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A stylized graphic on a purple background. It features a thick, wavy yellow path that starts from the left, curves down, and then leads into a series of three overlapping arches. The arches are white with black outlines and vertical stripes. The path continues to curve away from the arches towards the bottom right.

# WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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## Resistance within a performativity discourse: Learning from an analytic autoethnographic perspective

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### Abstract

*Can beginning teachers teach against the grain? In this article, the author studies the self when he was a teacher in the school system, teaching with an approach that was antithetical to the school's pedagogic norm. By analysing the author's self in the context of the larger political, historical and structural contexts of the teaching situation, the author highlights the struggles of going against the pedagogic discourse, and the accommodation that was enacted to ensure his survival. While the autoethnographic self-study is essentially grounded in the lived experience of the author, it reveals the broader issue of how performativity pressures in school systems socialize its teachers.*

### Key words

Analytic autoethnography, socialization, performativity

### Introduction

#### Background to study

I first started teaching in a primary school in 1998. From 1998 to the time I became a teacher educator in 2009, I taught five upper primary low process classes,<sup>i</sup> three upper primary middle progress classes, two upper primary high progress classes, two Grade 1 classes and one middle grade class. Two of my students, Connie and Linda,<sup>ii</sup> from a Teaching Methods course I taught in the August–November 2011 semester met with me near the end of their final teaching practice in May 2011. Connie was one of the keenest and most enthusiastic students in this course. She would almost always ask questions to clarify her understanding and seek to know how the different strategies could be adapted and applied to her future primary English language class. I thought she would have been an ideal student teacher to mentor if I had been her Cooperating Teacher (CT).<sup>iii</sup> I was both intrigued and saddened by what Connie and Linda recounted:<sup>iv</sup>



**Connie:** His response was to tell me to “do whatever you want”. However, after I created an entire week’s worth of lessons and handed them in today, he decided that it was not what he wanted and told me to re-think and re-do. I felt that he could have at least pointed out my mistakes instead of brushing me off.

**Me:** Oh dear! What exactly did he want for your lessons?

**Connie:** He only wanted me to complete the school worksheets because he has a timeline to “catch up with” [sic]. He was not happy when the children could not finish the worksheets just because I took some time to do extra activities that I had planned.

**Linda:** Ya, ya! That was exactly what my CT told me too! I am learning to be practical at the moment. Before this, I had been thinking of ideas and activities to make my lessons complete, but I realised that my CT only wanted me to complete the school worksheets. She too was not happy when the children could not complete the worksheets because I had planned for the children to complete a storyboard after a DRTA (Directed Reading-Thinking Activity) comprehension lesson.<sup>v</sup> So now, I am going to be more practical. I have to make use of available resources rather than spending time thinking of new activities. My teaching has to be short and focused. So that the children would have time to complete their worksheets.

**Connie:** In school, I’ve adopted a ‘Yes Man’ policy. To say “yes” and smile at everything. I’d just do what I am told.

**Me:** But that is so sad.

**Connie:** Ya, but it can’t be helped. I had planned a week of reading, fun writing and comprehension, and then to be told that it’s not good. What’s the point of trying when the CT is not open to the idea?

**Linda:** Ya, I am in a similar situation too. I am now afraid to try out any strategies with the class. My CT doesn’t seem to take too kindly to them. Her strategies for the past week involved using *Essential Grammar Guide* to teach the grammar items.<sup>vi</sup> Students had to read on their own, and the teacher went through the explanations, and after that, the class did the grammar exercises.

**Me:** How do you feel about the teaching practice thus far?

**Connie:** It’s really the class that keeps me going. They are so involved in the lessons and they are very intelligent children with so many ideas and questions that it is really a joy teaching them!

**Linda:** I totally agree! The children have been wonderful! I carried out the writing lesson on unicorn.

**Me:** You mean the tutorial I conducted on teaching different text types? The procedural text one on “How to cook unicorn meat”?

**Linda:** Ya, ya, that's the one. I could really see that the students were engaged with my activities. The first writing was not perfect, but their ideas were good. So in the second lesson, I built on from their first writing and taught them how to write a procedural text by going through important information which needed to be included in a procedural text. After that, I got them to write a second draft so that I can display their writing in class. They are writing their individual writing tomorrow. I am so excited to see the fruit of my teaching!

