

**The (Re) Construction of Beginning Teachers:
A Narrative Journey**

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Abstract

In a performativity-driven school system, where academic results determine the annual assessment of its teachers, an undeniable amount of pressure is exacted on beginning teachers. Within each school in such a system, there exists a set of cultural practices that dictate how teaching is done, so as to maximize the academic output of its pupils. It is within such an environment that beginning teachers learn to survive after their initial teacher training. It is thus important to understand how such a school culture impacts and influences the beliefs and practices of beginning teachers. In the midst of the massive recruitment of teachers, the questions that naturally arise are ‘Are beginning teachers’ identities and their pedagogical approaches socialized by school systems?’ and ‘If so, in what ways?’ This narrative study is set within the context of Singapore, where the performativity discourse is dominant. It explores the journey of four beginning teachers from their pre-service training to their second year of teaching. The beginning teachers’ narratives reveal how the micropolitics of the schools shape their values, beliefs and practices. It uncovers the process of teacher socialisation in the Singapore school system. Through a narrative approach, their, otherwise suppressed, stories are heard. And with this revelation, teacher education and the teacher education institute’s existing relationship with schools must fundamentally change.

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Chapter 1: The Introductory Inquiry

... and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge. In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*,
'Down the rabbit-hole'

1.1 Prologue

It was a Tuesday in 1994. It was the second day of my teacher training at the Teacher Training Institute (TTI), Singapore's sole teacher training institute. As I strolled into the LT1 (Lecture Theatre 1), I was struck by the size of the largest lecture theatre on campus. It was the first Education Studies module out of many over the span of the four years of teacher training. I wondered what this module was all about. I understood that the Curriculum Studies modules were about pedagogical skills, but what about Education Studies? I searched for faces that were familiar to me; we only met the day before, on our first day. I sat with them. We made small talk, asking each other about the other modules we took and the impression we had of our professors, while we waited for the lecturer of this module to appear.

A tall wiry and gaunt looking Caucasian man with dark brown hair and moustache walked in. He was evidently not a student teacher. He looked to be in his early sixties. There was not a smile on his face. He did not even spare his audience a look, an audience made up of the four-year Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science students. He seemed detached. He took out his stack of overhead transparencies from his tan brown leather briefcase and placed them on the lectern. Then he turned his head up to look at us. He scanned the entire lecture theatre, from left to right and then from right to left. Voices slowly died down.

'You are all regimented clones!' His loud booming voiced resonated throughout the lecture theatre, even though physically he did not seem capable of doing that. We were shocked! There was an uncomfortable silence.

That was my first Education Studies lecture. The professor, with his thick Welsh accented English, was well-liked and respected by his students. His exclamation shocked us into listening. His accusation that we were 'regimented clones' made us more ready to listen to what he had to say about the nature and value of education, more open to new ideas in the field of education and more willing to try new pedagogical research-based practices.

“‘Regimented Clones’” was one of my favourite expressions as I think we were all victims of a particular type of teaching and learning’ (Dr. ¹Tristan Craddock, personal communication, January 13, 2010). He had used the phrase to illustrate how student teachers in general were conditioned to play a particular role imposed by those in authority. That was my first real day of teacher training.

1.2 Background of the study

I was taught to be a professional teacher – to be critical of the pedagogies taught and learned, to adapt the pedagogies to fit the class profiles, and most importantly, to not ‘blindly’ accept and adopt a fixed way of teaching. As teachers, we were exhorted to be creative in how we engage our pupils so that they in turn would be able to understand and therefore learn (National Institute of Education, 2009).

Yet, even as my fellow student teachers and I were taught not to be ‘regimented clones’, when we entered the schools after graduation, we were required to conform to certain ways of teaching. The worksheet syndrome in Singapore 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 as a tool to assess learning. Much of the classroom teaching is planned around the completion of the worksheets (Cheah, 2004; MOE, 1998; Sullivan, 1997). Worksheets serve another function; they are used to assess whether the teachers have completed what they are required to teach. Schools in

¹ All names in this study (i.e. the four participants, people related to them and to the research process, the schools and the training institute) have been anonymised to protect the participants’ privacy and ensure confidentiality.

general check the files of the pupils during the ²termly holiday breaks in months of March, June and September. The teachers are required to submit the worksheet files of the teaching subjects, such as English language, Mathematics and Science, to the ³Heads of Department (HODs) before the start of the termly breaks. The HODs and/or their assistants, the Level/Subject Heads (LH/SH), would check the files during the termly breaks to ascertain that marking has been done, corrections to the errors committed in the worksheets or books have been completed by the pupils and also have been marked by the teachers, and that the stipulated number of worksheets have been utilized and completed.

In order to complete a certain set of worksheets, which teachers had been given in the beginning of each term or during the term itself, time has to be set aside for the pupils to do the worksheets, and to explain the answers to the questions in the worksheets. 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, ⁴beginning teachers (BTs) need to adjust their teaching time to accommodate the ‘worksheet curriculum’ and in doing so, they have less time to incorporate engaging activities in their lessons. Moreover, as these extra worksheets need to be marked, more time is hence required to be spent on

² There is a one-week break in March and September, and a four-week mid-year break in June.

³ Heads of Department are administrative leadership positions given to the school’s middle managers; they aid the principal in monitoring and running the various departments, and monitoring and assessing the teachers in their respective departments.

⁴ A Beginning Teacher in this study is defined as a teacher in the first 18 months of his / her teaching career after graduation from teacher training. The period of 18 months has been identified as a critical period by Measor (1985) and Sikes, Measor & Woods (1985).

correcting and marking the corrections of these worksheets. This is in addition to the marking of the workbooks and exercises that accompany the course books.

The beginning teachers are hence subjected to socialisation (Veenman, 1984; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985; Zeichner & Gore, 1989) by such schools to plan lessons that accommodate the worksheet curriculum. Though this situation may have been highlighted during teacher training, 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 (Festinger, 1957), as this was not what was advocated in the teacher training institute. This is further compounded when the more experienced teachers tell beginning teachers to put aside what they (i.e. beginning teachers) learned at the teacher training institute, and that teaching to the worksheet & examination (i.e. worksheet pedagogy) is how 'real' teachers teach.

Beginning teachers also feel the need to do well due to performativity pressures (Ball, 2003). 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 to the school's practices. Beginning teachers also need to participate and help out in the planning and organization of school-based programmes and one or two extra-curricular activities. This situation is what Ball (2003) termed as 'performativity':

Performativity is 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)

Ng (2008), Tan (2005) & 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, 2007b). In the EPMS, teachers are assessed on areas in addition to teaching. Being a responsible teacher, in terms of teaching and marking, will 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, particularly related to a systems approach that incorporates an input-output model. However, it is also a discourse because it is a practice that incorporates values, establishes behaviours and affects relations’ (Jeffrey, 2002, p.532). These ‘terrors of performativity’ exert further socialisation pressures on the beginning teachers to conform to the ‘values’ and ‘behaviours’ that the schools regard as important.

As a neophyte to a new organization, pressures to conform are always great (Hoy & Rees, 1977; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Schein, 2004), 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. As Ball (2003) pointed out, '(b)eliefs are no longer important – it is output that counts' (p.223). As a result, cognitive dissonance may arise, especially for those who have very strong ideals of what it means to be a teacher. This will result in a shift or shifts to the beginning teacher's teacher identities.

1.3 Rationale for the choice of topic

As the sole teacher training institute in Singapore, the Teacher Training Institute (TTI) wanted its teacher training to be relevant to the schools, so selected teachers were seconded for a period of time to help with its teacher training. I was one of those seconded teachers from 2006 to 2007. In 2006, during the Teacher's Day Rally held on 31 August, the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, informed the teachers present that there would be an increase of teachers from 28, 000 to 30, 000 by 2010 (MOE, 2006a). That announcement led me to wonder about the new teachers who would be posted to the schools after their training:

Would they be socialised into the school system? How would their teacher identities be configured? Would their teacher identities remain intact or would they shift after they entered the system?

The experience of the first few years of teaching is highly influential in forming positive attitudes to teaching as a career (Bezzina, 2006). Would the socialisation

pressures be a positive one? Or would the ‘profession that eats its young’ (Halford, 1998, p. 33) induce cognitive dissonance? Or would the beginning teachers be able to accept the socialisation pressures and conform? These were the questions that passed through my mind after reading the announcement made by the Prime Minister then.

Not conforming is a lonely affair; for a teacher who holds on to his or her ideals firmly, a performative discourse that ‘refocuses teachers’ attention from the issues of how to interpret curriculum policy to ensuring that delivery of its basic tenets and reproduction of them illustrate the success of the school in the educational market place’ (Jeffrey, 2002, p.537) would be an anathema. Would such a teacher conform to the performative discourse prevalent in the school system? This is the driving force behind my writing this study. This study would serve as a safe haven for my participants to share about their teaching beliefs, their struggles and joys as beginning teachers in the school system, and the experiences that affect and impact their teacher identities.

More recently, in the Ministry of Education’s Workplan Seminar 2009, the then Minister for Education, Dr. Ng Eng Hen, announced that the ministry had met the target of recruiting 30, 000 teachers and would be recruiting even more teachers, so that the ministry would have a teaching force of 33, 000 by 2015 (MOE, 2009b). With this increase, it is hence timely to look into the pressures that the beginning teachers in Singapore face when they enter the school system. Though there have been numerous studies on teacher identities and teacher socialisation, there is a lack of

research focusing on Singapore. In a recent study by Heinrich, Heine & Norenyan (2010), the authors posit the importance of not just relying on studies based on Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic societies. As the contexts and situations differ, it is important to study how Singapore teachers respond to the socialisation pressures exacted on them. Given the lack of research on teacher socialisation and its impact on teacher identity in Singapore, this study is needed. This study focuses on the teacher identity shifts of four primary school beginning teachers as a result of socialisation pressures.

1.4 Research questions

This study is guided by the following primary research questions: *Are beginning teachers' identities and their pedagogical approaches socialized by school systems? If so, in what ways?*

I will be looking at the following sub-questions in order to address the above research questions:

- i. What are the factors that impact the socialisation process?
- ii. What are teachers' aims and beliefs when they begin teaching, and how do these change over time?
- iii. What are the critical events and processes that create these shifts?

This delving into their experiences is akin to a journey, a journey of teacherhood. I seek to learn from their journeys, their stories, just as I share my stories with them.

For as Coles (1989) states, ‘their story, yours, mine – it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them’ (p.30).

1.5 Purpose of study

This study aims to explore how teacher identity in the first 18 months after graduation from teacher training is shaped by the school system. This is a phenomenological study of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ a teacher from both a beginning teacher and a teacher educator perspective. This is done through a narrativization of the journey because:

... learning to teach constitutes a time of biographical crisis as it simultaneously invokes one’s autobiography, ... it is a time when one’s past, present and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach – like teaching itself – is always the process of becoming; a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become (Britzman, 1991, p.8).

This study is set within the context of the lives of four beginning teachers and it focuses on their transition from teacher training and entry into the teaching profession. It explores the tensions that might arise as a result of the conflict between the schools’ demands for strict adherence to established norms and routines, and the participants’ desire to hold onto their ideals. Importantly, it also investigates how this tension affected their identities as teachers. Essentially, it uncovers the never before revealed socialisation process of beginning teachers in the Singapore school system.

1.6 Significance of study

The contributions to teacher education in Singapore I hope to make are three-fold:

First, this study may shed light on the factors affecting the construction and development of teacher identities from the time the new teachers enter teacher training to the time they enter the schools. Second, these insights gleaned can continue and extend the conversation among teacher educators about the importance of addressing teaching beliefs and teacher identity issues during pre-service training as these aspects will impact the beginning teachers' transition into the school system. Third, the insights gleaned can also highlight the importance of expanding the collaboration between the teacher training institute and the schools in the beginning teachers' induction.

1.7 Organising framework

This study is based on the premise that narratives are essential in helping teachers find their voices and rhythms in their practice. As O'Laughlin (1992) posits:

In a world in which teachers are often silenced by the institutional structure of schooling, the most powerful antidote is to affirm their personhood and their experiences and provide a space in which they are enabled to voice their thoughts and examine their experiences. (p. 338)

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) advocate the telling and retelling of our stories in order that we may construct new meaning that will help us begin to live new lives. This is attested to by Chase (1995): 'Contrary to common sense, which assumes that our lives determine our stories, narrative scholars argue that our stories shape our lives and that narration makes self-understanding possible' (p. 7). To understand a person and know

why the person makes certain decisions and takes certain actions, it is crucial to look at his / her experiences. After all, 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p.572); perception is hence reality. Therefore, in order to seek to find out why the participants made certain decisions and respond to situations the way they did, it is crucial to elicit from them their perception of the experiences they encountered in school. When people share their stories of experiences, they think about and understand their individual thinking and actions (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricoeur, 1991; Clough, 2002). Thus, this study adopts a narrative approach. The stories that are shared will be used as raw data for researchers to analyse as they re-story based on narrative elements (Ollenrenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Even as people share their stories, the events that occur in their stories are not framed individually but rather in 'larger structures' (Bruner, 1990, p.64). The use of the narrative plot is hence particularly suitable in such a study. A plot, as defined by Polkinghorne (1995), is 'a type of conceptual scheme by which a contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed' (p.7). In this study, the plotline from Vogler's (2007) adaptation of Joseph Campbell's (1949) stages of the hero's journey is used: namely the stages of 'Crossing the First Threshold', 'Test, Allies, Enemies', 'Approach to Inmost Cave', and 'Facing the Ordeal'. Each stage examines the experiences encountered by each of the participants at various points of his / her journey from teacher training to the end of the 18 months. These stages correspond to the recruitment, training and practicum, encounters in school with the various

stakeholders, such as the school management and colleagues, the transformation as a result of the encounters, and finally the re-storying of one's own identity as a teacher.

