
Title	From fantasy to depression: A beginning teacher's encounter with performativity
Author(s)	Jason Loh
Source	<i>AsTEN Journal Of Teacher Education</i> , 1(1), 1-12
Published by	Association of Southeast Asian Teacher Education Network (AsTEN)

Copyright © 2016 The Authors

This is an Open Access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivs 3.0 Philippines License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/ph/>).

Citation: Loh, J. (2016). From fantasy to depression: A beginning teacher's encounter with performativity. *AsTEN Journal Of Teacher Education*, 1(1), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://po.pnuresearchportal.org/ejournal/index.php/asten/article/view/143>

This document was archived with permission from the copyright holder.

From Fantasy to Depression: A Beginning Teacher's encounter with Performativity

Jason Loh

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Abstract

This paper reports a qualitative study of a beginning teacher in Singapore. It explores the journey of a beginning teacher from his pre-service teacher education to his third year of teaching, drawing on extensive interviews, emails, phone text messages and field notes over a span of three years. This study illuminates the issue of performativity faced daily by teachers caught in such a discourse, and highlights the tension between enacting one's idealism as a beginning teacher and pursuing academic excellence as required by the school system within such a climate. The study describes how the performativity pressures exerted by the school system shaped the beginning teacher's beliefs and practices. As a result of the socialization forces limiting and regulating his practices, the beginning teacher experienced cognitive dissonance, and consequently suffered clinical depression. From the findings, it shows there is a need for current teacher education to highlight the neoliberal emphasis on "market values" of accountability that currently exists in the school system. The study concludes with suggestions that teacher education in Singapore needs to extend beyond skills training to incorporate performativity discourse within its pedagogy courses. This might create more opportunities and thus induce a greater propensity to teach against the grain.

Keywords:

Performativity, Teacher socialization, Worksheet curriculum

Authors' Notes

Correspondence regarding this paper should be directed to Jason Loh, National Institute of Education / Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, jason.loh@nie.edu.sg.

Introduction

In this age of performativity, Ball (2012) posits that teachers are required to spend increasing amounts of time making themselves accountable to the school and public. Performativity is a market-influenced principle of governance and a technology of power that drives teachers towards a certain type of "professionalism". It is a form of regulatory culture, which subjugates

teachers' lives through accountability measures. These measures put a harsh spotlight on their achievements, or lack of, and are used as a yardstick for comparison. As such, new sets of skills – "of presentation and of inflation" – are necessary for teachers to market and to make a "spectacle" of themselves (p.19). In such school systems, teachers are accountable for an efficient production of their students' academic and non-academic performances. After all, the public

performance is necessary for schools', principals' and teachers' appraisal. Consequently, the ranking of schools determine the public perception of the schools' instructional quality; likewise, the ranking of the class results determine the school management's perception of the teachers' instructional quality.

As a result, teachers are driven to adopt time-tested teaching approaches. One of which is the transmissive drill-and-practice, via the ubiquitous worksheets. In Singapore, the worksheet syndrome is pervasive; worksheets are not just used as a tool to reinforce what was taught, they are used as the main resource for teaching and assessing learning. Much of the classroom teaching is planned around the completion of worksheets (Sullivan, 1997; Cheah, 2004; Hogan *et al.*, 2013). Worksheets serve another function; they are used to assess whether the teachers have completed what they are required to teach. Teachers are required to submit the worksheet files of the teaching subjects, such as English language, Mathematics and Science, to the Heads of Department (HODs) before the start of the termly breaks in months of March, June and September. The HODs and their assistants would check the files to ascertain that that the stipulated number of worksheets have been utilized for teaching, completed by the students, and marked by the teachers.

In order to complete the worksheets, which were distributed in the beginning of each term or during the term itself, time has to be set aside for the students to do these worksheets. Furthermore, time is required for the teachers to explain the answers. These activities take up time, especially when particular schools require teachers to fulfill a certain number of worksheets in a particular week or for a particular topic. To survive in the first few years in such schools, beginning teachers (BTs) need to adjust their teaching time to accommodate the 'worksheet curriculum' and in doing so, they have less time to incorporate student-centred constructivist activities in their lessons. Moreover, as these worksheets need to be marked, time has to be set aside to correct and mark them. This is in addition to the marking of the workbooks and exercises that accompany the school textbooks.

This shift towards a performativity stance in educational development is not limited only to Singapore. In a number of comparative studies in the Asian-Pacific region, Mok and Welch (2003) found that the educational reforms in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Mainland China, Japan, the

Philippines, Cambodia, New Zealand and Australia have been heavily influenced by the performativity discourse of marketization and accountability as well. The various educational institutions within the system in the aforementioned countries have adopted strategies to market themselves and compete against each other. Such strategies include, but are not limited to, publishing their academic and non-academic achievements, branding themselves as institutions of choice and quality, etc. This case study provides illumination on what could possibly happen to the teaching profession in the region, if the performativity shift is not kept at bay.