**Me:** Are the teachers in your teaching practice schools open to new teaching approaches or strategies?

**Linda:** When I attended the teacher sharing sessions for English subject. I can see that the school is trying to shift from the traditional to new teaching methods. They even make use of reading books from the States. However, when I am back in my CT's class, traditional method rules! She told me not to do some exercises in the books because they take up too much time, and we have our own worksheets to clear.

**Connie:** That's true. At the end of the day, we deliver what they want.

### **Caught between two worlds**

#### The school

I thought about what Connie and Linda shared with me, and recalled my experiences during the time that I was in the school system as a teacher and later as a Head of Department (English language). I too had encountered similar attitudes. There are many in the school system who prefer to teach using the traditional drill-and-practice approach and supplementing the approach with worksheets (Cheah, 2004; Sullivan, 1997). I had my fair share of encounters with such colleagues and school management. To enact an approach that is antithetical to what is commonly practised in schools is "challenging and sometimes discouraging work" (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 285). Teaching against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991) is tiring and is a constant battle against the normative school system. Teachers who do so "must name and wrestle with their own doubts, must fend off the fatigue of reform and depend on the strength of their individual and collaborative convictions that their work ultimately makes a difference in the fabric of social responsibility" (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 285).

I remember what I had to go against in order to teach against the grain, and it is because of what I remember that I constantly share my experiences with student teachers, so that they are mindful of the reality after graduation. Yet, I wonder if I am doing enough as a teacher educator to prepare them for this 'reality'. Teaching beliefs and practices that are acquired during teacher training have been known to be "washed out" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) by school experiences (see also Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Veenman, 1984; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). As I wondered about the various factors that have contributed to this disconnect between what is believed and what is practised, I thought back to my own recent past.

## The self

Over the years, my experiences have shaped me as a teacher. Much of what I have experienced within the school system has fashioned my understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Being and becoming a teacher is not a simple issue; it is a complex and intricate process, one that cannot be reduced to formulas or clichés. Experiences matter; they are the planned and unplanned stops that one makes in a long journey, and the stories that one can relate to. Hence to learn more of being and becoming a teacher, student and beginning teachers need to be exposed to and learn from such stories.

I too was asked to teach in a certain way. I too was pressured to teach in a way that would produce the academic results demanded by the performativity-driven school system. I too underwent the twin trials of socialization and performativity. Yet the question is not what I went through, but how I experienced it, and how I survived it with my beliefs intact. My own conflicts and my sense of the conflicts with the existing school climate and culture have prompted me to study my ‘self’; a study of ‘self’ that can be shared with student teachers about to embark on their journey as teachers in a performativity-driven educational system. Thus, this is a study of the ‘self’.

## Methodology

### Self-study

Zeichner (1999) exhorts teacher educators to study the self, as this very act of a “disciplined and systematic inquiry into one’s own teaching practice” can provide “a model for prospective teachers and for teachers of the kind of inquiry that more and more teacher educators are hoping their student’s employ” (p. 11). In order that my future student teachers are in a better position to face the performativity-driven and socialising school system, I embark on this self-study. I set out to study my ‘self’ so that I am able to share the “knowledge of the educational landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 575), so that future teachers are able to make the transition from being student teachers to beginning teachers slightly more easily in this “profession that eats its young” (Halford, 1998, p. 33). After all, the duty of the teacher educator should not only be to prepare the next generation of teachers to teach, but also to prepare them to survive in the educational system.

### Data Sources

For this self-study, I drew on various sources of data. First, I used my diary entries of the critical period when I met resistance from the school management as a result of teaching against the grain. I verified these accounts with my former school colleagues.<sup>vii</sup> I also used the interviews that were conducted by a researcher who had studied my transition from a classroom teacher to a teacher educator. In addition, I emailed my former student teachers with their accounts as a form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Analysis—Analytic autoethnography

Zeichner and Liston (1996) posit that autobiographical inquiry is a valuable way to uncover one’s values, beliefs and motivations. Hence, in this self-study, I have chosen

to use autoethnography. Autoethnography is “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Using autoethnography, I am able to access certain aspects of my experience that would normally not have been observable by others. Although the study is an introspection, the issue in this study is not the self-reflexive nature of it, but rather the connections made between my individual self and society and societal culture at large, which in this case is the school culture. Much as Anderson (2006) states, autoethnography “entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to *better understand both self and others* through examining one’s actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others” (p. 382; emphasis added). This self-study thus allows a deeper understanding and insight into how the systemic forces within the school shape and influence my responses, and how I reacted to and addressed them. In a sense, this study draws upon my “personal experiences and perceptions to inform our broader social understandings” and upon my social understanding “to enrich our self-understandings” (Anderson, 2006, p. 390).