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

In **Chapter One**, I have introduced the purpose of my study, the background and the rationale for this study. I have pointed to the importance of framing this study within Singapore as there is a dearth of research in this area in spite of the increasing numbers of teachers being recruited since 2006. As the number of beginning teachers grow, the tensions that might arise as a result of possible conflicts between idealism and reality is real, and hence research is needed to inform possible resolutions.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature in which this study is grounded. This chapter covers the research on beliefs and how beliefs impacts one's practices, the research on socialisation and how it might cause cognitive dissonance as a result, the research on teacher identity and how shifts in teacher identity impacts on teachers' practices, and the pressures of performativity and how that influence behaviours and values. **Chapter Three** describes the rationale for the choice of narrative as the primary method in this study, the research methods, the data collection procedures and the mode of analysis. **Chapter Four** is a reflexive foray into the autobiographical construction of me as a teacher, teacher educator and researcher. Its intent is to illuminate the lens from which I view this study. **Chapters Five & Six** describe and document the participants' journey of becoming teachers; through the use of story and analysis, the two chapters unwrap and reveal the concrete details and nature of the four participants' experiences during their practicum, their first semester (i.e. first six months) and their first full year (i.e. next 12 months). **Chapter Seven** explores the

four themes of 'Socialisation of pedagogic practice', 'Re-construction towards performativity', 'Re-formation of identity', and 'Micropolitics of teaching' found in the narratives of the BTs. Lastly, **Chapter Eight** provides closure to the study as I summarize and reflect on the experiences of the BTs, highlight the insights that emerge from the study relating to teacher training and support of the induction of BTs, and delineate the limitations and contributions of this study. I conclude chapter eight with an epilogue of where the four BTs were after the end of their three-year teaching bond.

Chapter 2: Inquiry into the Literature

This chapter is a survey of relevant research in the field of beliefs, performativity, socialisation, identity and cognitive dissonance. This survey is like a journey of sorts. After all, is it not a belief for many that one can make a difference which calls one to teach? As such, the call to this teaching adventure is one's beliefs. Hence, a survey of the art on beliefs will be addressed first. As one crosses over from preservice training to in-service teaching, one will be assaulted by performativity pressures that have taken a foothold in the organisation of the school systems (Jeffrey, 2002; Tan, 2005; Tan & Ng, 2007; Troman, Jeffrey & Raggl, 2007; Turner-Bisset, 2007; Ng, 2008; Tan, 2008). The literature on performativity will then be looked at. While one is trying to survive in the school system, with the performativity pressures constantly knocking at one's door, one is confronted with the forces of socialisation. Conformity is the normative value in many organisations, thus if one does not submit to these socialisation forces, then the struggle to survive becomes all the harder. Thus, I shall be looking at the literature on socialisation at that point. In the face of such forces, will one be able to hold on to one's identity? Or will one yield and adopt another identity that is alien to one's original self? A survey of the art on identity will then be next. Finally, a look at whether one chooses to accept a new identity or hold on to the original identity will lead to a survey of the literature on how one comes to such a decision – cognitive dissonance theory.

2.1 Call to Adventure - Beliefs

Your beliefs determine your action and your action determines your result, but first you have to believe.

Chicken Soup for the Soul,
Mark Victor Hansen

Different studies over the years have yielded different results with regard to congruence or incongruence between one's beliefs and practices. Before examining the disparate views, it is prudent to understand the term 'beliefs', and then to find out exactly what 'teacher beliefs' mean – What does research have to say about teacher beliefs? What influences teachers' beliefs regarding instructional practice?

2.1.1 Definition of beliefs. Different researchers use 'beliefs' in a myriad of ways. In his influential article, Pajares (1992) states:

... defining beliefs is at best a game of player's choice. They travel in disguise and often under alias – attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perception, conception, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in literature. (p.309)

This inconsistent use of what is meant by beliefs was similarly echoed by Kagan (1992). He found that terms such as 'principles of practice', 'personal epistemologies', 'perspectives', 'practical knowledge', or 'orientations' were used by some researchers in place of 'teacher beliefs' (p.66). Clearly, this lack of a common definition of

'beliefs' is indeed baffling, but perhaps indicative of the complexity embedded within any study of teachers' beliefs. As such, it might be wise to look at the definitions given by established dictionaries.

In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005), 'beliefs' in its plural form is simply defined as 'something that you believe' (p.128). Similarly, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (n.d.) defines 'beliefs' in its plural form as 'an idea that you believe to be true, especially one that forms part of a system of ideas'. This means that 'beliefs' is something or a set of something which is 'believed' – 'to feel certain that something is true; to think that something is true or possible although not completely certain; and to have an opinion that something is right or true' (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005, p.128).

To reiterate, and thereby have a common ground of understanding, the term 'beliefs' is a mental construct of which 'to think', 'to feel' and 'to have an opinion' are mental processes (Thompson, 2004) held to be true or perceived to be true by an individual or a group of individuals. Hence, in the same vein, teacher beliefs in this present research refer to teachers' mental construct – their thoughts, feelings and opinions – of their work perceived to be true or right.

2.1.2 Research on teacher beliefs - congruence. Over the past three decades, teacher education researchers have realized the significance of the complex relationship between teacher beliefs and practices. If teacher beliefs do drive

instructional practices, then it is essential that teacher education programmes address the beliefs of pre-service teachers, and imperative that teacher education programmes seek to know and, perhaps, even direct or influence the beliefs of in-service teachers.

It is with these concerns that an increasing number of research has been done over the years. This concern, as Richardson (1996) puts it, 'calls for research that examines both beliefs and actions ... within teaching and teacher education' (p.114). This view was already held by the National Institute of Education (USA) in their report of a National Conference on Studies in Teaching in 1974; it argued that researchers must study the psychological processes by which teachers perceive and define their professional responsibilities and situations in order to understand, predict and influence what teachers do (National Institute of Education, 1975; cited in Clark & Peterson, 1986).

Since then, there has been a proliferation of research on teacher beliefs. One of the earliest and most well-known studies on beliefs and practices was undertaken by DeFord in 1985. DeFord's Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) consists of 28 statements to determine teachers' beliefs about practices in reading instruction with regard to the areas of phonics, skills and whole language. It was initially administered to 90 teachers, with 14 of them observed. There was a high correlation between the teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices and the observed practices. Studies undertaken by other researchers (Watson, 1984; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991; McGee & Tompkins, 1995) concur with this direct relationship between teacher beliefs and instructional practice.

Watson (1984) studied two teachers after administering DeFord's (1979, 1985) TORP questionnaire. One was skills-oriented while the other was whole-language oriented. They were required to keep a journal and were observed in the classroom while conducting reading instruction. The data were analysed and Watson (1984) reported that in every category, theme or pattern derived from the data, the teachers' instructional practices were congruent with their beliefs. Similarly, Richardson, Anders, Tredwell & Lloyd (1991) interviewed 39 elementary school teachers from six schools about their beliefs and practices in reading. 38 of them were observed twice, and 15 teachers were videotaped during reading instruction. The data were analysed and it was found that the 'practices could quite accurately be predicted from belief interviews' (p.575). In one of the cases where there was a mismatch, Richardson and her fellow researchers suggested that 'a lack of relationship between beliefs and practices may indicate that the teacher is going through a change process' (p.579), and after the change is complete, it was suggested that the two will be aligned.

Another study which demonstrated congruence between teacher beliefs and instructional practices is McGee & Tompkins (1995). The researchers sought to examine the beliefs and practices relationship through analysis of the teachers' personal reflections, and lesson critiques. The four elementary teachers reflected on their personal beliefs about reading and literature, and McGee & Tompkins (1995) framed the teachers' reflections within theoretical perspectives. McGee & Tompkins' (1995) analysis of the lesson plans and reflections revealed a direct relationship between the teachers' articulated beliefs and their planned classroom instruction.

Congruence between beliefs and practice is not just isolated to elementary teachers. Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden & Benjamin (2000) conducted a study of university teachers' intentions and their practices. Its aim was to explore 'the qualitative variation in the way 26 university teachers intended to constitute a subject or topic for their students to learn; how they taught the subject and subsequently what, if any, inconsistencies emerged between intentions and practice' (p.388). Martin *et al* (2000) interviewed 26 university teachers from four disciplines of Social Science & Humanities, Business & Law, Science & Technology, and Health Sciences. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to find out what the teachers hoped their students will learn from them and how they intended to deliver their lessons. Martin *et al* (2000) then undertook two teaching observations for each of the 26 university teachers, and detailed notes were taken during the observations. The notes were used to corroborate or disprove the hypothesis the researchers formed on the basis of the interviews conducted earlier. A phenomenographic analysis was used. They found that there was 'no observed inconsistency between the teachers' intentions and their practices' (p.409). In this research, there was thus a positive relationship between the teachers' mental construct and their instructional practice.

In another research on university teachers, Hativa, Barak and Simhi (2001) did a study to investigate the beliefs and general pedagogical knowledge 'regarding effective teaching strategies' and how it relates to 'their classroom practice' (pp. 703-704). Hativa *et al* (2001) interviewed four exemplary teachers (based on student ratings) from the disciplines of Hebrew literature and Psychology. In addition, the researchers interviewed ten students, videotaped classroom sessions, administered

'effective teaching' questionnaire to students, and examined the materials given to the students and examination questions. Content analysis was utilized for the questionnaire. The data were compared and analysed, and Hativa *et al* (2001) found that 'there is a good ... fit between the teachers' beliefs and knowledge concerning effective strategies and their classroom practice' (p.725). This research showed a positive relationship between beliefs and instructional practice as well.

Another study which also revealed a positive relationship was conducted by Sahin, Bullock & Stables (2002). The aim of the study was to examine 'the relationship between beliefs and their practices at Key Stage 2 (ages 7 – 11) in relation to the use of questioning' (p.371). The researchers interviewed 13 teachers from four schools in the west of England. A year later, seven of the original teachers were interviewed again, and four of them were observed in the classroom. The study revealed that the teachers' use of questioning corresponded to their reported beliefs. Furthermore, the study revealed that the teachers did more than what they reported. The researchers deduced that because the teachers' explanation given during the interviews was context free, the teachers may 'have difficulties in making their implicit beliefs explicit' and may not be 'aware of context as a significant factor that influences their questions or how this influence operates' (p.381).

2.1.3 Research on teacher beliefs - incongruence. The previous study disclosed the fact that perhaps teachers need to be given a specific context during their interviews, so that their responses (i.e. reported beliefs) are as close to what they

really are as possible. Pajares (1992) has also put forward the suggestion that for purposes of research, beliefs must be context specific. Fang (1996), in analysing the earlier research on teacher beliefs and practices, similarly suggests that 'contextual factors can have powerful influences on teachers' beliefs and, in effect, affect their classroom practice' (p.53). Teachers are not aware of this consciously, and thus their statements of beliefs may not always show what they do in the classrooms.

A research that took into account the context in its investigation of the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices is one by Wilson, Konopak and Readance (1992). Wilson *et al* (1992) found inconsistencies between the teachers' reported beliefs and observed practices. They studied a secondary English teacher's beliefs, lesson plans and instructions in relation to content area reading. Kinzer's (1988) packet of belief statements and interviews were administered, lesson plans were collected and observations made. The study revealed that even though the beliefs statements corroborated with the use of a variety of strategies in reading instruction, it was still primarily teacher-directed. Furthermore, in spite of the teacher beliefs in the integration of reading and writing, the only writing activities that were observed involved answering of worksheet questions. This teacher's instructional choices were consistent with her beliefs on the written instruments, but her professed theoretical beliefs were inconsistent with her actual classroom practice. Wilson *et al* (1992) attributed the inconsistencies to the environmental factors of the classroom. Context thus figures highly in the incongruence of beliefs and practices.

There have been more studies that revealed a discrepancy between the professed beliefs and actual instructional practice. Most notably is the study by Wray, Medwell, Poulson & Fox (2002). Wray and his fellow researchers undertook a study to examine the beliefs, practices and knowledge of a group of effective literacy teachers. The beliefs, practices and knowledge of another group of teachers, not identified as such, were used as validation. A questionnaire, adapted from Deford's (1985) TORP, was administered to 228 effective primary school teachers, and another 71 primary teachers as validation. The questionnaire sought to find out about the teachers' beliefs on literacy, instructional approaches and reported use of teaching techniques. 26 teachers of the effective group and 10 teachers of the validation group were observed twice, and interviewed each time. 18 head teachers of those observed were also interviewed.

It was through the analysis of all the data that the researchers surmised that the linkage between professed beliefs and actual practice is 'generally consistent' (p.137), but not totally. There seemed to be a weak link; even though the effective teachers did not express a clear inclination towards using phonics in their orientation, they did incorporate the use of phonics 'in a planned, systematic way' (p.101) in their instructional practice. Perhaps these teachers are deemed effective because they are able to infer the necessity of using phonics in the situated context of their pupils' needs; they adopted a functional approach. Hence, the slight incongruence may stem from the contextual need of helping the children in their literacy needs.