Performativity in Education

Although this performativity situation may have been highlighted during teacher education, it is "not fully addressed as teacher preparation cannot duplicate the reality of the actual world of beginning teaching" (Loughran, Brown & Doecke, 2001, p.17). This creates a form of cognitive dissonance for the beginning teachers, as this was not what was advocated during teacher education. This is further compounded when more experienced teachers tell beginning teachers to put aside what they learned during teacher education, and that teaching to the worksheet & examination is how teachers teach. This is what has been termed performativity. Ball (2003) defines "performativity" as:

... a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of "quality" or "moments" of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement. (p.216)

Performativity seeks to reform the teacher as an instrument of productivity. Its main purpose is to raise standards in schools and educational achievement across the nation, so as to prepare a workforce to

compete in the global knowledge economy (Jeffrey & Troman, 2012). This is invariably accomplished through accountability measures, benchmarking of performance targets and high-stakes testing. Consequently, intensification in the volume of first order activities (e.g. additional teaching in after-school supplementary/remedial lessons, extra training sessions for academic and extra-curricular competitions) and second order activities (e.g. documentation of lesson planning, result monitoring, report writing) result. This aids the school in its “fabrication” of identity – a construction of a particular version of the organisation; its “effective” self (Ball 2004). This fabrication is especially important during the public ranking and the inspection period. This performativity trend in the UK has been well documented over the years (Ball, 2004, 2007, 2012; Jeffrey, 2002; Jeffrey & Troman 2012; Troman, Jeffrey & Raggl, 2007). This technology of education governmentality has also insidiously spread its influence over other parts of the world.

Tan (2005), Ng (2008) & Tan (2008) have pointed a trend towards performativity in Singapore. The *Enhanced Performance Management System* (EPMS) was officially implemented to appraise all *Education Officers* (i.e. teachers) in 2003. It is a system to “set work targets, review performance and plan their (i.e. teachers’) development” (MOE, 2007). In the EPMS, teachers are assessed on areas in addition to teaching. Being a responsible teacher, in terms of teaching and marking, will only garner a “Meeting Expectations” D-grade for the teacher. For a teacher to acquire a C-grade and above, the teacher needs to involve himself/herself in other school programmes or activities. The performance indicators by which the teachers are assessed “act mainly as a form of accountability”; furthermore, the appraisal acts as a discourse because “it is a practice that incorporates values, establishes behaviours and affects relations” (Jeffrey, 2002, p.532). These “terrors of performativity” exert socialization pressures on the beginning teachers to conform to the “values” and “behaviours” that the schools regard as important.

As neophytes to the organization, pressures to conform are always great and it will not be easy to hold on to and enact their personal pedagogical beliefs if they do not fit with the school’s. Turner-Bisset (2007) attests to this: “Teachers compromise on the kinds of teaching in which they believe, and (enact) the kinds of teaching demanded by performativity” (p.195). As beginning teachers are new to the service, they, more so than the experienced teachers, feel the need to ensure that they

complete the worksheet curriculum for fear of being penalized for not conforming. The need to participate and help out in the planning and organization of school-based programmes and one or two extra-curricular activities, as a result of performativity pressures is great. As Ball (2003) pointed out, “(b)eliefs are no longer important – it is output that counts” (p.223). Outputs that ensure they are positively appraised; outputs that help with their year-end ranking; outputs that establish an upward trend for their eventual promotion to a higher grade. Thus teachers are required to “set measurable performance objectives which are systematically reviewed” (Troman, Jeffrey & Raggl, 2007, pp. 549-550). Resistance to this hegemony of performative demands seems futile.

Methodology

This study is set within the context of the life of Henry, a beginning teacher, and it focuses on his transition from teacher education to the teaching profession. It explores the tensions that arose as a result of the conflict between the school’s demands for strict adherence to performativity-driven norms and routines, and Henry’s desire to hold onto his ideals. Hence, to study how the culture of performativity has affected Henry’s beliefs and practices, the following research tools were used.

Methods of Data Collection

The key instrument for data collection in this study is the ubiquitous interview. Silverman’s (2000) admittance that the interview can be considered as the “gold-standard of qualitative research” (p.291) underscore the significance of interviewing as a tool of revelation and data collection. Due to the restrictions on participant observation, the interview became an essential tool for data gathering. The interviews were used to obtain “unique information or interpretation held by” Henry and the key informants, and to find out about things “that the researchers were unable to observe themselves” (Stake, 2010, p.95).