Specifically, I draw on my understandings of the systemic forces in school, gleaned from my experiences as a school teacher, combined with my academic and teacher educator focus since my recent departure of the school system and entry to university teaching. This dual perspective, both from inside and outside, is thus used to “to describe and systematically analyze” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, p. 1) how I, as a school teacher, coped with the normative forces assaulting me, and how I accommodated them to my pedagogical beliefs. The purpose and goal of this autoethnography is “to describe and systematically analyze” my personal experience “in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 1); it is to utilize and analyze my own experiences in relation with the literature so as to shed light on what and why the phenomenon occurred, and in so doing, to inform and contribute to the knowledge of the larger community. To these experiences I now turn.

## Context

### Looking back on an experience

The school principal I had then was a woman who firmly believed in one thing, and that was the worksheet. Many of the grade level and department meetings in that school were used mainly to revise existing worksheets and to churn out more. Because this principal believed so much in the efficacy of worksheets, piles of worksheets were printed during the termly and mid-year holidays, so that when the teachers arrived back they had to clear all these worksheets in the term that followed. Many a time, the other teachers and I complained that we had to apportion too much teaching time to clear these worksheets.

I did not and could not agree with this practice because I knew from my own experiences that worksheets were not a guarantee that learning took place, and that they became a chore to children if too many were given. Personally, I believed that more time should be given to teaching rather than finishing the worksheets. I did not believe in this policy of the principal’s, and so in my classroom the worksheets were used as a form of reinforcement of the lessons rather than the lessons themselves. I did not use the excessive number of worksheets distributed; I kept them in the cupboard.

During the middle of the year, a file checking exercise was held. Each head of department had to check the files of the students. These files contained all the worksheets that were completed, marked and corrected. The principal was not too happy about mine; mine was the best class, and hence she expected the class files to be the thickest for the entire level because the perception was that the best class could do a lot more. But I did not believe in the worksheet curriculum, so my files were not as thick as the others. Much of my teaching time was spent on group activities, such as story mapping or round-robin writing, instead of completing the ‘drill and practice’ worksheets. The principal was displeased: it showed disobedience; by resisting the worksheet policy, I was not toeing the line.

### **Rise of performativity**

Performativity, as defined by Ball (2003), is “a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change—based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (p. 216). He adds that the “performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection” (p. 216). Thus, individual subjects or organisations are compelled to ‘churn out’ products of a certain quality as these products will determine their ability or ‘competency level’. These products will also determine whether they are ‘fit’ to be rewarded or promoted or both. Thus performativity encapsulates or represents “the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement” (p. 216).

The teachers in such a system are expected to produce sterling academic results from their students and raise standards of achievements in the activities or projects they are in charge of. As such, accountability becomes paramount. Thus teachers are required to “set measurable performance objectives which are systematically reviewed” (Troman, Jeffrey, & Raggl, 2007, pp. 549–50). In a sense, performativity requirements engender the creation of a culture—a culture that strives for high outputs and which entails a firm belief in these outputs (Ball, 2004a).

The principal was prescribing a practice that was symptomatic of the primary school system since the 1990s. Sullivan, a former teacher educator at Singapore’s sole Teacher Training Institute, in her address at the 1995 RELC (Regional Language Centre) Symposium on “Reading for Success”, concluded that: “The worksheets are driving the English instruction programme rather than supporting it” (Sullivan, 1997, p. 45). It was a culture that set in during the 1990s: “By the 1990s, teachers were using every worksheet that came with the textbook and principals were similarly using the worksheets as a check on teachers’ work” (Cheah, 2004, p. 361). This was indeed the situation in my former school—the thickness of each student’s worksheet files was a measurement of whether the teacher was doing his/her work.