This functional approach seems to be consistent with why there is incongruence between the teacher's beliefs and practices. In a study, Keys (2005) reports on how teachers' statements of beliefs, or expressed beliefs as referred to in the study, influenced the implementation of a new science curriculum. The study was conducted over four school terms in Queensland, Australia. Four primary teachers and three secondary teachers volunteered for this study when the two schools were approached. An educational criticism methodology was utilized in this study. Educational criticism has three frames of verification. The first, which is termed structural corroboration, is the compilation of data, such as the new science curriculum and materials used in the classroom, to find some commonality. The second, which is termed consensual validation, is 'educators sharing with each other their experiences around a common experience' (p.504). This includes interviews, conversations and observations. The third frame, which is termed referential adequacy, is providing a detailed description of what is happening so that the researcher is able to identify with the event (Flinders & Eisner, 1994; cited in Keys, 2005). Three groups – the seven participants, a group of teachers from another school, and a group of academics – discussed the implementation of the new science syllabus through the perspectives of three composite characters (i.e. two primary and one secondary teacher), who incidentally were the synthesis of the seven teacher-participants.

Data from all three frames were analysed, and it was shown that what was espoused in the teachers' beliefs was not demonstrated in their practice. Thus, the researchers labelled them as 'expressed beliefs'. When the teachers were questioned, the response was 'either the lack of time or resource' (p.512). This was a factor mentioned by all

the seven teacher-participants, and which concurs with research (Garet, Porter, Desimona, Birman & Yoon, 2001). Keys (2005) highlights the importance of taking the functional approach towards teaching into consideration when teacher beliefs do not correspond to instructional practice. Likewise, Swan (2006) also highlights this important consideration.

Swan (2006) reports on a study which aimed to analyse the development of Mathematics teachers' practices and beliefs and evaluate the effects of intervention. 64 Mathematics teachers, from 44 different Further Education (FE) colleges in England, participated in this study. The teachers were given a 'beliefs' questionnaire and a 'practices' questionnaire. Three independent methods were used to check the reliability and validity of the two questionnaires – pen portrait descriptions of themselves, lesson observations by an independent observer, and student questionnaires. Six of the pen portraits were selected, six of the teachers were observed and 47 of the teachers administered student questionnaires to 360 students.

The data were analysed, and discrepancies were revealed between beliefs and practices. The teachers were asked for possible reasons for the discrepancies, and out of the 43 replies, 40 stated that they 'felt unable to teach in their preferred style' due to 'a perceived need for syllabus coverage, a lack of suitable resources, the social pressures of the FE culture and a low expectation of the capacity of the GCSE students to take advantage of the approaches' (p.65). Again, this study demonstrated the importance of taking into consideration the context when teacher beliefs do not

correspond with instructional practices. The context demands that the teachers take a more functional approach towards teaching. This functional approach seems to help the teachers to 'keep their heads above water' – completing the syllabus within a limited span of time or with limited resources.

Marsh's (2006) research is another study which highlights the need to take this crucial factor into due consideration. The aim of the study was to determine the beliefs and experiences (i.e. practices) of pre-service teachers in relation to the use of popular culture in the primary literacy curriculum during their teaching placements. 119 pre-service teachers in a university in the north of England were involved in this study. The first year students were administered an 'attitudes, beliefs and experiences' questionnaire on the use of popular culture in the primary literacy curriculum. Over the span of the three-year undergraduate course, 18 students were interviewed in group and individual formats to ascertain more details as regards their beliefs and experiences with the use of popular culture in the classroom. They were also tasked to complete concept maps which would reflect 'the influences on their construction of the literacy curriculum' (p.182). A final questionnaire was administered to 42 students who attended the lecture during the last weeks of the course.

The data were analysed, and there was a clear disparity between a belief in the possibility of using popular culture in the literacy curriculum, and the lack of it in the actual practice during pre-service teachers' placements. The literacy curriculum was 'a key inhibiting factor for the students throughout the study' (p.186). A majority of

the students cited this as a reason for this non-alignment of beliefs and practices.

Although other factors, such as lack of confidence, the pre-service teachers' own school experiences, perceived suitability of texts and lack of guidance, also influenced the choices made by the pre-service teachers, it can be seen that the contextual factor (i.e. completing the literacy curriculum within a prescribed time span) played a large part in restricting their beliefs from manifesting in their practices.

The contextual factors of limited time and a 'unwieldy' curriculum seem to have a huge role in the disparity between beliefs and practices. Hugh Munby (1982), in his critique of the research on educational beliefs, make mention of this. He states that 'it might be the case that quite different and weightier beliefs are responsible for the ways in which these teachers act in their classrooms' (p.216). These external influences, such as the school, the principal, the community or the curriculum, have been noted as constraints on teachers' classroom practices as far back as 1986 (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

So what does this mean? Do teachers' beliefs impact actual practices? Or does it not?

As can be seen from a review of the above studies, there are instances whereby professed teacher beliefs do not correspond to the actual instructional practice in the classroom. As alluded to in some cases, it is very likely due to contextual factors.

2.1.4 Impact of the belief system. It is generally agreed that teachers' educational beliefs do shape the nature of their instructional practices (Clark &

Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). Yet, some studies also suggest that the challenges of classroom teaching very often place constraints on the teachers' ability to incorporate practices that are congruent to their beliefs (Munby, 1982; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fang, 1996; Keys, 2005). In the light of this, Pajares (1992) has warned that detaching educational beliefs from and leaving them unconnected to a broader belief is 'ill advised and probably unproductive' (p.326). He advocates the importance of thinking of connections among beliefs, instead of beliefs as independent sub-systems. Likewise, Richardson, Anders, Tredwell & Lloyd (1991) formulates theoretical orientations as 'sets or systems of individual beliefs' (p.562).

If this is so, what then is a set or system of beliefs? And how does it explain its influence on actual instructional practice? Green (1971) provided an illuminating study on belief systems. He contended that there are several dimensions of belief systems, three of which are of relevance in this study. The first is the idea of 'centrality'.

Centrality of a belief is the core basis of its strength and the number of connections it has with other beliefs. Other beliefs are held because they are offshoots of a central belief, and any permutation in a central belief would have significant ramifications for the individual's belief system. This may be quite unnerving and dissonant for the individual. Consequentially, centrally-held beliefs are usually not susceptible to change.

The second dimension of Green's description of belief systems is the phenomenon of 'clustering'. This means that a group or cluster of beliefs can be held in isolation from other beliefs. As a result, an individual may hold certain beliefs that contradict one other, without being aware of it. According to Green (1971), such clustering occurs when beliefs are formed in disparate contexts.

The third dimension of beliefs relates to the reasons with which they are perceived. They may be held as a consequence of evidence, in which case they are said to be evidentially held, or they may be held because of a perceived authority of its origin, or because they are held as a consequence of another belief which may or may not be evidentially held. As such, evidentially held beliefs are susceptible to change due to conflicting evidence or evidence to the contrary. Non-evidentially held beliefs on the other hand are highly resistant to change due to the fact that it is not influenced by any evidence for or to the contrary.

Implicit in both the centrality and clustering of beliefs is the importance of context. The relative centrality of beliefs varies according to the context. For example, in the context of pre-service teacher training, the student teacher might agree with the importance of student-centred approaches in motivating and enabling his/her future pupils to learn and to understand the lesson, but in the context of his/her primary six class, his/her beliefs in the importance of maintaining control of the class and the need to finish the syllabus and the related beliefs that teacher-directed approaches are more

effective could be more central. As a consequence, teacher-directed approaches instead of student-centred ones are used in the classroom.

The concept of clustering might provide an alternative way of looking at the above situation and offer an alternative explanation for the apparent lack of congruence between stated beliefs and classroom practices. It permits the possibility that a teacher might hold contradictory beliefs developed in entirely different contexts. Beliefs formed as a result of his/her own primary experience, beliefs formed as a result of preservice training, and beliefs formed as a result of a bad or good classroom teaching placement experience may each contain opposing and conflicting elements which the teacher may not be mindful of.

Thus, the concepts of centrality and clustering should be borne in mind when teacher beliefs are not congruent with instructional practice. The teacher may only be reporting or professing certain central beliefs or certain cluster of beliefs, and not all of his/her set of beliefs. Depending on the context in which he/she is put in, certain central beliefs or cluster of beliefs may dominate, and hence that is the belief that will influence the instructional practice of that teacher. That may or may not be the belief which was reported or professed.

2.2 Crossing the Threshold into Performativity

- Co-opt (verb):* to include somebody in something, often when they do not want to be part of it
- Possession (noun):* the situation when somebody's mind is believed to be controlled by the Devil or by an evil spirit

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (7th ed., 2005)

From 2003, an Enhanced Performance Management System, abbreviated as EPMS, was phased in to appraise teachers throughout the Ministry of Education and its schools in Singapore. Each teacher was given a file that specified and detailed the definitions and workings of this system. In the section on Tools, in the Performance Management Guide, it provided a definition of performance management:

Performance management is an on-going process that involves:

- Establishing a shared understanding between Reporting Officers and their Jobholders on what needs to be achieved, i.e. the targets and expectations;
- Equipping Jobholders with the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to accomplish their targets;
- Increasing communication about performance between Reporting Officers and their Jobholders so that Jobholders know how they are doing and how they can further improve their performance; and
- Evaluating Jobholders' performance and recognising their achievements and contributions.

(Ministry of Education, 2003, p.2)

The teachers are expected to have a good understanding of the enhanced system as it will not only help 'individual officers in clarifying their development', but it will also help them to 'set achievable benchmark levels', so that these officers will 'level up to a higher level of competency' (Ministry of Education, 2003). This is symptomatic of a performativity culture which 'requires individual practitioners to organise themselves

as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations' (Ball, 2003, p.215). At this juncture before proceeding further, it is prudent to ask a simple question – what is performativity?

2.2.1 Performativity. Performativity, as defined by Ball (2003, p.216), 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)'. 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 pupils 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. 549-550). 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, 2004).

2.2.2 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 year-end reports, the lesson observations and the list of achievements become tools that are used to promote one's visibility and worth.

Reconstructed relations. Such visibility requirements are not confined to individual teachers. Schools as organisations are also subject to these performativity pressures. 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). And so the monitoring of its teachers cannot be left to chance. Managing the beliefs, the work culture, and the level of production output is hence as important as, if not more important than, overseeing the design and implementation of the curriculum, which were the primary responsibilities of the 'managers' in the past. The new 'managers' must now evaluate the worth of the individual teacher's contributions and outputs, and judge if it is of value to the school's overall visibility; the new 'managers' must now assign a grade to each individual teacher relative to another based on his or her performances in that year of appraisal, and with that grade, the performance monetary incentives. Thus, a more defined and segregated hierarchy of positions is thus created. With the categorization of teachers by grade based on their individual performances, formerly 'collegial relations gave way to hierarchical relations' (Jeffrey, 2002, p.539).

Reconstructed time. Performativity pressures on both school and teachers will thus intensify the work that is required on the part of teachers. Activities related to teaching, which are termed first order activities, increase due to pressures to ensure that the pupils perform well academically as well as in non-academic areas.

Thus, extra lessons, such as supplementary and remedial classes, for the purposes of covering more content in one and helping the struggling pupils have a basic understanding of the lessons covered during normal curriculum hours in the other, are scheduled in addition to normal class time. Extra practice sessions are also planned so that pupils in sports- or performing arts-related clubs have more opportunities to train for competitions and thus have a higher chance of ‘producing’ medals.

As a consequence, second order activities, which are the setting up of monitoring and management systems that collect evidence for the appraisal and review reports, also intensify. Such activities ‘consume vast amounts of time and energy and reduce the time and energy which teachers can spend on genuine innovative teaching or a real focus on teaching and learning’ (Turner-Bisset, 2007, p.195). Such gathering of performative information takes a toll on the overall time and energy available for the teacher; as a result, less energy is left for the teacher to make any improvements in his or her pedagogical practice (Ball, 2003, 2004).

Reconstructed pedagogical practice. Due to the performativity discourse enacted in schools, the relations with parents have fundamentally changed. It is 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, which indirectly implies the teachers' ability, 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. In so doing, 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 Ball's).

Yet, what works is subjective. There are scores of pedagogic practices that will enable pupils 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, 2004, 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 rigours of performance on the other' (Ball, 2004, p.146). Accordingly, performativity would require a potential sacrifice of professionalism for accountability.

2.2.3 Performativity in Singapore. Singapore's education system has embraced the performativity discourse to a large extent. Studies by E.T.J. Tan (2005), C. Tan & Ng (2007), Ng (2008) and C. Tan (2008) have documented the ways the Singapore education system adopted the performativity discourse. This rise in performativity is achieved through the School Excellence Model (SEM), the Masterplan of Awards (MoA), the list of comparable schools given to each primary school, and the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS).