All the interviews with Henry were semi-structured and focused on the respective issues during the span of the three years of study: (1) experiences during teacher education and teaching practice; (2) experiences in the first three years; (3) critical

events encountered during the three years; and (4) interpretations of the critical events. Each interview lasted between 60 to 100 minutes, and was audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were then sent to him for member checking to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A total of ten interviews were conducted from June 2008 to June 2011. Field notes of the interviews with Henry and the key informants were made immediately after each session. These meta-data can offer invaluable insights in the analytic phase of the study (Dornyei, 2007).

This study also drew on other methods of data collection: emails and phone text messages with Henry. Throughout the three years, I emailed Henry fortnightly; this was to demonstrate a concern as to how he was coping in school, as well as to provide an avenue for him should he wish to ask me for any suggestion or advice pertaining to school life. I texted him via the mobile phone network for the same purpose. The emails and phone text messages were used as “different sources of the same information” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p.305), so as to check for “the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time” (Patton, 2002, p.559). Internal consistency is used as a measure to ascertain that what a participant says in one part of the interview does not contradict what is said in another part (Atkinson, 2002). These three modes of data collection – interviews, emails, and phone text messages – served as a form of quality check to verify Henry’s interpretation of his reality. Henry’s permission to use the data gathered from all three modes were solicited and obtained right at the start of the study, and also sought again at each face-to-face session.

Research Participant and Setting

Henry, 35 (in 2008), had been an industrial trainer for eight years before he was retrenched and enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme to be a teacher in 2007. He loved to read extensively in any area that he was interested in at that particular period of his life. To him, books were “food for the brain”. The book by Richard Feynman, *What do you care what other people think?*, was a major influence on him. Through the book, in Feynman’s recount of his life, Henry realized it would advantageous to always be more knowledgeable than others in any field; this realization piqued his desire to always read beyond what one should know.

Henry had a positive experience during teacher education. He had a “world class science educator”, Dr. Felix Sharpe, who showed his classmates and him “interesting, engaging, and practical” pedagogical strategies to use in their science classes. Henry was inspired by Dr. Sharpe’s passion because he believed that passion was the most important ingredient in teaching, and the way to obtain passion was to be enthusiastic. Henry believed that with sustained enthusiasm, passion would follow. As the Teaching Practice (TP) neared, Henry felt a sense of adventure. He was excited because it was “like a journey of discovery ahead”. He believed TP was a chance for him to “better” himself with regard to teaching, and try out what was taught during teacher training.

Henry was posted to Central Primary School. Central Primary was a relatively young but popular school located in the southeastern part of Singapore. It had an enrolment of 1, 500 students. It was popular partly because the principal knew how to promote his school to the neighbourhood. It was touted as a school with many curricular programmes catering to the needs of all its students. Henry’s supervisor, main Cooperating Teacher (CT) and School Coordinating Mentor all commented that he excelled in his work attitude and that he had commendable enthusiasm for teaching. He was able to meet all the lesson outcomes he had planned for in his Science and Mathematics lessons. Henry found a parallel to his Science teacher educator in his Science CT, Mdm. Oh. Henry felt that Mdm. Oh was the female version of Dr. Felix Sharpe. Mdm. Oh, in spite of teaching for more than 20 years, used the inquiry approach of teaching in nearly all the lessons that Henry observed, unlike many of his friends’ CTs in other schools.

Data Analysis

Texts from the data corpus were analysed and coded according to recurring patterns. The codes were reviewed against each data set and revised or merged, and then collated into potential themes. The potential themes were in turn reviewed against each data set, and this produced a number of broad thematic categories. Accompanying data extracts were also collated with the potential themes. The data extracts from each theme was then read and verified that they indeed fit within the potential theme; whether they appeared “to form a coherent pattern” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.91). If they did not, the theme was “re-worked” or a new theme

was created, or the data extracts were moved to another potential theme. After all the themes were reviewed against each of the data sets, they were finalized and named. One theme stood out above the others, having a pervasive influence over the other themes:

of being a classroom teacher that puts their beliefs and ideas about teaching to the test, challenges some of them, and confirm others” (p.105). This is indeed what happened to Henry; he was confronted with “the realities and responsibilities” of school life

Overarching theme	Socialization towards performativity
Sub- theme 1	Worksheet curriculum / pedagogy
Sub-theme 2	Teaching to the test
Sub-theme 3	Accountability pressures

Results and Discussion – Socialization Towards Performativity

In the beginning, before and during the teaching practice, and to some extent, his first six months after graduation, Henry enacted his teaching belief of engaging their students through interesting and engaging lessons, which are fundamentally different from that prescribed by many schools:

I am thinking of ways to excite and engage my students with my media/ICT skills. I really want to be competent in the teaching of my subjects. (email, 2008, September 25)

Research (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Sahin, Bullock & Stables, 2002) has shown that teachers’ educational beliefs do shape the nature of their instructional practices. Yet, the challenges of classroom teaching and school life quite often curb teachers’ ability to enact practices that are congruent to their beliefs (Fang, 1996; Keys, 2005). This seems to be the case for Henry.

