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The aim of this chapter is to visualise the tasks of teachers and investigate whether the working spaces they are given are adequate for the proper performance of these tasks. Approximately 450 pupils aged six to sixteen attend the school under study. The workweek is 45.5 hours long, thirty-five of which are scheduled in school classes and while the remaining 10.5 are planned and carried out in optional locations. A discussion to reduce the hours to forty, all scheduled, has been initiated by the local board of education, and some schools have already started effecting this change. Questions can therefore also be raised about if there is something that has to change in teachers’ tasks and working space if 40 school-scheduled hours a week becomes reality. Teachers are in general against this change, claiming that they will not be able to get their work done in 40 hours, unless they are relieved of certain tasks.

Teachers today have many workplaces. In a study by Jane McGregor, teachers were asked to take pictures of their workplaces. The photos showed for example desks, homes and cars. McGregor notes that teachers identified the workplaces as “their” classroom and the department office. Since few of the teachers in the studied unit have personal classrooms, this study intends to define the teacher’s office from the perspective of the many and varied tasks teachers perform, including those done at home. A teacher’s office reveals much about his or her work, though it is not the actual focus of their work. Teachers feel that the office is beyond the spotlight, and might even be seen as their private refuge at the school.

study is one I have worked at, and I wondered if it is possible to visualise tasks with the use of images. Catherine Burke has written that examining photographs can make us see things that we often miss, because there are so familiar to us in our daily routine.21

Method and Aim of the Study

In preparing the present study, a request was sent to the three headmasters of the school in question. Upon obtaining their consent, an e-mail with information was sent to the teachers who worked in the room to be studied. Receiving no objections, I went to the school and took pictures of the room and desks. My intent was to see if all the teachers’ various tasks could be visualised. I removed all names of teachers and pupils from any documents that were captured in the images in order to preserve anonymity. While reading the photos my focus shifted and the question as to whether these working spaces were adequate enough took precedence. Questions raised include: Can the work done by teachers be visualised in photos of their working spaces? Is the space and time adequate to their needs? Does something have to change spatially if a forty-hour workweek is introduced?

The School Context and the Office

The school was originally built in 1979 to house approximately 300 pupils, aged seven to twelve. Today there are about 450 pupils, aged six to sixteen, and the teachers upon whom this study focuses are fifteen in number, teaching grades seven, eight and nine. Thirteen of them each had their own desk in a shared, 53 square meter office. In 2010, all teachers were given personal computers and two years later all pupils in grades six to nine each received a personal computer. Most of the teachers have no homeroom, so their work-related possessions are kept in this office. Each teacher has approximately 2 to 3 square meters of individual workspace, into which all material (books, papers, documentation, etc.), technical equipment (computers

and electrical cords), and they themselves (from time to time with a colleague or pupil) has to fit. The office is also used for discussions with pupils, planning with colleagues, job-related and personal telephone calls and copying. There is a common table for meetings, a washbasin and hooks for outdoor clothes and shoes in the room.

Originally the room was 57 square meters, but since there was nowhere for teachers to make phone calls (to pupil’s parents, social services, etc.) or conduct one-on-one conversations with students requiring privacy, a corner of the room was converted into a small separate room with a door. Last year, a much-needed copy machine was acquired. Very loud in operation, it was installed in this room. So now the teachers have a copier, but even less privacy. The office has windows facing in two directions, one overlooking the younger pupils’ playground and the other facing the older pupils’ main corridor. The room lies between a classroom and a corridor with lockers for two classes. This all contributes to recurrent increases in noise and distracting movement. Teachers complain that opportunities to relax during breaks is few and far between, many of them using headphones to block out conversation, colleagues, pupils and so forth. The crowded feeling has occasionally been a source of irritation between colleagues.

Reading the Images: Establishing a Workload Typology

To be able to determine whether a room is adequate to its task, it must be seen. Of course you can visit or even describe the room, but visualising is necessary in order to gain different perspectives. The images should be read as text, as Ian Grosvenor argues. It is important to read the images, to really see what is there, what is seen and what is left out, what is included and what is not. Since the images in this study have been taken recently and by the present author, their context is well known and the gap between image-producing context and reading context is avoided.

Figure 1. The teacher’s office. Photo: Lina Spjut (2012).

Figure 2. The teacher’s office. Photo: Lina Spjut (2012).
Figure 3. The teacher’s office.
Photo: Lina Spjut (2012).

Figure 4. The teacher’s office.
Photo: Lina Spjut (2012).
While reading the images and searching for the tasks in a teacher’s daily routine, I discovered that they perform many formal and informal tasks in the course of a day. The formal tasks are those included in their respective job descriptions, including actual teaching and lesson preparation. Informal tasks are everything else that gets done because pupils, colleagues or they themselves expect it to get done. There are also things that are hard to categorise, because they are informal tasks that are consequences of formal tasks, some environmental and situational, others of a more personal nature. After discovering the formal and informal tasks represented in the images, I sorted and categorised them according to the patterns that emerged and what I perceived to be the essence of the workplace: (a) private things that make work more pleasant, (b) things visualising formal tasks, and (c) things visualising informal tasks that are consequences of the office environment as such or directly linked to the consequences of formal tasks. The final category emphasises problems in the teachers’ working conditions.