School Excellence Model (SEM). The SEM was introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2000 as a form of quality assurance. The then Minister for Education, Rear-Admiral Teo Chee Hean, lauded this approach of measuring the schools' success:

The Schools Excellence Model (or SEM), which was implemented fully in 2000, has provided schools with a more systematic framework and holistic approach to self-assessment. By *measuring both outcomes and processes*, and requiring schools to examine their practices not independently, but as parts contributing to a whole, SEM is structured to emphasise holistic education. The SEM requires every school to continuously question its current practices and established norms, and think of more creative and effective ways of *delivering* the desired outcomes of education. (Ministry of Education, 2002a; emphasis added)

Schools are required to audit themselves at the end of each academic year, and it is a common practice for school teachers to devote the last week of the academic year and the first week of the year-end holiday to gather the necessary evidence for the compilation of the SEM report. The SEM report requires evidence of the following:

- a sound and integrated approach for systematic, continuous improvement for all criteria of quality defined by the model;
- a systematic deployment of the approach and the degree of implementation;
- a regular assessment and review of the approaches and their deployment, based on monitoring and analysis of the results achieved and on-going activities;
- an identification, prioritisation, planning and implementation of improvement activities;
- a set of appropriate and challenging performance targets;
- a continuous improvement of results over three to five years;
- a benchmarking of performance against comparable schools;
- an identification of the causes of good or bad results.

(Ng, 2003, p.30)

Thus, in the words of Ball (2003), SEM reports can be said to be ‘a variety of formal textual accounts of themselves in the form of development plans, strategic documents, sets of objectives, etc’ (pp.225-226). This is an example of what Ball (2003, 2004) terms as ‘fabrications’. Fabrications are:

based upon one, or some, of a possible range of representations or versions of the organisation or person. These versions are written into existence in performative texts. This involves the use and re-use of the right signifiers. ... Within the performative regime, it is likely, however, that the choice of those representations which are to be privileged and cultivated will be ‘informed’ or driven by the priorities, constraints and climate set by the policy environment – examination results, retention, racial equality, social participation. (Ball, 2003, p.224)

Approximately once in five years, an external team sent by the Ministry of Education (MOE), called the External Validation (EV) team, will validate the results of the school's SEM reports using the same set of criteria used in compiling the reports. The EV teams will include 'members from outside the education fraternity' so that the practices in the schools 'can be compared against good practices in business and industry' (Ministry of Education, 2002a). The benchmarking and comparison of school practices to business and industry practices by the then Minister for Education is a clear allusion to a business model of education. After all, the SEM is 'a self-assessment model for schools, adapted from the various quality models used by business organisations, namely the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM), the Singapore Quality Award (SQA) model and the education version of the American Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award model (MBNQA)' (Ng, 2003, p.28).

Profit is the *raison d'être* of business; could the 'profits' of rising academic scores and winning awards be the *raison d'être* of the schools in such a performative system?

Masterplan of Awards (MoA). Related to the SEM is the Masterplan of Awards. The MoA was instituted in 1998 as part of the implementation of the SEM. The Ministry of Education's rationale for the MoA as stated in the official document:

The MoA is a key instrument for recognising schools' achievements. With the MoA as a guide, a school can embark on its journey to excellence and make progress through self-assessment, benchmarking, and continuous improvement.

The awards serve as important milestones in this journey. (Ministry of Education, 2005)

These awards are presented to the schools at the yearly Ministry of Education's Workplan Seminar by the Minister for Education. It is an event attended by all Singapore school leaders and senior Ministry officials. The list of award winners is also released to the press prior to the Workplan Seminar. When the schools are able to sustain their excellence in achieving these awards for three consecutive years, the schools will obtain a Level Two award, and upon reception of such awards, the schools are given the 'privilege of using the award logos for as long as the awards are valid' (Ministry of Education, 2005). Schools thus submit themselves to the rigours of the system so as to achieve these awards that validate their efforts at being 'excellent schools'. In a sense, the 'fabrication becomes something to be sustained, lived up to' (Ball, 2004, p.148).

Comparable schools. In the Singapore primary school system, there is no official table of schools for comparison, unlike the secondary schools' School Achievement Tables. However, each primary school is given a list of comparable schools from which to choose and be benchmarked against. These comparable schools are 'comparable' in terms of the socio-economic status of the pupils' families, ethnic ratio of the total school population, and the school parents' educational attainment. The schools' results in the national Primary Six Leaving Examination (PSLE) are compared to the ten similar schools. It is a yardstick of comparison for the school's management, so that they can ascertain their level of competency in delivering the academic results when compared to schools of similar pupil profiles. The

performances of the school, thus, in a sense, 'must be constructed or fabricated with an eye to the competition' (Ball, 2003, p.224).

Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS). While the SEM, MoA and comparable schools are used to hold school leaders accountable, the EPMS is used to appraise and hold teachers in the system accountable. During the ⁵Committee of Supply Debate in the Government Financial Year of 2007, the then Minister of State for Education, Lui Tuck Yew, clarified the purpose of the EPMS when some concerns were raised about this form of appraisal:

The EPMS allows a holistic assessment on our educators' performance based on competencies and follows a more structured process to help them identify areas for training and improvement. The system spells out the knowledge and skills required as well as the professional characteristics and behaviour patterns appropriate for each of the three different career tracks, namely Teaching, Senior Specialist and Leadership. (Ministry of Education, 2007)

Using the EPMS, teachers are required to draft and 'record the targets and performance expectations agreed upon' with their reporting officers and be 'aware of the target levels for all the competencies that are relevant to his (sic) role' (Ministry of Education, EPMS, Tools, p.18). This is similar to what Woods & Jeffrey (2002) listed as one of the teacher dilemmas:

⁵ Committee of Supply: A Committee of the whole Parliament that considers the business of Supply. It usually sits for seven days or more in March to deal with the estimates of expenditure for the coming financial year. The Committee considers each ministry's request for funds and votes on it. (<http://www.parliament.gov.sg/Publications/glossaryC.htm>)

Consumerism has replaced care. *Measurable quantities* have replaced immeasurable qualities in assessment. Audit accountability sidesteps the personal and local, putting emphasis on the abstract and the universal. *Competencies* have replaced personal qualities as criteria of the good teacher. (p.97; emphasis added)

The teacher is no longer portrayed as the professional, but more like the 'post professional'. 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, 2004, p.17). The 'post professional' is one who 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, and they tend to interpret a "thinking school" as one where thinking skills are taught explicitly with the help of "thinking worksheets" and "thinking programmes"' (Tan, 2008, p.118).

Examples of performativity in Singapore. A study (Wolf & BokHorst-Heng, 2008) was conducted in one Singapore secondary school. It was on how the performativity discourse affected the running of the school's extensive reading programme. The researchers found that the school's extensive reading programme has a 'strong outcome-based orientation with a niggling need to *monitor* and *quantify* reading: student weekly newspaper summaries are required and a student daily reading log must be maintained and updated' (p.156; emphasis added). This is

actually symptomatic of schools that need to document its school-based programmes for the year-end SEM report. A teacher from the school tellingly revealed that ‘the use of number of books read is an important SEM measure so there must be *hard evidence* to show that students are progressing in their reading’ (p.160; emphasis added). One of the key factors for the success of extensive reading programmes is non-accountability (McCracken, 1971; Pilgreen, 2000). Yet, both the researchers, Wolf & Bokhorst-Heng, noted that the ‘teachers and school leaders felt a need for “hard evidence” of progress’ (p.161).

Even though the SEM is supposed to encourage schools to ‘think of more creative and effective ways of delivering the desired outcomes of education’ (Ministry of Education, 2002a), in reality, as Wolf & Bokhorst-Heng (2008) concluded, the opposite resulted – the SEM ‘created new and heightened anxieties about reading outcomes’ (p.161) and impeded ‘the very goals of passion and engagement embedded in ER’ (p.162). The performativity discourse embedded within SEM ‘created a tension between reading for pleasure and the priority and procedures to monitor reading and measure outcomes’ (p.162).

In another study (Loh, 2009), in this case a primary school, even though the teacher as a role model has been widely cited by research as a key factor in the success of an extensive reading programme (Pluck, Ghafari, Glynn & McNaughton, 1984; Wheldall and Entwistle, 1988; Widdowson, Dixon & Moore, 1996; Day & Bamford, 2002; Methe and Hintze, 2003), on average, over the span of the ten weeks during the study

(Loh, 2009), there was not even an average of two teachers reading during the extensive reading programme in the mornings. The teachers in the school were heavily involved in many other programmes during the extensive reading time slot – enrichment and remedial programmes. The researcher noted that:

The high emphasis placed on academic results by the school seems to have pervaded the school's culture. As such, reading has been de-emphasized unknowingly. The teachers might have been caught up with this *result-oriented* pursuit and hence might have felt that reading as a pleasurable activity is out of place in such a culture, such a system. (p.108; emphasis original)

Many of the teachers in this study acknowledge the importance of reading, as demonstrated by one of the many similar responses during the interview:

They have to take it very seriously. They themselves should be good role models. They should also read during this period so that the children will also take it seriously. They see that the teachers are reading so they would think it's important. (p. 109)

Yet due to the heavy emphasis on ensuring that the pupils do well for the examinations, they had to spend a large part of the extensive reading time running the other programmes. Loh (2009) notes: 'Taking the time to model the act of reading prevents them from carrying out these duties, and they may be seen as insubordinate if they fail to carry them out just so they can model reading' (p.108). Since these other programmes will directly impact the examination results, they are thus given a greater weighting of importance by the school management.

The two case studies are accurate portrayals of the malaise that has gripped an education system driven by a performativity discourse. This is attested to by Charlene Tan (2008) who surveyed and reviewed the state of Singapore's education system in its drive towards performativity:

Innovative programmes, projects and lessons will remain superficial and peripheral as long as schools in Singapore still rely on academic performance as a measure of success. ... School leaders and teachers are likely to stick slavishly to strategies that best produce the outcomes demanded in the SEM, the Masterplan of Awards and the EPMS. (pp.118-119)

This was the context that the four BTs found themselves upon graduation as trained teachers. Whatever their ideas and beliefs they held about constructivist teaching, they had to take a backseat to the performativity discourse driving the school system – the outcomes that measure the success of the schools, the school leaders and the teachers dictated the practice within the schools.

2.2.4 Reformation of the teacher's soul. The new teacher, 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, managerialism and performativity – are not merely tools to reform the state of the organisations, but are also tools with which to reform the teacher. Hence, in the discourse of educational reform, he posits that it is actually a struggle for the teacher's soul.

The soul referred to here is not the 'ontic or metaphysical soul, but the phenomenological self, experienced as one's own cognitive consciousness' (Chua, 2009, p.162). It is the consciousness that is signified by the responses to the self-reflexive questions of 'Who am I?' and 'What do I believe in?'

Co-option of the teacher's soul. In the performativity discourse, the 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?

Possession of the teacher's soul. 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 pupils winning medals in sporting- or performing-related competitions will reap huge psychic rewards when their pupils 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), the performativity culture that celebrates academic and competition achievements above all else is thus welcomed and embraced. This is especially seductive for the beginning teachers since they are fundamentally 'unsure about the value of their teaching and assessment strategies'. 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 giving feedback. 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 to obtain it is not of paramount importance. In other words, the end justifies 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 pupils do well during the examinations, and since the most efficient way of doing so is to utilise 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 pupils produce tactical improvements – pushing the A-grade pupils 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 almost futile. Especially since the schools as organisations will seek to orientate, acculturate and assimilate all new teachers to a certain mode of operation, be it inside the classroom or outside. And to this, I now turn.

2.3 Trials of Socialisation

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind...

Meditation XVII
John Donne

Three decades ago, with the publication of *'Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study'* (Lortie, 1975) and *'The Socialisation of Teachers'* (Lacey, 1977), teacher socialisation gained a new level of emphasis. It was developed to help universities and its student teachers 'become aware of the social forces structuring their perspectives, ...' (Lacey, 1977, p.153). Since that time, a plethora of research has emerged to add on to our knowledge of teacher socialisation (Hoy & Rees, 1977; Pataniczek & Isaacson, 1981; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, 1985; Veenman, 1984; Jordell, 1987; Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Hansen, 1995; Brower & Korthagen, 2005; Marks, 2007).

Before one can decide if teacher socialisation influences one's personal beliefs, it is prudent to learn more about the concept of socialisation – what it is, what it entails, and why it occurs. To do so, we would need to understand the more general sociological concepts of habitus and professional socialisation before we delve specifically into the concept of teacher socialisation and why it occurs.

2.3.1 Habitus. Habitus, as defined by Bourdieu (1990), is a system of:

durable, transposable dispositions, structural structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (p.53)

Simply put, it is a set of dispositions or inclinations that govern and generate the actions of individuals subconsciously, without willing it to be so. The freedom of will, rather than the deliberate choice of pursuing and following a set of rules, principles and expectations, accords it its very essence, its very power.

Habitus derives its form from 'practical hypotheses based on past experience' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54). The past experienced through one's interactions in the social world, such as the family, the tribe, the village or the school, creates and perpetuates a set of dispositions or inclinations that will reproduce 'those actions, perceptions, and attitudes consistent with the conditions under which it was produced' (Swartz, 1997, p. 103). Hence, the very past and present influences will create an impact on the decision-making of the future; it moulds and directs possible future choices. As such, it provides a 'practical evaluation of the likelihood of the success of a given action in a given situation (that) brings into play a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical precepts' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.77) with which to guide in making our possible choices.