The first three years have been identified as one of the critical periods of a beginning teacher’s career (Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985). This stressful period can provoke “shattered images” of teaching (Cole & Knowles, 1993) or induce “praxis shock” for the beginning teachers. This “shattered images” or “praxis shock” is an outcome of a confrontation between the beginning teachers’ personal philosophical beliefs about teaching and the schools’ reality. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) define “praxis shock” as “the teachers’ confrontation with the realities and responsibilities

that challenged and put his “beliefs and ideas about teaching” to the test. In fact, the challenge was so great that he had to revise and adapt their practice to fit with the school norm – the extensive use of worksheets to teach and to drill (i.e. the worksheet curriculum), so as to prepare the students for the examination (i.e. teaching to the test).

Worksheet Curriculum

In his first calendar year (January 2009 – December 2009), Henry’s seventh to 18th month, the worksheet culture seemed to have seeped into his classroom practice:

Worksheet works. It produces results. All those pedagogies are good for fun and stuff, but when it comes to the crunch, results matter. And worksheets are the way to go. I intend to come during the hols to create all the worksheets I need for my P3 science class. (phone text message, 2009, May 27; emphasis added)

Beginning teachers are unsure of their professional ability in the beginning due to their lack of experience, and thus “the experience of professional success inside and outside the classroom” is “essential to the development of professional self-confidence” (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p.111). This success can be found in being viewed by their colleagues as competent and hardworking professionals, and especially “if students do well on their tests, this is motivating and

reassuring to the beginning teacher” (p.112). Thus, highly visible artifacts such as worksheets, homework assignments, and test results create the perception in themselves and in the eyes of their colleagues that they are competent and professional.

A study by Chan, Tan and Khoo (2007) reveals that Singapore preservice teachers are “capable of embracing two seemingly contrasting notions of teaching and learning in chorus” (p.192). They speculate that “given constraints such as the need to complete the syllabus on time” (p.193), even though the preservice teachers believe in the constructivist theories of teaching and learning, they would teach in a more traditional drill-and-practice way. This was played out in the case of Henry, who had espoused constructivist beliefs in the beginning of the study. But when he started teaching, these constructivist teaching beliefs were put on hold.

Henry was socialized into the use of the worksheet pedagogy in his second year (June 2009 – May 2010). By then, due to the pressure on him to produce sterling academic results for his classes, he accepted the norm of using worksheets. He did not do so willingly, but out of necessity for his own survival and appraisal. He adopted the strategy of strategic compromise (Sikes *et al*, 1985), whereby he utilized both the worksheet pedagogy and his constructivist teaching approaches.

Turner-Bisset (2007) posits that teachers “compromise on the kinds of teaching in which they believe,” and execute “the kinds of teaching demanded by performativity” (p.195). This seems to be what happened to Henry – he started following the worksheet curriculum within the span of the first three years. Beginning teachers are appraised at the end of the calendar year on their class results and on the projects that they contribute to. Thus, the need to perform in these situations seemed to have rendered the need to uphold their personal teaching beliefs ineffectual. In addition, even though the Henry had been in the teaching service for a relative short span of time, he was given projects to manage on his own in his first year. In spite of the heavier workload, Henry continued to show a positive attitude.

According to Ball (2003), performativity is both “a culture and a mode of regulation” (p.216). Individual subjects within an organization are measured by their performances, and these performances, or performance measures, serve as indicators of their productivity or

output. These “displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection” represent “the worth, quality or value of an individual or an organization” within such a discourse (Ball, 2007, p.27). In the case of the school system, it allows the school to insert itself in the culture and the practices of the staffroom and its teachers; similarly, it allows the state to insert itself in the culture and practices of the schools, its principals and its teachers. Clearly, from Henry’s responses to the work that he had to do, some assigned and some volunteered, he had re-constructed himself as what Ball (2004) would term as the “post professional” – one who is willing and able “to adapt to the necessities and vicissitudes of policy” (p.17).