### **Effects of performativity**

As the outputs are pushed to the foreground in such a system, visibility becomes important. The teacher is then “subject to a myriad of judgements, measures, comparisons and targets” (Ball, 2003, p. 220). The appraisal meetings, the performance

reviews, the lesson observations and the list of achievements become tools that are used to promote one's visibility and worth.

Such visibility requirements are not confined to individual teachers. Schools as organisations are also subject to these performativity pressures. Due to the performativity discourse enacted in schools, relations with parents have fundamentally changed. It is now an exchange of services and goods. As stakeholders in this new education economy, the parents feel that since they have 'invested' time and resources (i.e., their children) in the school, they should reap the rewards in terms of rising academic scores and grades for their children. And since the parents are free to choose the schools they put their children in, schools will seek to market themselves as value-added organisations that produce results. Schools are "encouraged to make themselves different from one another, to stand out, to 'improve' themselves" (Ball, 2003, p. 219). In essence, schools as organisations are required to do what they require their teachers to do—to take responsibility for transforming themselves in the new education marketplace (Ball, 2003). Effectively, the pressure on the teachers to produce academic results thus rises. In essence, teachers "are required to produce measurable and 'improving' outputs and performances"; fundamentally, this translates to "what is important is **what works**" (Ball, 2003, p. 222; emphasis in original).

Yet, what works is subjective. There are scores of pedagogic practices that will enable students to learn. But the performativity discourse requires production of outputs in terms of quantifiable results that can be measured and compared, rather than qualitative interpretations of learning. Thus, there is a possibility "that commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance" (Ball, 2004a, p. 146). 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). There is essentially a potential dilemma between "the teacher's own judgement about 'good practice' and students' 'needs' on the one hand, and the rigors of performance on the other" (Ball, 2004a, p. 146).

Accordingly, performativity would require a potential sacrifice of professionalism for accountability. The teacher is no longer portrayed as the professional, but more like the "post professional" (Ball, 2004b). The post professional is one "conceived of as simply responsive to external requirements and specified targets, armed with formulaic methods—'what works'—suited to any eventuality" (Ball 2004b, p. 17). The post professional is willing and able "to adapt to the necessities and vicissitudes of policy" (p. 17). Thus, the post professional is one who can maximize performance, is driven by the demands of performativity, and whose practice is driven by results and improvements. Hence, it is not surprising to note that the "focus of many teachers is still on testing and drilling" (C. Tan, 2008, p. 118). Studies by Charlene Tan (2005; & Ng, 2007), Ng (2008) and Jason Tan (2008) have documented the ways the Singapore education system adopted the performativity discourse.

The new teacher in such an environment, the post professional, is one who can "set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation" (Ball, 2003, p. 215). According to Ball (2003), the policy technologies of education—the market and performativity—are not merely tools to reform the state of the organisations, but are also tools with which to reform the teacher.

## **Trials of socialization**

I resisted the push by the school's performativity culture to be a post professional; I did not want to be a 'regimented clone'. Instead, I tried to change others in the beginning. I perceived that what was happening in the school, the directive to complete the worksheets and the insistence of a high level of difficulty in the school examinations, was not educationally sound. I knew others agreed with me, so I was quite vocal in my expression of what I saw as unsound-ness. Things came to a head on a Wednesday after the school's weekly staff meeting. I was called to the principal's office and told that I was a negative example for the rest of the teachers. I was not given a chance to explain as accusations of insubordination, in the form of not completing the various worksheets, were laid on me. A listing of the worksheets from the Mathematics and English departments was given. I tried to explain my intent and how I used the extra time from not completing the worksheets; my comments were all cursorily dismissed. I was expected to do all I had planned and intended, *and* complete the worksheets.

I was flabbergasted at being accused of doing wrong. All I had intended was to teach in a way I believed to be engaging and more beneficial for my students in the long run. I tried to teach in the way that I had learnt during my teacher training. As a consequence, for that year's work, I was given a low performance grade and bonus, even though my top student's overall performance in that year's PSLE<sup>viii</sup> was better than the previous year's top student, who was incidentally taught by the principal's favourite head of department. My students had performed better than the previous year's top class, **without** the excessive use of worksheets, but this fact was not acknowledged by the principal or her heads of department.