Habitus not only influences individual actions, but also 'collective practices in accordance with the schemes generated by history', or past experiences (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54). A real example would be a teenager involved in a teen-gang whereby all the members smoked, spouted expletives and are always game for a fight. Over time, a period of history or past experiences, the teenager becomes susceptible to these influences subconsciously and this creates certain dispositions within the teenager to smoke, spout expletives and be willing to get into fights. As Bourdieu (1990) would say:

The objective homogenizing of group or class habitus that results from homogeneity of conditions of existence is what enables practice to be objectively harmonized without any calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or, a fortiori, explicit co-ordination. (pp. 58 – 59)

Habitus creates a habitual state from which individuals and groups of individuals internalize the social experience, social structures, social perceptions and social practices, and which produces a propensity to reproduce that which was absorbed. With an understanding of the sociological concept of *habitus*, and how it influences group or class actions, we can now turn to the general concept of professional socialisation.

2.3.2 Deformation professionnelle. As members of different professions, there are certain rules, expectations, values and norms required of its members. Being a doctor, nurse, lawyer, accountant, pilot or other professional means there is a

necessity not only to learn but also to adopt these requisites that epitomize the profession. Any violation is frowned upon and might even lead to expulsion from the particular profession. It is thus important to know where these requisites come from, and how they are passed to the neophytes.

The concept of culture provides an illuminating answer to these questions (Schein, 2004). As defined by Schein (2004), culture is

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

As such, when new members enter the organization, the organization in its own way will share and pass its culture to them (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Schein, 2004).

The socialisation process has been systematically studied from a variety of perspectives and professions for the past few decades (Becker *et al*, 1961; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Harvill, 1981; Lurie, 1981; Sabari, 1985; Templin & Schemp, 1989; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993b; Bischoff, 1995; du Toit, 1995; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Clark, 1997; Reutter, Field, Campbell & Day, 1997; Ashforth, Saks & Lee, 1998; Kneafsey, 2000; Wood, 2006). Over this time, a number of definitions have been formulated and utilized by several of the researchers:

Brim (1966) defined socialisation as ‘the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and of society’ (p. 3). In a similar vein, Durkheim’s (1953) influential perspective of socialisation has it as the study of how an individual comes to be aware of and to acquire the socio-moral rules. Merton (1957) defined ‘occupational socialisation’ as ‘the process by which people selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge – in short, the culture – current in the group of which they are, or seek to become, a member’ (p.278). Hoy & Rees (1977) defined ‘bureaucratic socialisation’ as ‘the organization’s attempt to induce consensus between newcomers and the rest of the organization’ (p.23).

Van Maanen (1978) defined ‘organizational socialisation’ as ‘the manner in which the experiences of people learning the ropes of a new organizational position, status, or role are structured for them by others within the organization’ (p.19). Similarly, Van Maanen & Schein (1979) defined it as ‘the process by which one is taught and learns the ropes of a particular organizational role’ (p.211). Freshour & Hollman (1990) defined ‘organizational socialisation’ as the ‘process by which an organization changes a newcomer so that he or she successfully fits into the organization’ (p.79). Tierney & Rhoads (1993a) defined ‘organizational socialisation’ as a ‘ritualized process that involves the transmission of culture’ (p.21).

Before the various definitions can be juxtaposed effectively for a common understanding within this research, it is good to first define what a profession is.

Frankel (1989) defined a profession as ‘a moral community of shared norms, values and definitions of appropriate behavior’ (pp.110 – 111). This definition encompasses many of the specific requisites listed in the abovementioned socialisation definitions. Instead of using ‘occupational’, ‘organizational’ or ‘bureaucratic’ as the premodifying term of socialisation, which might prove to be too restrictive, this paper opines the unequivocal use of ‘professional socialisation’ whereby it is used to convey a transference of culture, dispositions and an understanding of what it means to be a member of that particular profession and which includes the specific requisites of ‘profession’.

As a process, professional socialisation has engendered two aspects – pre-entry (anticipatory) and post-entry (after training / organizational stage). This paper focuses on the influence of the profession on the individual neophyte after the training phase in the immediate post-entry period. This is the period whereby the novice practitioner becomes professional (hence professional socialisation). This transformatory period is one in which the neophyte’s values may be challenged and transformed to reflect the normative standards and symbols which are held in high regard by the profession; accordingly, a change of behaviour. This is what Moore (1970) termed ‘deformation professionnelle’. It refers to a mutation or evolution of one’s character as one enters and engages in an occupational milieu (Moore, 1970).

2.3.3 Research on professional socialisation. In a famous study on the socialisation of medical students, Becker *et al* (1961) revealed how the medical students adapted their attitudes and behaviour according to the contexts. Their idealism became more realistic and pragmatic at the end of their training. Mortimer & Lorence's (1979) longitudinal study on male college graduates showed that the intrinsic, people-oriented and extrinsic values conformed to that of their work over a period of ten years. Similarly, Melia (1984) demonstrated how nurses knew how to adapt to the contexts in which they were in. They changed their behaviour from the education context to the service context in order to meet the expectations of those they worked with. In Bradby's (1990) classic professional socialisation study, it was revealed that the nursing students experienced 'reality shock' upon entering the clinic situation and that they had to learn and conform to the institutional norms of traditional nursing practices.

These are but four socialisation research studies over the past four decades. In the past 15 years, there has been a renewed interest and hence a proliferation of socialisation research. It is crucial therefore to ascertain if there is a common underlying pattern to professional socialisation in the midst of all this burgeoning information. I shall hence look at the socialisation research in general and attempt to sieve out the commonality underlying them, before moving on to the teacher socialisation literature.

In Wales, Philpin's (1999) aim was to uncover in what ways the changes in nursing education, implemented through 'Project 2000', had influenced the acquisition of nursing culture. Project 2000 emphasized nursing theory, biological and social

sciences more than the previous programmes. It also included research and critical research use components, as well as more emphasis on interpersonal and skill management. This was in large part very different from the previous programmes and thus would lead to a creation of a different breed of nurses. Eighteen qualified nurses in three Welsh hospitals were sampled for this research, of which nine were trained in the traditional framework and nine in the Project 2000 framework. The traditional nurses had at least three years of experience and the Project 2000 nurses had at least one year of experience. Semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and a constant comparative method was used to analyse the data.

The discovery was that the context of socialisation was of prime importance. The Project 2000 nurses who were in Acute areas of hospital work were treated harshly and had negative sanctions used on them to ensure compliance and conformity to ward culture. On the other hand, those in the Chronic areas had a more satisfactory socialisation experience, and were even able to influence ward culture. Both groups conformed to the existing ward culture, one more so than the other, with one group being compelled to and the other willingly due to an understanding of the economic constraints placed on them.

Kneafsey (2000) in her review of the many recent nursing socialisation studies, argued that 'the values, attitudes and skills nurses learn as they are socialized into the nursing culture serve to impede attempts to improve patient handling techniques' (p.588). This was in spite of the 1992 legislation on patient handling practices in the

U.K. The purpose of the legislation was to lessen the high incidence of back pains among nurses. She posited that the nurses had been socialized into a culture where the normal handling of patients is the established norm of behaviour, and that back injuries were to be expected and accepted. This was the culture that new nurses were socialised into. Finally, she suggested that if existing practice is to change, the culture with which new nurses are socialised into must change, starting with the re-training of the existing 'gate-keepers' – the senior staff nurses.

In a study on Corrections officers, Ulmer's (1992) aim was to find out the factors that foster or hinder the formation of cynicism toward prison administration. The study was based on a 20-item survey of 198 first line Corrections officers at a medium-sized, medium security state prison in the rural Midwest of the United States. The survey was administered to two groups – a group of newly-hired officers about to enter the corrections training academy, and another group that had just returned from the academy. Out of the 198 officers, 161 had at least one month's work experience, 22 had just completed academy training and 15 about to enter academy training. The results revealed that newly hired officers had idealized definitions of prison work, but cynicism ran high among those with only one month's experience. Thus, the finding revealed that officers 'become cynical toward prison administration within their first month of duty' (p.431). It was also found that a cynicism subculture existed among the corrections officers and it was the cynical subgroup which socialised and led the new officers to cynicism.

Similarly, in a study on new police recruits, Stradling, Crowe & Tuohy (1993) revealed a socialisation of police recruits towards a more cynical operational style. Five groups of male recruits, numbering 369, from an English provincial police force were surveyed on a 27-self-concept-item questionnaire. One group was surveyed at entry, three groups at different stages of their two-year probationary period and one immediately after the two-year probationary period. In the comparison between groups, it was revealed that the emotional openness, empathy and commitment lessened considerably over time. The officers after probation had 'set aside some of their initial commitment', and had 'shed large amounts of their sensitivity to and consideration for the feelings of others' (p.145). This was attributed to a defence mechanism termed 'protective cynicism' (p.140). It is a strategy used to cope with the exigencies of the job; a strategy quickly adopted as the officers conformed with the work group practices – in other words, professional socialisation.

In a more recent study, Mitus (2006) surveyed 168 rehabilitation counselors with six to 24 months of work experience. The counselors were divided into three groups – early socialisation (six – 12 months), mid-socialisation (13 – 18 months) and late socialisation (19 – 24 months). The aim was 'to investigate the role of organizational (sic) socialisation ... on the affective commitment of rehabilitative counselors' (p.12). The results showed that the rehabilitative counselors learned most about their job scope and its practices in the initial 12 months of socialisation, and with this growth in knowledge, their affective commitment to the organization they were working with grew. As the focus of this study was on the level of affective commitment in relation to professional socialisation, it did not explicitly state whether the counselors

conformed to the existing practices of the organization, but it did so implicitly. Since the counselors had higher levels of affective commitment due to them learning more about the organization's goals and values, the conjecture of the study was that there was a good 'person-organization fit' (p.18), and since there was such a fit, it implies a congruence of values and practices, at least to a large part.

As can be seen from the research, professions shape people. Their views are coloured, adapted or modified in some way by the very profession they chose to be in. As mentioned by Lortie (1975, 1990), 'scholars as diverse as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, William James, and Thorstein Veblen have discussed the profound influence work has on human personality' (p.55). After all, so much time and energy are spent in one's work over a lifetime; this is to be expected. More specifically, the first period in any new profession has been described by Van Maanen (1976) and Van Maanen & Schein (1979) as the most influential period of professional socialisation. They posit that the immediate period just before and after a particular boundary in the organization is more powerful and more intense for the socialisation of its neophytes than any other.

This is pointedly similar to what Wanous (1980, 1992) suggested. He postulated that when individuals enter an organization, they either find corroboration or disproof of their expectations. Soon, through role ascription and role taking, individuals learn to function within the organization. This process is accompanied by the establishment of commitments, imbibing the values and learning the behaviours consistent with the

organization. Subsequently, they become insiders – professionals. This would be the four-stage socialisation process as described and suggested by Wanous (1980, 1992):

- 1) confronting and accepting organizational reality;
- 2) achieving role clarity;
- 3) locating oneself in the organizational context;
- 4) detecting signposts of successful socialisation.

This would also bring into question studies that focus solely on anticipatory socialisation, such as Elias (2006). The author did a study on accounting students' ethical awareness and sensitivity during their college years. He contends that it is possible to shape the future accountants' ethical sensitivity at this early stage. His results revealed that the 'undergraduate accounting students exhibited a high degree of commitment to the accounting profession' (p.88) and hence were 'more likely to perceive questionable accounts as unethical and less likely to engage in them' (p.88). This is highly arguable as has been revealed in the previous studies on professional socialisation – one's values may be shaped by the organizational reality and this organizational reality may be sharply different from one's perceived reality or the training institute's reality. Only when one confronts the reality, tries to find one's role and locates oneself in that reality, will we know for sure one's ethical and moral values. Only when there is 'deformation professionnelle', will we know how much of an individual's values have remained the same, modified or changed.

And thus, we now turn to teacher socialisation and discover how similar or different it is from professional socialisation.

2.3.4 Professional socialisation of teachers. As shown in the previous subsection, organizations pattern the orientation of the neophytes through its institutions to conform to its norms. This is especially acute in the immediate period after the neophytes join the organization. It is a time ‘when efforts to induce consensus between the newcomers and the rest of the organization are comparatively intense’ (Etzioni, 1975, p.246). As the neophytes enter a world with its own sets of organizational norms and values, which may likely be at variance with those espoused by the training institution, they may be confronted with reality shock (Veenman, 1984; Weinstein, 1988). And it is in the aftermath of this reality shock that the neophytes will go through a process of bureaucratic orientation, where bureaucratic orientation refers ‘to the individual’s commitment to the attitudes, values and behaviors that are characteristically encouraged by bureaucracies, for example, self-subordination, impersonality, and rule conformity’ (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990, p.296). In other words, professional socialisation.

Classic studies (Lortie, 1975; Hoy & Rees, 1977; Lacey, 1977; Woods, 1981; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) have shown the rapprochement of the neophytes’ expectations with that of the bureaucratic institution called the school. This is due to the fact that professions such as ‘teaching or medicine exist not only as a curriculum in professional schools, but equally importantly, as an everyday practical activity’ (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985, p.313). Thus teaching cannot be solely learnt or taught in the classroom within a teaching institute, but rather to be acquired and mastered on the job. This was attested by Blasé (1985, 1986) & Smylie (1989).

In the cross-sectional qualitative socialisation studies of teachers in two secondary schools, Blasé (1985, 1986) found that the actual classroom teaching experiences was the most influential factor which shaped teachers' perspectives. Similarly, Smylie (1989) found that the classroom experience was rated the most efficacious means of learning to teach in a nation-wide survey of 1789 teachers. Not only is the classroom experience important, the very experience of being part of a bureaucratic institution is crucial in learning to be a professional teacher.

