way that was enacted in some settings, coupled with the copyright element that really made it unworkable and unpopular in its first iteration.

As you note, the issues with teacher workload are now well beyond something a resource pack can fix. Thanks for taking the time to comment!

**REPLY**

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