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Time to Teach: Contextualizing teaching time in German higher education (0146)

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Central to the study of academic work is how much time academics spend on research and teaching. Academics' perceptions as well as large-scale workload-measurements point to the fact that German academics spend more hours on teaching than they ought to. For instance, the latest survey by Jacob and Teichler (2011: 129f) shows that on average professors at universities work 56 hours per week and research associates 39 hours per week during the lecture period. They work 52 hours and 42 hours per week respectively during the lecture-free period. Such disconcerting results very often overplay the ways in which these measurements come to place and what they actually represent. Indeed as Enders and Teichler (1995: 47f, transl.) themselves admit that the "relationship of invested time and results (...) is hard to determine" within the academic profession and that it is shaped "to a large extent by the freedom in timing [one's work]". Their study such as most other large-scale surveys hence are to a large extent based on what Schuster and Finkelstein (2008: 78) have described as "crude self-reported estimates" by academics themselves.

Such self-reports respond to precise questioning on the average weekly work-time without taking their adequacy into account. Through the researcher's question average work-time becomes a "metaphysical device"¹ that renders different work trajectories homogenous and comparable in their workload. The fact that a professor spends 18.5 hours a week on average on teaching (Jacob & Teichler 2011: 130) enables researchers to compare it to the amount of time a professor spends on average on research. It thereby produces a balance-sheet that can problematize both practices: either within an "academic ratchet" that fulfills the ever-growing demand for research time by withdrawing from teaching (Massy & Zemsky 1994) or the increasing hegemony of teaching in the university that triggers "coping strategies" (Schimank 1995: 57) to 'make' time for research. The calculation of average working time can also be used to relate academic work to comparable job profiles or to the actual academic working duties. Time here becomes the measure of academic labour (Colley et al. 2012: 374) while neglecting whether academics themselves perceive such figures as appropriate and useful representations of their working practice (cf. Bourdieu 1977: 106; Malcolm & Zukas, 2009: 500).

Such problems became apparent within our own research when we used an online survey to inquire into the time German academics spend on teaching in relation to other academic tasks and yielded partially unrealistic results (Bloch et al. in print). One respondent remarked:

"I have tried to fill out your survey but failed to calculate my weekly working time as I neither own a time-punch cluck, nor do I make statistics on my working hours" (Professor humanities, translated e-mail)

A follow-up qualitative investigation through interviews with 15 academics and six deans from different disciplines at one middle-sized German university on their teaching time experience altered the above workload measurements substantially. Other than a zero-sum game presumes, research and teaching time are complexly entangled. Academic work-time perceptions neither represent themselves in clock-time counts nor weekly working hours but evolve out of a specific teaching time category that performatively structures the academic working live. The so-called

1 Fraser (1990) speaks of "metaphysical device" or "machine" to describe the role of clocks in time measurement. We expand this notion to all forms of time ordering devices that produce homogenous time experiences.

Semesterwochenstunde (SWS - weekly semester teaching hour) represents the contact hours an individual academic has to spend in class during a semester. Academics can pretty easily provide an account of the number of SWS they have to teach as their contact hours remain rather stable during a semester and are materially connected to their presence at a specific place at a given time (one SWS lasts 45 to 90 minutes). All other tasks in teaching and research organize around the SWS assigned to each academic. Yet the SWS goes beyond being a simple contact hour: it also acts as a universal and moveable work-time object that can be employed everywhere in the university. Administration and teachers alike use it as a simple category around which to plan student numbers, coursework, and room distributions, and thereby “achieve ordering of practice at a distance” (Fenwick & Edwards 2010: 85). In this way, the SWS never comes alone but signifies a specific position within the net of other SWS, room placements and student and teacher distributions. To become moveable it has to represent and black-box all teaching related tasks. The usual professorial teaching time of 8 SWS may vary considerably from professor to professor as soon as it enrolls in clock and calendar time. Depending on which phase² of teaching academics are in, their rank in academic hierarchies, how they combine their courses, how many students they have in class, what assignments they align etc., quantitative clock time counts de- and inflates with the relations the SWS mobilizes while acting out in teaching practice.

As the SWS is the only fixed workload category in German academia, this applies likewise to research. As soon as an academic has SWS teaching obligations her research responds to the way this teaching time structures her work-practice. It may be disconnected and take place between teaching related tasks or evolve out of them through aligning research interest with courses. Such individual orderings out of blurry categories take place because it is part of academic life that academics “are so immersed and enthusiastic in their work, that they just cannot stop working” (Ylijoki & Mäntylä 2003: 71). Thus, it is less a question of measuring the time academics work, but rather *how* time *relates to* and forms the tasks of academic practice in order to maintain this enthusiasm.

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2 We identified seven general phases that evolve out of the SWS: (1) allocation, (2) coordination, (3) conceptualization, (4) preparation, (5) teaching of the course, (6) supervision, and (7) examination.

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