With that in mind, we shall first take a look at how the school as an organization influences the teachers through its culture and how the individual agents within that culture influence the teachers. Finally, we shall look at four case studies over a span of three decades in view of how the school influences the teachers through its culture and its agents.

Culture. A school is an organization. As with any organization, it has its own culture:

Any group with a stable membership and a history of shared learning will have developed some level of culture,Once a set of shared assumptions has come to be taken for granted, it determines much of the group's behavior, and the rules and norms are taught to newcomers in a socialisation process that is itself a reflection of culture. (Schein, 2004, p.22)

This culture is crucial in defining its purpose and its direction. It plays a definitive role in the professional socialisation of its neophytes. It primarily has two functions –

to help the school and its members to fulfil its responsibilities, and it facilitates the internal integration of its diverse school members (Schein, 2004). It drives its members to incorporate and internalize the assumptions inherent in itself. Though most teachers will learn this culture, there are some who will not accept it in its entirety or even partially.

Researchers (Lacey, 1977; Woods, 1981; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985; Gratch, 2001; Windschitl & Sahl, 2002) have found that beginning teachers are resistant to the norms of the school. There are even those who left the schools because they were neither able nor willing to accept the prevalent culture in the school (Woods, 1981; Gratch, 2001). As can be seen, the culture of the school plays an important role in socializing the neophytes. It is hence of great consequence to identify the individual agents that contribute to this school culture.

Agent – principal. Among the agents, one stands out alone in its all-pervasive omnipotence and omnipresence – the principal. Even though principals rarely exert direct influence over the new teachers, they do so via the context within which the teachers operate. They set expectations, determine classroom allocation and work resources, and are the ultimate appraisal authority (Wood, 1981; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985; Jordell, 1987; Freshour & Hollman, 1990; Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Staton & Hunt, 1992). It is through the influence on the ‘structural imperatives of the job’ that the principal drives the socialisation process of the new teachers.

Agent – colleagues. Another important agent would be the colleagues that the new teachers find themselves working with. Consultations with and observations of colleagues were listed as the second most effective sources of learning to teach in Smylie's (1989) survey. This was attested to by Lawson (1989) in a study on workplace conditions of physical education teachers. Colleagues are important because they have gone through the process of socialisation themselves and are in fact coping and surviving in similar situations and conditions. Zeichner & Gore (1990) suggest that:

(g)iven that teachers in a given school work under generally similar conditions, collegial influence is probably closely tied to the common circumstances that teachers face in the structural characteristics of schools and in the ecological conditions of classrooms. (p.339)

They can thus provide a mentoring, collaborative and supportive source of wisdom with which to draw from. As Jordell (1987) states, 'they (the colleagues) take part in their (beginning teachers) socialisation as persons who participate in the validation of experiences in the classroom' (p.171).

Even though it is true that 'the cellular form of school organization, and the attendant time and space ecology, puts interactions between teachers at the margin of their daily work' (Lortie, 1975, p.192), it is by the very fact that teachers spend much of their free time between lessons and after lessons in the staff room, and that they have to collaborate with their colleagues in school projects, committees and interact during meetings, the influence of this agent cannot be denied or sidelined. The colleagues

may hold different views from the new teachers, but it is because the views are different that an impact will be made, whether positively or negatively.

Agent – students. The next agent of influence within the school culture is one that teachers cannot escape from – their students. Students can be considered the primary agent of socialisation as they are the ones teachers spend most of their time with. After all, this is the nature of teaching. Lortie (1975) in his landmark study found that teachers experienced a great sense of achievement when they felt they had influenced their students. Staton & Hunt (1992) in their review on Teacher Socialisation listed numerous studies (Gehrke, 1981; Bullough, 1987; Deal & Chatman, 1989; Wildman *et al*, 1989; Etheridge, 1989; Kilgore, Ross & Zbikowski, 1990) which demonstrated how powerful students are as a socialisation agent. When teachers are faced with and have to deal with ‘diversity and complexity’, teachers ‘develop a more elaborated cognitive framework from which to understand students and, in turn, themselves’ (Staton & Hunt, 1992, p.126). Jordell (1987) in an earlier study than Staton & Hunt (1992) listed a number of studies in the 70s which demonstrated the importance of students as an agent in the socialisation of teachers. He summed it up as: ‘Taken together, there is considerable agreement among researchers in many countries that students are of major importance in the socialisation of teachers’ (p.169). The importance of this agent of teacher socialisation is understandable given that teachers spend so much of their time in schools with the students. Furthermore, this time spent is in isolation from the other teachers. The needs of and responses from the students will necessarily bring about certain changes or adaptations to the teachers’ planning and teaching. As Zeichner & Gore (1990) state: ‘there is little question that classroom influence is reciprocal in nature and that

teachers' perceptions of pupils' characteristics, expectations, and behaviors influence the nature of teacher development' (p.339).

Agent – parents. The next agent is one related to the previous agent – parents of the students. This agent has not received as much attention as the other three agents aforementioned, but a number of studies (Gehrke, 1981; Blasé, 1985; Wildman *et al*, 1989) have shown that parents do contribute to the socialisation of teachers – some directly, some indirectly. Increasingly, schools are encouraged to involve parents in the academic lives of their children, and in so doing, parents make their presence felt, some more than others, either positively or negatively, directly or indirectly. Yet, this involvement varies from school to school, country to country (Jordell, 1987; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). In whichever situation, it is of necessity to acknowledge this agent's role in the socialisation of teachers into the culture of the school. Even though teachers need not and do not need to passively conform to this agent's pressures or influences, 'they must take them into account in some ways as they go about their work' (Zeichner & Gore, 1990, p.340).

Agent – curriculum. Last, but not least, is the agency of the curriculum. Not many studies have been done to explore whether the curriculum affects the socialisation of the teachers, yet since the curriculum drives the content of what the teachers need to teach within a certain time frame, it can sufficiently be considered to be of influence to the socialisation process. Zeichner & Tabachnick (1985) hinted to its influence as a form of institutional 'technical control' mechanism. Templin (1989) alluded to the curriculum's impact on teacher effectiveness and satisfaction. In a recent longitudinal study by Brouwer & Korthagen (2005), on the influences of

socialisation on the development of teaching competence, it was found that the 'beginning teachers' teaching was influenced to a large degree by the textbooks currently prescribed in their schools' (p.203). As textbooks chosen by the schools are highly influenced by the curriculum of the state or nation, curriculum as an agent should and must be considered.

Upon identifying the various agents that contribute to the socialisation of teachers, we now turn our attention to four case studies which span the past three decades and relate how the agents, individually and collaboratively, influence the socialisation of the beginning teachers.

Hoy & Rees (1977) did a study on the 'bureaucratic' socialisation of student teachers. They administered a questionnaire survey of 64-items to 112 student teachers before their student teaching stint. They administered the same questionnaire immediately after the nine-week teaching experience of which 79 student teachers responded. It was found that the student teachers became more bureaucratic in their orientation and more custodial in their pupil-control orientation. They concluded that 'the school bureaucracy quickly begins to impress upon student teachers the value of conformity, impersonality, tradition, subordination, and bureaucratic loyalty' (p.25). Although Hoy & Rees (1977) did not specifically mention which agent contributed significantly to the socialisation process, it seems reasonable to posit that the school culture through the use of 'school bureaucracy' had a large part to play in this.

Hoy did another study on the socialisation of student teachers with Woolfolk more than ten years later. In their study (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990), which sought to examine the influence of students teachers' pupil-control orientation, they administered a 51-item, eight-vignette questionnaire to 191 students, of which there were three groups – one which went for a semester of practice teaching, one which did not and one which was not planning to teach. Again, the pupil-control orientation became more custodial after going through a semester of practice teaching, with no change in the other two groups. The other finding with respect to Teacher Efficacy revealed that the student teachers became less sure that 'schools can overcome the limitations of home environment and family background than before student teaching' (p.294). In this study, it seems that the agencies of students and parents might have come into play through the authors' use of 'home environment and family background'.

In a study on a first-year Physical Education teacher, Curtner-Smith (2001) focused on one 24-year old first year physical education teacher. His aim was to examine how the physical education teacher's entry into the workforce influenced his teaching perspective. Curtner-Smith discovered that 'pupil disinterest', 'lack of collaboration within the physical education department' and 'low level of departmental organization' frustrated the physical education teacher that he developed 'radical pessimism' (p.99). Through this study, it can be seen that the agencies of students, colleagues and school culture influenced the physical education teachers in a very negative way.

Finally, in a study of three beginning teachers, Gratch's (2001) focus was on what the three beginning teachers felt were the most important events and experiences which influenced their development. Interviews, observations and documents were collected and analysed. From the original sample of 38 teachers in various stages (pre-service students, teaching interns and first year teachers), Gratch narrowed it to three beginning teachers. It was found that the agencies of the 'principal' and 'colleagues' negatively influenced one of the teachers so much that she left the teaching service. The agencies of the 'principal' and the 'school culture' affected the second teacher negatively to a large extent as well. In the third case study, the school's collaborative culture and supportive principal built the teacher's confidence. The students also provided a source of motivation for the teacher.

Even though the experiences of the three beginning teachers vary, it showed clearly the influence of the school culture and the school principal. It created such an impact on the teachers that one left, one's focus of concern was no longer to provide learning opportunities for the students, and one became more confident as a teacher.

All these four studies evidently revealed the primacy of the school culture, and how the school, with its culture, principal, colleagues, and to a lesser extent, students, parents and the curriculum, may create a 'reality shock' for the neophytes. For the neophytes, not only do they encounter a dramatic role exchange, they have to juggle the demands of the heavy teaching workload with the amount of committee work thrust upon their shoulders. This transition from a training institute to a workplace is

not easy, and with it comes the recognition that what was learnt in the training institute (teacher education) may not be easily or is not perfectly transferable to the workplace (school practice). As a result, beginning teachers 'struggle for control and experience feelings of frustration, anger and bewilderment' (Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998, p.159). This initial period becomes more of a survival one than a learning one. Perspectives which they might have acquired during teacher education may be discarded to be replaced by school norms; humanistic control becomes more custodial in orientation. Neophytes start to learn and adopt practices which they observe are being utilized successfully and effectively by the teachers in the school. This thus creates the 'wash out' of the effects of teacher education (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

This leads us naturally to the question – why do some beginning teachers choose to 'wash out' the effects of teacher education? What of their teacher identities which they constructed of themselves prior to joining the schools? Were their initial teacher identities disregarded? Or did their teacher identities morph? To these questions, I now turn.

2.4 Revelation of Identity

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His act being seven ages.*

As you like it (Act II, Scene VII)
William Shakespeare

What is identity? Is identity that which one is born with? Or is identity formed over time due to various experiences encountered? Or is identity that which one constructs as a result of accepting, rejecting, or adapting from the positive and negative encounters of life? Is it a state of being, or is it a subconscious or conscious development? These are the questions research has sought to answer over time. In Giddens' (1991) analysis of the modern self, he argues that the self, the identity, is not a positive entity, subject only to the determination of outside forces. Rather, the individual contributes to the changing identity that is influenced by the social forces at work. Giddens (1991) provides a view of identity as reflexive and interactive: 'The individual's biography ... must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing "story" about the self.' (p.54)

Identity exists, but it is also subconsciously forged and consciously constructed over the years due to the various experiences in a plethora of situations encountered. As this research is on identity of teachers, a look at the various definitions of teacher identity will help illuminate this construct.

2.4.1 Teacher identity. Wenger (1998) posits that teacher identity is ‘the negotiated experience of self, involves community membership, has a learning trajectory, combines different forms of membership within an identity, and presumes involvement in local and global contexts’ (p.149). This negotiation thus engenders the notion of agency on the part of the teacher.

Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop (2004) identified the four essential features of teacher identity after analysing 22 studies on teachers’ professional identity from 1988 to 2000, which they considered as the ‘period that teachers’ professional identity emerged as a research area’ (p.108):

- 1) It is an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences; it is dynamic, not stable or fixed;
- 2) It implies both person and context; teachers learn and imbibe certain professional characteristics within the school’s contexts;
- 3) It consists of sub-identities which may be central or peripheral to the core of the teachers’ professional identity;
- 4) It comprises the notion of agency, whereby the teachers are active agents in the pursuits of professional development and learning. (p.122)

Beijaard *et al* (2004) argue that ‘professional identity is not something teachers have, but something they use in order to make sense of themselves as teachers’ (p.123).

Hence, active construction of identity is of paramount importance for them.

In the same vein, construction and reconstruction of identity is also alluded to by Walkington (2005). She defines teacher identity as ‘based on the core beliefs one has about teaching and being a teacher; beliefs that are continuously formed and being reformed through experiences’ (p.54). This interactional nature of the construction of

teacher identity is echoed by Sachs (2005) who posits that ‘...teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather, it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience’ (p.15). Likewise, Olsen (2008) views teacher identity as ‘a label, really, for the collection of influences and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems (each itself a fluid influence and all together an ever-changing construct) that become intertwined inside the flow of activity as a teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments’ (p.139).