This policy tool in effect serves to re-make the school and its teachers through objectification and commodification of their work. Their work is rendered into “outputs”, “levels of performance” and “forms of quality” (Ball, 2007, p.28). As such, the work produced by the teacher or the school is “contestable and competitive” (p.28): schools are compared in terms of their academic results and the awards obtained; principals are compared in terms of what their schools have achieved; teachers are compared in terms of the academic results that their classes produce during the examinations, the prizes or awards that their students obtain in inter-school competitions, and even the amount of work they have put in to prepare their students for the examinations or the competitions. This intensification of being publicly compared and assessed leads to a constant need to produce “artifacts” of recognition. And Henry was put through this intensification process.

Teaching to the Test

Right from the beginning, during the teaching practice, Henry was required to prepare the students for the mid-year examinations, especially in the weeks prior to it. He was asked to put aside the normal curriculum, and replace it with worksheets or practice papers. Like what Watanabe (2008) discovered about classroom instruction in a high-stakes accountability programme, the high-stakes testing regime influenced teachers to place more emphasis on explicit test preparation, whereby “students practice the demands and format of the multiple-choice standardized test through workbook exercises” (p.504). Similarly, Henry was pressured to focus on the test preparation, during

teaching practice and during his first three years of teaching. Various studies (Craig, 2004; Hammerness, 2004; Hogan *et al*, 2013) have shown the effect high-stakes test pressures have on teachers' classroom instruction.

Despite his teaching beliefs in constructivism, Henry succumbed to the pressure of the high-stakes testing; he taught using the worksheets, as the worksheets were the most efficient method of preparing his students for the high-stakes tests. He was measured by the results produced by his own students, and thus he felt compelled to produce this performance indicator through the worksheet pedagogy:

I will just deliver what the school wants and that's results. And the best way of obtaining results is to worksheet the children to death. Worksheet them to death. *It's the only way of getting results – worksheets.* And that is the way that the (school) management appraise, assess the teachers. *And that's the way the teachers keep themselves safe, protect themselves and that's through worksheets.* (Harriet, interview, 2009, November 7; emphasis added)

This is corroborated by Deng and Gopinathan (2003) who analyzed the challenges of teacher training in Singapore. They found that teachers in Singapore tend to be examination-oriented, and expect their students to learn by “drilling and practising” (p.62). They agree that the primary reason for this examination-oriented pedagogy is due to the “prevalence of high-stakes examinations” (p.62). Similarly, Hogan and his colleagues (2013), in an extensive study that covered 32 schools in Singapore in 2010, found a consistent single-minded performative orientation, where instructional practice focuses “on worksheets and workbooks” and where “focus on exam preparation led the field” (p.65). The students' success in tests implies that the beginning teachers have the ability to teach well; this was how Henry felt after his second year of teaching:

It is all drill and practise for me next year. It's all about results and adding value since numbers are used to evaluate us. (email, 2009, November 1)

It is hence not surprising to note that the “focus of many teachers is still on testing and drilling” (Tan,

2008, p.118). After all, the post professional is one who is driven by the demands of performativity, whose practice is driven by results and improvements, and thus is able maximize performance (Ball 2004).

Accountability Pressures

Other than producing academic results, Henry had to engage in extra-curricular projects and work that were taken as measures of his work performances. He was attracted to the performativity discourse in the beginning. He was competitive by nature, and so was always game to help out in all the projects suggested by Mdm. Oh. In fact, he thrived in the projects as he felt he was contributing to their success. He was especially pleased that he was favourably looked upon by the school management. He knew his ideas and initiatives were welcomed by the management, and that these moves contributed to him performing well in the appraisal system:

Must write proposal for iPods by tonight for Wed (23rd July) superintendent's meeting! Principal told me about it at 7.30 p.m. As cluster superintendent is visiting this Wed, P wants me to show how innovative our school is by the proposal, especially since my interest is in Physics and computers. (phone text message, 2008, July 21)

I have got a few major projects on hand, but I will save it for December citing time and priorities; *must save some rabbits for next year to pull out of hat ... to secure good ranking.* (phone text message, 2008, July 7; emphasis added)

Much like what Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) put across, all these artifacts, referring to the effective and extensive use of worksheets, students' academic results and managing school projects, “get a symbolic importance in beginning teachers' self-presentation and their quest for professional recognition” (p.112). But with this re-construction of self towards performativity, due to the contextual and socializing pressures of the appraisal tool, would not the individual have cognitive dissonance as a result of conforming to the dominant pedagogic practice that is fundamentally conflicting in nature to one's teaching beliefs? This is demonstrated in Henry's response to the accountability work, during

his third year in the school:

All this school and the system care for is about strictly following processes and *showing evidence*. All my burnt Saturdays (preparing for interesting lessons) for nothing. I could have *spent that time creating evidence*. (phone text message, 2011, November 14; emphasis added)