In this school, the principal had her internal streaming policy—students at the end of Grade 1 were streamed out and the academically weakest students were assigned to one or two classes. I was given the weakest Grade 5 class for the following year. It was considered a "blacklisting" because, usually, untrained teachers waiting to go for teacher training or short-term relief teachers or teachers who could not manage students were assigned to those classes. Chomsky (1999) describes such a scenario:

There are people who don't accept, who aren't obedient. They are weeded out, they're behavioural problems. The long-term effect of this process is to foster and reward subordination. It begins in kindergarten and goes all the way up through your occupational or professional career. If you challenge authority, you get in some kind of trouble. (p. 7)

This was an observation made by many of the teachers in that school—I was in trouble.

## **Reflections and conclusion**

### **Reflections**

As I compared my story with what Linda and Connie shared, I wondered how closely our experiences aligned. Do they see hegemonic forces reaching into their classrooms to compel the choices that they make? In the performativity discourse, teachers are "represented and encouraged to think about themselves as individuals who calculate about themselves, 'add value' to themselves, improve their productivity, strive for

excellence” (Ball, 2003, p. 217). Certainly, in such a discourse, the post professional is appealing. Do I not wish to add value to myself? Do I not wish to improve my productivity and strive for excellence? Is this post professional not an ideal worth pursuing? Ball (2004a) too attests to this appeal: “We learn that we can become more than we were. There is something very seductive about being ‘properly passionate’ about excellence, about achieving ‘peak performance’” (p. 148). The offer is tempting; the rewards are great. Why should I resist?

Lortie (1975) posited that:

Psychic rewards are an important part of the total rewards received by the classroom teacher. Since psychic rewards apparently revolve around classroom achievement, understanding their nature requires familiarity with how teachers define achievement. The way teachers see achievement will influence the level of psychic reward they achieve in their daily work.... the flow of rewards in teaching has consequences for other aspects of occupational life. (p. 106)

Consequently, in the performativity discourse, the teachers who see achievement as rising academic scores obtained at the end of each academic year will reap huge psychic rewards; the teachers who see achievement as their students winning medals in sporting- or performing-related competitions will reap huge psychic rewards when their students do so.

This means that for teachers who “feel inwardly unsure about the value of their teaching and assessment strategies” because they work “alone in their classroom, without the benefit of collegial reassurance and feedback” (Hargreaves, 1999, p. 125), will welcome and embrace the performativity culture that celebrates academic and competition achievements above all else. This is especially seductive for the beginning teachers. They work “alone in their classroom” without any form of feedback from their colleagues unless they specifically ask for it, and even then, their colleagues may not be comfortable providing it. The performative discourse does away with this need for assurance from colleagues; the discourse requires only that the beginning teachers produce ‘results’, and the way these are obtained (e.g., via a worksheet curriculum) is not of paramount importance. In other words, the end seems to justify the means.

The incentives engendered in the performative discourse as a consequence promote a new basis of making moral and ethical pedagogic choice—I am responsible for ensuring my students do well during the examinations, and since the most efficient way of doing so is to utilize the traditional ‘drill-and-practice’ approach, then I will do so; if not, I will be short-changing them. The teacher becomes “reprofessionalized” (Seddon cited in Ball, 2003, p. 218). The teacher has “the possibility of a triumphant self of becoming a new kind of professional or of entry into the ever expanding ranks of the executors of quality” (p. 218). As the new post professional, “we learn that we can become more than we were and be better than others—we can be ‘outstanding’, ‘successful’, ‘above the average’” (p. 219); as the post professional, living in the performative landscape, I can be a ‘good’ teacher by putting in the time, energy and effort in ensuring my students produce tactical improvements—pushing the A-grade students to achieve a high number of distinctions, while pushing the borderline failures to achieve a high percentage of passes. As pointed out by Ball (2004b): “This is not just a process of reform, it is a process of social transformation” (p. 25).

## **Resistance seems futile; assimilation seems inevitable.**

### Concluding thoughts

As a teacher educator, exhorting my student teachers to teach against the grain is my mission and my goal. But if by doing so they are sidelined and penalized is that being ethical or responsible on my part? Perhaps, as Cochran-Smith (1991) posits, the resistance should not be against “the hegemony of the educational and societal status quo” (p. 280). Perhaps the resistance should be within oneself.