Private things that make work more pleasant are things brought from home, visualised with private photos,24 cups25

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24 Figure 5.
25 Figure 2, 4 and 5.
and children’s artwork. Things visualising formal tasks such as teaching, planning, reading assignments, correcting and documenting are visualised with computers, curricula, schedules, standardised national tests, pupils’ work, grade document, absence forms and a camera. Things visualising informal tasks that are consequences of the office environment as such or directly linked to the consequences of formal tasks include tasks teachers carry out in order to make teaching work without being formal responsibilities. These include handing out lemonade and cookies to pupils when everyone passes a test or before Christmas, Easter or summer break; handing out fruit to pupils that are so tired and hungry they cannot concentrate; making, painting or repairing furniture for pupils’ areas during “Pupil’s Choice” class. These informal tasks are visualised with a pitcher of lemonade, fruit baskets, lampshade and headsets. This final category also includes all the things that teachers bring to work just to be able to do their job properly under the prevailing conditions. Many teachers are probably not aware of why they bring different things, or how many of them they actually are. It is therefore important to visualise them through photography. This is the most important category in this study, because not really knowing why things are being done makes it hard to discuss working hours and tasks.

26 Figure 2.  
27 Figure 1.  
28 Figure 4.  
29 Figure 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.  
30 Figure 4.  
31 Figure 2, 3, 4 and 5.  
32 Figure 4 and 5.  
33 Figure 5.  
34 Figure 5.  
35 Figure 3.  
36 Figure 1 and 4.  
37 Figure 1 and 3.  
38 Figure 1 and 4.
Working Conditions in the Actual Workroom

Reading the images from the workroom, the first impression is one of clutter and congestion. It is a cramped and crowded, quite dark room, despite the fluorescent ceiling light. The blinds are down (to shut out distractions from the younger pupils’ schoolyard) and headsets are visible. Coffee cups litter the place because of the shortness of breaks and because it is too far to the staff room. Teachers have time in their schedule to plan the weekly Pupil’s Choice class, but planning and organising them requires so much extra time that it becomes one more informal task. You take the paperwork home with you because you cannot find the time at work. Sometimes conflict arises between colleagues about who should do this “homework”. A school health services survey is conducted every semester and distributed by teachers. Current events competitions and likewise are entered by schools almost every year. They are time demanding but also interesting and fun, at least for some of the teachers and pupils. The standardised test from the Swedish National Agency for Education is of course a formal task, but correcting the results is not.

Results and Discussion

After reading these photos and seeing them in the context of the knowledge I possess of the actual school and its teachers and their tasks, the primary conclusions are that there are many different tasks that can be read from the pictures and a kind of a structural problem as regards work. Considering that all teachers and pupils in this unit carry their own personal

39 Figure 1.
40 Figure 1, 4.
41 Figure 2, 4, 5.
42 Figure 3.
43 Figure 3.
44 Figure 4.
45 Figure 4.
46 Correcting is not part of the formal job description but the schools correct the tests by themselves, according to the directives of the Agency for Education. It takes a lot of time, and there is always a negotiation between headmasters and teachers about the time teachers spend correcting them.
computer, there is a remarkable amount of paper strewn about the workroom. Despite having entered the self-proclaimed “paperless” era of teaching, the copier is obviously still in steady use. The pupils’ computers having just recently arrived, perhaps that is the reason for parallel work on both computer and paper, or perhaps it has to do with time and computer training for teachers and pupils? To find a private space close by where teachers can talk to pupils or make phone calls without being interrupted seems impossible, since the noisy copier now occupies the “telephone room”. These things are now done at home, or when the other teachers have left for the day. Maybe they will take place via computer in the future.

The windows let in sound from the playground and corridor and it is sometime hard for teachers to concentrate, which is why many of them resort to headphones. But the question remains, is it actually possible for teachers to actually do their work in this office? Since there are 10.5 extra hours that can be done at home, in school when co-workers have left, or in another place, then yes, teachers somehow make it work. The reason is that teachers seem to be clever innovators when it comes to finding space and time that is actually not there. This, in turn, makes it possible to ignore space-and-time issues at work, and tasks that require privacy or concentration can continue to be done at another place at teacher’s expense. The responsibility felt by teachers for their pupils seems to compel them to accept working conditions that other professionals would object to. As a consequence, teachers are stressed and dissatisfied.

Things related to the daily routine of teaching that are invisible to the “daily” eye seem to appear more clearly in photographic images. It is obvious that visualising is an effective method for highlighting working conditions. The present study suggests that the acute lack of space and time is getting out of hand and can only be remedied by making alterations to both tasks and office space. It would be interesting to come back in ten years and study what has happened in the interim. Are the problems the same? Are teachers working a forty-hour workweek? How was the space problem resolved? How much paper is lying around? Comparisons with other office spaces in other schools would also provide beneficial insight.
Conclusions

The purpose of the present essay was to see what images could visualise about teacher’s daily tasks, if their working space is adequate and if the tasks have to change if the hours do. The resulting images showed clutter and overcrowding and revealed a slew of formal and informal tasks. Despite their many tasks, teachers seem to find the time and space for them because of the responsibility they feel toward their pupils. If Swedish schools switch to a forty-hour workweek, working conditions, already inadequate, will have to change, too. School boards have to recognise the difference between formal and informal tasks, sort them out, and adjust the space accordingly. But most important, they must prioritise quality. Education is the future, and a good education requires satisfactory working conditions for teachers and pupils alike.