What then of one's identity as a teacher? Has it been completely replaced by that of the post professional? MacLure (1993) has suggested that identity is something that people "use to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the contexts in which they operate" (p.312). It is an argument for one's existence as a teacher. Henry's teacher identity started shifting, after just one year into teaching:

After one full year in teaching, I think the part that sucks is dealing with paperwork ... I think the best thing to do is just bury yourself in the work ... Like if you look at the Mother Tongue teachers, they are always busy marking. ... And I think, you know, that's what I should do. And then I've got my little corner, just sit down there and do my marking. So, like Mr. Goh, he just sits at the corner and does his marking. (interview, 2009, July 25)

Yet, that "context" is circumscribed by the school's culture. The context, whether in-classroom or out-of classroom, is not wholly private; the performativity discourse prevalent in the school system would require an outward demonstration and accountability of one's ability and value to the school. As such, one's actions which are "perceived, interpreted and judged by others" to determine "the image others built from them" (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002, p.111) have to be fully considered before being carried out. This was clearly a part of the school culture, which Henry had to contend with and consider for his work output:

We are at the start of week 7. More *wayang* coming from everyone. This year the atmosphere amongst staff feels apprehensive, a strong undercurrent of mutual sizing up, a coveted one up-manship started by Science department. (phone text message, 2011, February 14)

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

Ryan (1986) proposed a four stage life cycle for teacher development: *fantasy, survival, mastery* and *impact*. This study traced Henry from the *fantasy* stage to the *survival / mastery* stage. According to Ryan (1986), the fantasy stage begins "when the person starts to think seriously about becoming a teacher" (p.10). It is denoted as fantasy because "(m)ost preservice teachers fantasize what their life as a teacher will be like" (pp. 10-11). Upon graduation from teacher training and being posted to a school as a qualified teacher, the *survival* stage starts. It is denoted as survival because "the new teacher is fighting for his or her professional life, and often for a sense of worth and identity as well" (p.13). The survival period supposedly varies according to each individual.

Henry's tiredness stems from the *extra-curricular* work, or *second order activities*, he was given. This is exactly what Turner-Bisset (2007) posited: such activities "consume vast amounts of time and energy and reduce the time and energy which teachers can spend on genuine innovative teaching" (p.195). Incidentally, all the extra-curricular work was given by one person, Mdm. Oh, the one person he respects most in school. The constant encouragement by Mdm. Oh to perform and do well for the extra-curricular work was highly seductive for Henry. Since he was doing well in Mdm. Oh's department, he genuinely felt there was a good chance he could perform well in the school, in terms of appraisal by the EPMS.

Henry readily adopted the performativity discourse in the beginning, and seemed to be on his way to becoming a post professional in that first year. It was a discourse which maintained that "we can become more than we were and be better than others – we can be 'outstanding', 'successful', 'above the average'" (Ball, 2003, p.219). He gladly took on all the challenges of planning, coordinating and monitoring different extra-curricular projects and tasks for the Science HOD; he did beyond what was expected of a BT. He even went beyond what was expected of experienced teachers. This left him isolated from his colleagues, and thus it perpetuated a situation where everyone sought to outdo one another individually. But in terms of classroom practices, Henry was fortunate in that he could enact his constructivist beliefs because his HOD employed those same teaching approaches, or so it seemed. He discovered only much later that even though the HOD

taught so in the beginning, it was put aside nearer the examination period. Teaching to the test became the *de facto* curriculum (Craig, 2004; Lloyd, 2007). Henry did not do so, and he realized that his teaching ability was directly correlated with the examination scores of his pupils by the school management. It was through this experience that he too made the decision to adopt the worksheet pedagogy.

But due to his strong beliefs in constructivist approaches, he chose a strategy of strategic compromise. But that again was called into question when his results and teaching were disparaged by members of the management at the end of the year. The post professional roots were spreading in Henry's psyche, but the dissonance it created led Henry to have a mental breakdown:

School sucks! Been getting pulsating
headaches n chest pains these two weeks.
I'm just sick n tired of wayang.
(Phone text message, 2011, July 26)

Henry was diagnosed with clinical depression by his family doctor, and he was advised to leave this profession since the school system's belief in the performativity discourse were at odds with Henry's beliefs in how teaching should be done. He faced acute pressure from the school to enact a particular form of pedagogy. This socialization of his pedagogic practice stems from the fact that the BTs are appraised by the academic results their pupils produce in each of the major examinations, the awards or prizes their pupils receive as a result of any inter-school competitions, the amount of work put in to produce such results (as in the number of worksheets and the number of training hours), and the successful implementation and completion of school projects (MOE, 2008, 2012a, 2012b). This appraisal of the teachers is derived from the performativity discourse enacted through the MOE's performativity appraisal tools for teachers and schools. Through this performativity discourse, the BTs are compelled through the institutional ascription of roles by the schools and the discourse prevalent in the staff room to accept the identity of and live as a post professional, whereby one's performance is driven by the demands of performativity and whose practice is driven by results. Even when the BTs are not willing to conform to this ascribed role to be a post professional, the middle management will bring to bear on them, "the use of formal and informal power"; this is "to achieve their goals in organizations" (Blase, 1991, p.11). As such, BTs have little choice but to conform to

the schools' practices and accept the school's policies, albeit reluctantly.