Looking at all the various definitions of what teacher identity is, it is clear that there are overlaps in them. Thus, a consensus on what is meant by teacher identity can be derived from these various definitions for this research. MacLure (1993) provides a definition that encapsulates the consensus of the various definitions:

Identity is a continuing site of struggle for teachers... identity should not be seen as a stable entity – something that people *have* – but as something that they *use*, to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the contexts in which they operate. In other words, identity is a form of argument. (p.312; emphases MacLure’s)

With this understanding of teacher identity, that teacher identity is neither stable nor fixed, I shall now look at the next question: What influences teacher identity?

2.4.2 Influences on teacher identity. Do teachers adopt the same identity when they are in the classroom, when they are in the staffroom with their colleagues,

when they are subordinates reporting to their heads of departments or principal, and when they are with their teacher friends outside of school? Or do they enact different identities in different social contexts?

Coldron & Smith (1999) put forward the need for teachers to 'negotiate his or her identity within a community bound by its customs and traditions' (p.715). The new teacher hence has to 'make choices and work hard to achieve what an outsider might describe as socialisation into the school culture' (p.715). The identity enacted thus may be different from what one initially has or which one still holds on to.

Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson & Fry (2004) studied how the context of the school influenced the identity choice of a beginning teacher – the beginning teacher had to enact traditional teaching practices in spite of her personal beliefs in constructivist teaching practices. Flores & Day (2006) conducted a longitudinal study of 14 new teachers in their first two years of teaching and found that the teachers complied with 'the norms and values of the workplace, despite the fact that they did not match their own beliefs and values' (p.229). Due to the 'negative school contexts and cultures', the identities of the new teachers which had been 'strongly personally embedded at the beginning of their teaching careers' were 'destabilized' (p.230). The teachers knew that they had different identities from what they shared with the researchers in the beginning of their careers. They acknowledged the fact that in order to survive, they had to 'do what other people do'; in other words, they had to enact another identity – an identity for survival.

Similarly, Clarke (2008) acknowledges the influence of the communities within the school to shape the identities of the teachers in terms of their teaching practices. The power relations within the communities determine to a large extent the identity that the teachers subscribe to and enact. It thus creates the discourse with which teachers participate in and which beginning teachers seek to gain access to.

It thus seems that the contexts of the schools that the teachers are situated in determine to a large extent, more so for some than others, their professional identity. In the words of Gee (2001): 'This has moved the emphasis from individuals and the identities that seem to be part of their "individuality" to the discursive, representational, and semiotic processes through which identities are created, sustained, and contested' (p.114).

As I shall be using the beginning teachers' identities as a form of analytic lens, I will need to look at not just their individual identities, but also the identities that are created as a result of the different contexts they encounter. As such, I will be using Gee's (2001) four perspective on identities – Nature-identity, Institution-identity, Discourse-identity, and Affinity-identity.

2.4.3 Four perspectives on identity. According to Gee (2001), there are four perspectives with which to view 'how identities are formed and sustained' (p.101). The first is the nature perspective, which he termed as the N-identity. It is 'a state developed from forces in nature' (p.100). It refers to conditions with which the

individual has no control over, such as whether one is born male or female, whether one is born with blue eyes or brown eyes, whether one is born with Down syndrome or not, and whether one is born a twin or not.

The second is the institutional perspective, or the I-identity. It is 'a position authorized by authorities within institutions' (p.100). It refers to a position or role given by powers that are derived from a set of rules, laws, precepts or traditions in a group, community, organisation, or society. Examples would be the police officer whose power comes from the law of the land and its judicial system, the hotel manager whose authority over the hotel service staff comes from the hotel management and the rules enacted by the hotel management.

The third is the discursive perspective, or the D-identity. It is 'an individual trait recognized in the discourse of and with "rational" individuals' (p.100). It refers to a characteristic feature recognized as a result of a consensus reached through the discourse or dialogue of others. Examples would be a charismatic pastor recognized as such by his / her congregation, the self-serving politician recognized as such by the voters who have grown weary of his / her empty promises, the unethical insurance agent recognized as such by the clients and other insurance agents who are 'fed up' with his / her cheating practices.

The fourth is the affinity perspective, or the A-identity. It is the 'experiences shared in the practice of "affinity groups"' (p.100). An affinity group must share '*allegiance to,*

access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the group's members the requisite experiences' (p.105, emphasis Gee's). Power or recognition of one's status is given by participating in the activities or subscribing to the practices of such affinity groups. Examples would be the owners of the Harley Davidson motorcycles, affectionately called HOGs (Harley Owners' Group), fans of the DragonLance fantasy novel series who come together to form a book club, members of the conservative Tea Party movement in America who are motivated by their staunch beliefs in fiscal responsibility and bound by a sense of patriotism, economic anxiety and a common mistrust of government.

2.4.4 Identity as analytic lens. As teachers new to the school, and in searching for one's affirmation to be recognized as a competent teacher by one's peers, the A-identity has both a strong pull and a strong hold on the beginning teacher. To be recognized as part of 'us', 'us' being the more senior colleagues in school, the beginning teachers would primarily need to subscribe to 'a set of common endeavours or practices' (p.105) that define the 'us' group. Many a time, the 'common endeavours or practices' that define the 'us' group are the pedagogical practices or the belief of certain pedagogical practices. Doing anything out of the norm would entail a response such as 'spoil market', a colloquial Singapore English term to mean 'doing more than necessary, and hence, as a result, making others look bad'.

As Gee (2001) mentioned, 'an affinity group is something that one must *actively choose* to join' (p.106, emphasis added). This in turn implies that one must choose to

adopt or construct the A-identity. The A-identity may be reinforced by the discourse prevalent in the school. The beginning teacher may be ascribed a D-identity identical to the A-identity if he / she is constantly invited to internalize the discourse of the virtues of the traditional 'drill-and-practice' approach and the accompanying use of such worksheets to teach, illuminate and reinforce conceptual understanding. If the beginning teacher were to reject this dominant discourse, then the beginning teacher runs the risk of being 'shut out' or excluded by the colleagues.

The I-identity is no longer just determined by the 'governing bodies and policy-makers' that comprises the principal, superintendent of schools, or the ministry of education. It now includes the 'broader community, including the media and groups of concerned citizens, *particularly parents*' (p.682, emphasis added). Parents in Singapore are known to compare the work assigned by the teachers across the different classes in the same grade level. If a certain class teacher assigns less work, for example fewer worksheets, the parents would query this decision, and sometimes the query is directed at the head of department or the principal, rather than the teacher. In such a situation, this would entail a merger of the various identities – A-identity, D-identity and I-identity.

Hence, in light of the pressures exerted on the beginning teachers to conform to a prescribed professional identity, even though they may have their own ideas of what it means to be a teacher, it will be 'influenced by their understandings of institutional expectations, as well as the ways in which they identify with others' (McDougall,

2010, p.682). The decision to adopt the A-, D- and I-identities becomes a moral decision. Should the beginning teacher construct an identity that helps one to survive that might be antithetical to one's beliefs? Or should the beginning teacher forge an identity that is true to one's beliefs but which might mean being ostracized? Teacher identity is 'inescapably moral: identity claims are inevitably bound up with justifications of conduct and belief' (MacLure, 1993, p.312). And it is the decision of whether to justify one's conduct and belief due to the construction of one's identity that I now turn to.

2.5 Cognitive Dissonance – Transformation & Return

Much of the teacher socialisation research has centred on either the functionalist approach, where 'socialisation fits the individual to society' (Lortie, 1977, p.18), or the dialectical approach, where socialisation is 'comprised in an individual's construction of a belief system, acquisition of appropriate ways of acting, and learning to attend to relevant social messages' (Schempp & Graber, 1992, p.332), i.e. construction, re-construction and negotiation of an identity. Perhaps it is pertinent to note that both approaches are valid and are in action in any socialisation process. The bureaucracy itself tries to fit the individual into its machinery, and some of these individuals accept this 'fitting'. Thus, the functionalist approach does make sense. Yet, there are some individuals who do not fit or want to fit within the bureaucratic machinery, and so they interact, negotiate and might even contend with the bureaucratic machinery that tries to socialize them. This dialectical approach – a contest of social thesis against individual antithesis (Schempp & Graber, 1992, p.331) – also has its rightful place in this process.

Thus, the question is not to decide which approach best explains the socialisation process, but why certain individuals choose to be 'fitted' and adopt the prescribed identity, and certain individuals choose not to be 'fitted' without any contention and choose to retain one's own identity. This is where the Cognitive Dissonance Theory comes in.

2.5.1 Cognitive dissonance theory. Aesop once told a story of a fox which wanted a bunch of grapes hanging far above it. The fox leapt up high to get the bunch of grapes but to no avail. The grapes just remained out of its reach. Finally, after a few attempts, it gave up and surmised that the grapes were sour, and even if it had got hold of them, it would not eat them because they would be sour. Aesop's classic fable, from whence the phrase 'sour grapes' came, illustrates the theory of Cognitive Dissonance quite well.

To understand Cognitive Dissonance Theory, it is important to know the terms as defined by Leon Festinger, the originator of one of the most influential and widely debated theories in social psychology (Jones, 1985). Cognition is defined as 'any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior' (Festinger, 1957, p.3). Cognitions can be consonant (positively related) or dissonant (negatively related). According to Festinger (1957): 'the presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. The strength of the pressures to reduce the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance' (p.18). This means that individuals who face dissonant cognitions (i.e.

like the fox) would take steps to either lessen or remove the dissonant cognitions (i.e. justifying to itself that the bunch of grapes is sour).

Cognitive Dissonance Theory posits that the individual seeks agreement or harmony (i.e. consonance) between the individual's beliefs or opinions with the individual's behaviour. The individuals experience discomfort or tension when they 'find themselves doing things that don't fit with what they know or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold' (Griffin, 1997, p.206). It is this discomfort or tension that drives the individuals to resolve or alleviate this disequilibrium by either changing the behaviour, or the beliefs and opinions. Festinger hypothesized three ways in which individuals can reduce the dissonant tension or disharmony:

- 1) Selective exposure prevents dissonance;
- 2) Post decision dissonance creates a need for reassurance;
- 3) Minimal justification for action induces a shift in attitude. (Festinger, 1957)

2.5.2 Three ways to reduce dissonance.

Selective exposure prevents dissonance. Festinger's first hypothesis states that individuals will avoid certain information or situations that will create or increase dissonance. Thus individuals will gravitate towards harmonious ideas or situations, or people who are like-minded and who hold similar ideas. In this sense, it does seem to mean that beginning teachers, who seemingly allow themselves to be 'fitted' into the existing school culture, in fact hold similar or identical beliefs and opinions as the school they are socialized into. Or perhaps they choose to acknowledge and accept certain information that they can agree with and ignore those which they cannot.

Post decision dissonance creates a need for reassurance. Festinger's second hypothesis states that an individual agonizes over the decision made and seeks to find confirmation that the decision was the right one through rationalization of the action. This post decision agony is heightened by three conditions – the importance of the issue, the length of time spent deliberating over the two competing options, and the difficulty in reversing the decision once it has been made. This is the doubt that haunts one after one has made a decision, causing one to question if the decision made was right.

Using Aesop's fox, we can see that the fox's dissonance created by giving up the seemingly juicy bunch of grapes was reduced through its rationalization that they were sour. Reassurance was found. In the same vein, and taking it further, if the beginning teacher is not able to reduce that dissonance created as a result of trying to conform to the school's existing practices, then the teacher might resist the socialisation process and might even leave the school or service. Reassurance was not found, especially if the issue at stake is deemed important by the beginning teacher.

Minimal justification for action induces a shift in attitude. Festinger's third hypothesis states that the dissonance created due to minimally induced behaviour will require the individual to adjust his or her original attitude to justify that of the behaviour. In this sense, it is unconventional – the behaviour alters the attitude rather than the conventional other way round. Thus the beginning teacher whose original beliefs are not aligned with that of the school may find that those beliefs may

eventually be aligned due to the requirement of the school in expecting certain behaviour (i.e. practices) from this beginning teacher. The dissonance created by the school through its culture and its agents might lead the neophyte to alter his or her belief structure, and thus identity, such that it conforms with that of the school, and his or her dissonance is then reduced. Due to the amount of effort invested in the behaviour, the neophyte's attitude will follow suit (Griffin, 1997).

As can be seen by using Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory, dissonance is created when beginning teachers enter a school culture that is different from their own and the training institute's. As the school with its accompanying culture and agents try to socialize the neophytes, dissonance is created: 'If dissonance exists, it is because the individual's behavior is inconsistent with his self-concept' (Aronson, 1969, p.27). The neophyte would thus seek to reduce or eliminate this dissonant state which exists between his actions and his 'self-concept' due to the socializing pressures from the bureaucratic school. In so doing, it (dissonance reduction) will 'typically involve an effort to maintain two important elements of the self-concept: the sense of self as both (a) morally good and (b) competent' (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992, p.592). Hence, the neophyte would alter the belief or attitude, and correspondingly adopt the prescribed teacher identity, so as to correspond more closely with that of the existing school culture to maintain the positive 'sense of self' and reduce dissonance, or the neophyte might reject the socialisation influence because his or her post decision dissonance as a result of a decision to change was not eliminated or significantly reduced. As such, whether the beginning teacher chooses to conform and adopt the existing practices of

the school depends largely on whether dissonance was created, and the amount of dissonance created, as a result of conforming to those practices.