It is the self that must enact the resistance against the performativity discourse and its socialization agents. It is within oneself that the urge to teach against the grain must take root and flower. I do agree with Cochran-Smith (1991) and argue also that “students of teaching cannot learn how to reform teaching in a general sense during student-teaching period, but only how to be reformers in one specific classroom or school” (p. 280). In my narrative, I reformed the educational setting for that one class, my class. As Cochran-Smith (1991) notes, it is a struggle to teach against the grain. Olsen’s (1995) narrative study of two beginning teachers highlights the difficulty that beginning teachers had when they wanted to enact their own beliefs in their teaching; in the end, they had to “publicly conform to the authorized cover story” (p. 39) of the schools. But if one wishes to teach against the grain and sustain it over the long haul, then the ‘resistance’ must first start within oneself.

### **Implications for practice**

This is a story of an act of resistance (Ewick & Silbey, 2003). Yet, I must go beyond this story. Loughran (2008) implored those who attended the Seventh International Conference on the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices to go beyond individual stories to consider the contexts and issues in self-studies. This self-study must have utility: “the learning through self-study is intended to be used” (Loughran, 2002, p. 244).

As a teacher educator, I should not merely teach student teachers pedagogical approaches from course books or readings; I must go beyond that. I must be able to help them see what the reality of the school and classroom are like, and lead them to adapt these approaches to fit with the dominant pedagogical discourse that maintain a hold over many schools. Much as Schuck and Segal (2002) suggest, “We need to caution our enthusiastic student teachers that they need to plan how to gradually implement the alternative teaching strategies that have excited them at university” (p. 96). This self-study is to reveal to my students that even though the “practices we use in teacher education classrooms appear to be seamless and unproblematic”, they must be prepared to adapt and modify “when they try to implement these same practices in the school context” (p. 96). As a student teacher in the mid-1990s, I was not taught the reality; I was merely taught the theories and the ideal classroom situation. I had to learn to survive on my own. As a teacher educator now, I should not allow this situation to be perpetuated.

Trumbull (2009) concludes her commentary on self-study with an exhortation to provide the best possible beginning for new teachers. I fully agree with her. In real terms, this means being able to share with student teachers what they will face in schools when they graduate and what they can do about it, rather than just ignoring the

systemic reality, merely teaching them from the readings and assessing them with no consideration of the external contexts. As a result of this self-study, I have allocated more time during the teaching methodology courses to draw links between what is read in the course readings and what is happening in the classroom. I elicit a more critical reading of the literature by posing challenges of how the various teaching methods and principles can be adapted in the classroom in the face of performativity pressures prevalent in the system. I have also brought more artefacts from the classroom that demonstrate how some teachers modify their approaches to meet the demands of performativity, and yet do not completely succumb to being post professionals.

This self-study is important not for what it shows about myself but for what it reveals about the educational landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). With this knowledge, it is hoped that the teacher education theory-practice nexus will be strengthened, and that teaching against the grain will be more desirable than being a post professional.

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<sup>i</sup> Singapore schools formally assess and stream students by how fast they ‘progress’ in their learning at the end of Grade 4.

<sup>ii</sup> All names in this study (i.e., individuals, schools and the training institute) have been anonymised to protect the participants’ privacy and ensure confidentiality.

<sup>iii</sup> Cooperating Teachers are experienced teachers who are assigned to guide, mentor and supervise student teachers during their teaching practice.

<sup>iv</sup> Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2009; Yin, 2011) was done to verify that the conversation cited is accurately portrayed.

<sup>v</sup> Storyboard is a graphic organizer that is used to “preview a story before reading or to review the events in a story after reading” (Tompkins, 2010, p. 468). Children use pictures that are provided or constructed to sequence the story.

<sup>vi</sup> *Essential Grammar Guide* is a grammar assessment book that contains traditional drill-and-practice exercises.

<sup>vii</sup> My former colleagues consist of the following: one former student teacher who was attached to me during her Teaching Practice and who became my colleague in that school, one who became part of the school’s management committee, one who left the teaching service, and two who transferred to other schools—five in all.

<sup>viii</sup> PSLE: Primary School Leaving Examination—a national secondary school placement examination for all primary six pupils.