Implications for Teacher Education

During preservice training, preservice teachers are taught educational theories and pedagogical approaches and principles. They are essentially learning how to teach – the work of a teacher. But the job of a teacher entails much more than the work of teaching; it consists of the "backstage behaviors of teaching" (Rust, 1994), such as "the delicate balancing of competing demands that beset teachers daily, even hourly" (p.216). This aspect of being a teacher is not taught, or even alluded to. As Goodman (1988) points out, "to be effective, one must have some knowledge of how institutions work and how one can best 'work the system'" (p.39). Knowledge of the performativity discourse, with its concomitant reframing of educational priorities, and the ability to work with and around such a discourse, can help beginning teachers ameliorate the effects of the reality shock; after all, since performativity is a fundamental dimension of life in such a school system, knowing how it works will allow beginning teachers to understand, adapt and engage with the discourse in the interest of student learning. They would thus be more prepared for the realities of the schools and the complexities associated with the roles of teachers (Cole & Knowles, 1993).

Hence, since the performativity culture in the Singapore school system does not show any sign of abating (Tan, 2005; Tan & Ng, 2007; Ng, 2008; Tan, 2008), instead of ignoring it, the teacher education institute should engage with it during teaching methods courses, and teach preservice teachers how to adapt constructive pedagogical approaches within the dominant worksheet curriculum. It is thus imperative to retain teachers in the service for as long as possible; teachers who stay in the service gain experience and ideally this experience shapes them into better teachers. To help keep trained teachers in the service, it is necessary to prepare them for the performativity discourse which they will face in school. We cannot assume that all will find a way to survive the colonizing influence of performativity on their own. Choosing to ignore it during the teaching methods courses and hoping that the preservice teachers will on their own volition "teach against the school-grain" will only perpetuate the theory-practice divide that currently exists. As discussed by Mok and Welch (2003),

many of the educational systems in Asia are heavily influenced by the performativity discourse. Hence, it is imperative that teacher education programmes embed strategies to guide the future teachers circumvent the politics of performativity in their school systems (Loh & Hu, 2014). Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006) express concern that if such performativity pressures are not addressed, either some of the best teachers will leave, or “their energy, commitment and sense of purpose” (p.614) will be lost if they stayed on. This is indeed what had happened to Henry.

References

- Atkinson, R. (2002). The life story interview. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp.121-140). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ball, S.J. (2003). The teacher’s soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.
- Ball, S.J. (2004). Performativities and fabrications in the education economy: Towards the performative society. In S.J. Ball (Ed.). *The Routledge Falmer reader in sociology of education* (pp.143-155). London: Routledge Falmer.
- Ball, S.J. (2007). *Education plc: Understanding private sector participation in public sector education*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, S.J. (2012). Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-spy guide to the neoliberal university. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60(1), 17-28.
- Blase, J. (1991). *The politics of life in schools: Power, conflict, and cooperation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77-101.
- Chan, K.W., Tan, J., & Khoo, A. (2007). Preservice teachers’ conceptions about teaching and learning: A closer look at Singapore cultural context. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(2), 181-195.
- Cheah, Y.M. (2004). English Language Teaching in Singapore Today. In W.K. Ho and R.Y.L. Wong (eds.), *English Language Teaching in East Asia Today: Changing Policies and Practices* (2nd/rev. ed., pp. 353-74). Singapore: Eastern University.
- Cole, A., & Knowles, G. (1993). Shattered images: Understanding expectations and realities of field experiences. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9 (5/6), 457-471.
- Craig, C.J. (2004). The dragon in school backyards: The influence of mandated testing on school contexts and educators’ narrative knowing. *Teachers College Record*, 106(6), 1229-1257.
- Day, C.W., Kington, A. Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), 601-616.
- Deng, Z., & Gopinathan, S. (2003). Continuity and change in conceptual orientations for teacher preparation in Singapore: Challenging teacher preparation as training. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 31(1), 51-65.
- Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fang, Z. (1996). A review of research on teacher beliefs and practices. *Educational Research*. 38(1), 47 - 64.
- Goodman, J. (1988). The political tactics and teaching strategies of reflective, active preservice teachers. *The Elementary School Journal*, 89(1), 22-41.

- Hammerness, K. (2004). Teaching with vision: How one teacher negotiates tension between high ideals and standardized testing. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31(4), 33-43.
- Hogan, D., Chan, M., Rahim, R., Kwek, D., Aye, K.M., Loo, S.C., Sheng, Y.Z., & Luo, W. (2013). Assessment and the logic of instructional practice in Secondary 3 English and mathematics classrooms in Singapore. *Review of Education*, 1(1), 57-106.
- Jeffrey, B. (2002). Performativity and primary teacher relations. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(5), 531-546.
- Jeffrey, B., & Troman, G. (Eds.). (2012). *Performativity in UK education: Ethnographic cases of its effects, agency and reconstructions*. Painswick: E&E.
- Kelchtermans, G., & Ballet, K. (2002). The micropolitics of teacher induction: A narrative-biographical study on teacher socialisation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(1), 105-120.
- Keys, P.M. (2005). Are teachers walking the walk or just talking the talk in science education? *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 11(5), 499-516.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lloyd, G.M. (2007). Strategic compromise: A student teacher's design of kindergarten Mathematics instruction in a high-stakes testing climate. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(4), 328-347.
- Loh, J., & Hu, G. (2014). Subdued by the system: Neoliberalism and the beginning teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 41, 13-21.
- Loughran, J., Brown, J., & Doecke, B. (2001). Continuities and discontinuities: the transition from pre-service to first-year teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 7(1), 7-23.
- MacLure, M. (1993). Arguing for yourself: Identity as an organising principle in teachers' jobs and lives. *British Educational Research Journal*, 19(4), 311-322.
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2007). *Holistic teacher appraisal system clarifies expectations*. The Straits Times Forum letter reply, April 2. Retrieved <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/forum/2007/20070402.htm>
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2008). *MOE Masterplan of awards for schools*. Retrieved <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/files/2008/09/moe-masterplan-of-awards-for-schools.pdf>
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2012a). *MOE Removes Secondary School Banding and Revamps School Awards*. Retrieved <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2012/09/moe-removes-secondary-school-b.php>
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2012b). *Schools' SYF scheme revamped*. Retrieved <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/news/2012/11/schools-syf-scheme-revamped-st.php>
- Mok, K.H., & Welch, A. (2003). *Globalization and Educational Restructuring in the Asia Pacific Region*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ng, P.T. (2008). The phases and paradoxes of educational quality assurance: The case of the Singapore education system. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 16(2), 112-125.
- Pajares, M. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307-332.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Richardson, V. (1996). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In J.Sikula (Ed), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (pp 102 – 119). New York: Macmillan.

- Rust, F. (1994). The first year of teaching: It's not what they expected. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 10(2), 205-217.
- Ryan, K. (1986). *The induction of new teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Education Foundation.
- Sahin, C., Bullock, K., & Stables, A. (2002). Teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to their beliefs about questioning at Key Stage 2. *Educational Studies*, 28(4), 371-384.
- Sikes, P.J., Measor, L., & Woods, P. (1985). *Teacher careers: Crises and continuities*. Lewes: The Falmer Press.
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Stake, R.E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. New York: Guilford.
- Sullivan, C. (1997). Myths, misconceptions, and miscommunications in reading instruction. In *Singapore Symposium on Reading for Success, Reading for success: A collection of symposium papers* (pp.40-47). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Tan, C. (2008). Globalization, the Singapore state and educational reforms: Towards performativity. *Education, Knowledge and Economy*, 2(2), 111-120.
- Tan, E.T.J. (2005). The marketization of education in Singapore: What does it mean for thinking school, learning nation? In E.T.J. Tan & P.T. Ng (Eds.). *Shaping Singapore's future: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (pp. 95-111). Singapore: Prentice-Hall.
- Tan, C., & Ng, P.T. (2007). Dynamics of change: Centralised decentralisation of education in Singapore. *Journal of Educational Change*, 8(2), 155-168.
- Troman, G., Jeffrey, B., & Raggl, A. (2007). Creativity and performativity policies in primary school cultures. *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(5), 549-572.
- Turner-Bisset, R. (2007). Performativity by stealth: A critique of recent initiatives on creativity. *Education 3-13*, 35(2), 193-203.
- Watanabe, M. (2008). Tracking in the era of high-stakes state accountability reform: Case studies of classroom instruction in North Carolina. *Teachers College Record*, 110(3), 489-534.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the English Language & Literature Academic Group, National Institute of Education/Nanyang Technological University (NIE/NTU), Singapore, under Grant SUG 2/11 JL.