Studies of how the performativity discourse affected Singapore's educational system have been documented of recent (Tan, 2005; Tan & Ng, 2007; Tan, 2008). However, there is no existing study of beginning teachers in Singapore being subjected to this discourse, and how their teaching beliefs and identity shift as a result of socialisation forces arising from this discourse in Singapore. A review of the socialisation research of the last 35 years (Cherubini, 2009) attests to the reality that:

Established school cultures seem to have an embedded self recognition as an elitist membership not easily earned by newcomers into the profession.

Belonging to this exclusive membership is contingent upon the cultural gatekeepers of the school who model what is acceptable to that culture. (p.93)

In spite of these facts, no formal acknowledgement or research on the socialisation of beginning teachers as a result of the performativity has been done in Singapore. Day, Kington, Stobart & 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 due to the fact that 'teachers are drawn away from what they regard as the essential part of their work of interacting with students to deal with managerial priorities' as a result of 'imposed national competency-based standards of *school and teacher performance*' (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005, p.564; emphasis added). This is what Goodson & Sikes (2001) posit: that external forces 'can shape and determine life

courses and experiences' (p.101). Day (2012) in a recent article attests to this external 'neo liberal "performativity" results-driven agendas' invading and changing the teachers' 'worlds of work' (p.20). As such, this study seeks to address this gap, since this performativity discourse, as demonstrated in section 2.2 of this chapter, is endemic in Singapore's educational system, and hence all beginning teachers will come into contact with and experience the full extent of its influence. This socialisation pressure on teachers to conform to schools' normative practices is heightened because 'those who fail to perform against standards' established by the school management are 'punished, directly or indirectly' (Day & Smethem, 2009, p.154).

It is at this juncture, I shall turn to the research tools to be used in order to find out more about the beliefs held, the identity constructed and dissonance felt by the beginning teachers.

Chapter 3: Plan of Inquiry

*... a man is always a teller of stories,
he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others,
he sees everything that happens to him through them;
and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it.
But you have to choose: to live or to recount.*

Sartre, *Nausea*,
1938, p.61

In educational research and literature, the narrative inquiry approach has emerged to become a useful and insightful tool that allows researchers to elicit the experiences, concerns and understandings of teachers: Bruner (1986) describes narrative as a distinctive way ‘of ordering experience, of constructing reality’ (p.11); Polkinghorne (1988) states that the narrative is ‘the primary form by which human experiences are made meaningful’ (p.1); Connelly & Clandinin (1990) describe the study of narratives as ‘the study of the ways humans experience the world’ (p.2); Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) define narratives as ‘discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it’ (p. xvi); and Clough (2002) posits that narratives can open up ‘a deeper view of life in familiar contexts’ (p.8). Narrative inquiry thus uses stories to describe human experience and action (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995). Hence, in order for me to understand the reasons behind the teachers’ changing beliefs, if any, I have to listen to ‘their voices and the stories they tell about their work and their lives’ (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p.359).

Yet, even as I decide to utilize this plan of inquiry, Polkinghorne’s caution comes to mind – ‘To understand a narrative, ... one must grasp the intentions and expectation

of protagonists, the engine of a narrative usually being the thwarting of those intentions by circumstance and their rectification in the denouement' (1988, p.177). Will I be able to 'grasp the intentions and expectation' of my participants (i.e. protagonists)? Will I be able to resonate with what they tell me? Will this narrative inquiry approach allow me to get into their minds?

What follows in this chapter will be a delineation of my own personal journey – a journey to seek out that which will help me elicit the thoughts, the opinions, the views, the beliefs and the concerns of my participants; a journey to seek to provide others with a more accessible record of the research that resonates than an impersonal academic account. In the first section, I share my reflections on how my recent experiences have shaped the writing of this chapter, and how the past experiences have led me to a search for an appropriate research methodology. Subsequently, the sections on the procedures of data selection, data collection, data analysis and other considerations will be elucidated.

3.1 Inquiry into the Methodology

As Miles and Huberman (1984) put it: 'knowing what you want to find out, leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information' (p.42). I knew what I wanted to find out: *Are beginning teachers' identities and their pedagogical approaches socialized by school systems? If so, in what ways?* I wanted to find out what neophyte teachers face in the beginning to become a teacher of experience, specifically:

- i. *What are the factors that impact the socialisation process?*
- ii. *What are teachers' aims and beliefs when they begin teaching, and how do these change over time?*
- iii. *What are the critical events and processes that create these shifts?*

I wanted to find out what went through their minds as they encountered various experiences along the way from being a pre-service teacher to their first and later their second year of in-service teaching. I wanted to get into their minds to search for the conflicts and events that shape their thinking, their beliefs, and their practices. I knew what I wanted to find out from the beginning, but I did not know how to go about getting this information.

I knew what I wanted to find out because in 2006, I questioned myself when I was seconded to the university to be a teacher educator. I taught the pre-service teachers the principles and practices of current pedagogical methods. I taught them what was used in schools, as well as the research-based strategies. I shared with them the divide between the two, and the possibilities, practicalities, and difficulties of meshing them. The pre-service teachers generally respond with enthusiasm, vigour and wonderment on the usefulness and benefits of using current research-based strategies and the principles of language teaching. Yet, I wondered if this 'wonderment' would last; if this 'wonderment' would be carried over to their own classroom lessons. Many teachers espouse certain pedagogical beliefs but do not put them into practice (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992; Fang, 1996). Socialisation by the schools (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, 1985; Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Curtner-Smith, 2001; Gratch, 2001) has contributed to this lack of congruence between the teachers' stated beliefs

and actual classroom practices. A research project which I was analysing in the year of 2006 revealed this trend. The teachers openly espoused the importance of reading extensively, instituting a block of time for the pupils to read, and acting as models of reading for their pupils. Yet, the research proved otherwise. The teachers did not model reading at all; in fact, they either chose to mark or chose to chat with their colleagues or had other duties to perform during the school's extensive reading time (Loh, 2009).

I wondered about these pre-service teachers – would they be similarly socialized by the schools and not practise what they had preached at the university? I wondered what caused this change. Is it the school alone that changed them? Are they even conscious of this change? Are there other underlying factors? This wonderment led me to a search for a tool that will enable me to find out the underlying causes and factors.

3.1.1 The search. From the onset, I knew I was looking at undertaking qualitative research. The faculty that I was teaching at, in the English Language & Literature department, emphasised the scientific quantitative inquiry with its tightly controlled and verifiable studies. Although such a form of inquiry would allow logical and easy generalizability, it would not be able to answer many of my questions about the pre-service to in-service situation. It could not help me understand the beginning teachers' transitions, their conflicts, their changing beliefs and their lives. This is akin to what Casey (1992) mentioned:

By systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature on educators' careers actually silences them. Theoretically, what emerges is an instrumental view of teachers, one in which they are reduced to objects which can be manipulated for particular ends. (p.188)

I wanted to avoid being one of those researchers that Fenstermacher (1994) described:

They do not see themselves as studying teacher knowledge so much as they perceive themselves producing knowledge about teaching. Using methods and designs found in social sciences, they seek the determinants of good teaching. Their work rests on a belief that if their methods and designs are in accord with accepted scientific theory and practice, their results may be safely accepted as knowledge about teachers and teaching. (p.7)

Furthermore, quantitative research with its emphasis on absolute figures, graphs and tables will not and does not create resonance with my participants. The inability to see the relevance of such impersonal data is not likely to cause a second thought, a re-think or a deeper reflection of the current situation they find themselves in. Numbers in whatever graphical format will not aid my participants to have a better understanding of why beliefs and practices changed, can change or will change.

I needed to use a different approach. One that will provide illuminating, and even compelling, detailed and rich information that will resonate with them; that will create

a personal response of 'That reminds me of ...'. That is more likely to engender a reflection, a further and deeper reflection of their current beliefs, practices and situation. And that would be qualitative research. Qualitative research stresses 'the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.14). I, as the qualitative researcher, seek 'answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.14). In the midst of seeking this approach, a caution is given: 'There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of and between the observer and the observed' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.29).

Even as this caution is given, I asked myself this question – isn't that what I am looking for? I seek to know how my participants think through about the events that happened; I seek to know what their values are; I seek to know what is personally important to them. Hence, I do not seek objective observations but observations which are filtered through their lenses because those observations inform me of their thoughts, opinions and beliefs. I seek to find out their own personal interpretations of events and situations. Such interpretations will reveal what they believe because essentially interpretations are always seen through a person's own beliefs. This is demonstrated in the classic Thomas Theorem: 'If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p.572).

With this in mind, I looked at the different methodologies within the qualitative paradigm. I first looked at ethnography. But ethnography would require 'the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner' (Brewer, 2000, p.6). Yet, this was not possible. I was not able to enter the schools that my participants were posted to for their teaching practice nor was I able to observe them in their schools after graduating from teacher training. I would then become intrusive not only to them but also to their schools. That was not an option.

Next, I turned to Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded Theory is a 'qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants' (Cresswell, 2007, p.63). Grounded theory as a qualitative inquiry was developed in sociology by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), 'laid out a set of procedures for the generation of theory from empirical data' (Thomas & James, 2006, p.767). I was interested in the creation of a general formal theory of experience through data collection of a particular category of experience. The basis of grounded theory was that categories reproduce nature and that the categories were produced from the coded data. As I was contemplating the feasibility of breaking up the interviews into minute sections and sub-sections, of how I might code them, and of how relevant analysing minute coded data would be in discussing a person's beliefs, I came across Narrative Inquiry.

The visiting professor. ‘What do you want to look for?’, a Visiting Professor from Alberta, Canada, Paula Craig, asked when she found out I was studying for a PhD.

- Me: I want to find out why teacher beliefs change. What caused that changed? Do teachers know they have changed? Are they even aware of how they have changed?
- Paula: Well, it seems like you are looking at their stories.
- Me: Stories? What stories?
- Paula: Essentially you want them to tell you what happened to them in school; what conflicts, events or people influenced them in one way or another, either positively or negatively. Their stories. Don't you have a story? Don't you have something that happened to you in the past that made you change your perspective that made you do something differently, that shaped your opinions about things?
- Me: Ya, I guess I do.
- Paula: Well, that's your story. You are looking for their stories – stories that shaped them, stories that shaped their perspectives, stories that influenced and impacted them. You are looking at their narratives.

(Conversation with Paula, July 2007)

Paula went on to suggest that I read Jean Clandinin's work to get a sense of narrative inquiry as a methodology for exploring teacher practice through their stories. Paula was one of Jean Clandinin's doctoral students from the University of Alberta, Canada. She was a visiting professor to the faculty that I was seconded to then. That was the first of many conversations I had with Paula in my search for a methodology; I did member checks with her to verify and ensured that this recollection was accurate.

Paula wondered if my experiences in the past led me to Narrative Inquiry:

It could be that those experiences helped to reshape your story and who it is that you have become today. I wonder if those experiences with those principals didn't, in some way, move you closer towards this inquiry.

(Paula, personal email communication, November 22, 2007)

It did. I wanted to share my struggles, my changes and my story:

I think you might be right. Perhaps subconsciously I yearn for my story to be shared with others, and this Inquiry allows me to do so. I spoke my mind and the second principal didn't take too kindly to that. There was a clash of personalities in that school, and an exchange of words.

I tried to not be so 'open with my mind' in my next school, but somehow, as Chomsky puts it, 'The fact that honesty, integrity, creativity ... all run up dramatically against the hierarchic, authoritarian structure of the institutions in which we live and work' (1999, p.7), I ran up against the management, and I ran up hard against them. Or rather they placed the hammer right in my face and I had nowhere to go but hit it.

As I share this with you, I realize that I have become very cautious about speaking my mind now. Hmm... I am so different from when I first started teaching. This is one reason why I came here. I shared my mistakes hoping that my trainees can avoid the mistakes I made and save themselves from being 'singled out' and 'blacklisted' (or marginalized, as you call it).

(Me, personal email communication, November 22, 2007)

After another conversation with Paula at the university library, I finally realised why I was inclined to this approach:

You are right. These two stories have led me to this approach, because when I discovered I could and must share my 'stories' in this approach, my heart leaped for joy. I can finally share with an audience and at an intellectual level.

(Me, personal email communication, November 28, 2007)

This narrative inquiry intrigued me. I had my stories to tell and I shared them with Paula. It was a relief when I shared with Paula the conflicts that occurred over the nine years of teaching up to that point in time (1998 – 2007). I realised that this was what I was looking for. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) put it: 'Narrative Inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle' (p.41). I wanted to find out more about the participants, and by using narrative inquiry, I could track their past and present. They would then be able to share their narratives with me – stories that had influenced,

impacted and shaped them in their thoughts and beliefs. I found my methodology. I found Narrative Inquiry.

Narrative inquiry. 'Narrative inquiries are always composed around a particular wondering, a research puzzle' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.124). I had wondered and thus I sought answers to my wonderment through a methodology that centres around the 'particular wonder'. And to understand this wonderment, this puzzle, I seek to listen to my participants' lives – their narratives. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) suggests that 'people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience' (p.2). In listening and in writing of their narratives, I study their lives. As Beattie (1995) points out, 'narratives could be used to illuminate the ways in which we understand ourselves as teachers, appraise ourselves and our experiences and evoke and bring to life the meaning of those experiences' (p.41). After all, the study of narratives is the 'study of how humans experience the world' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2).

Human experience is fundamentally a storied one (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). History texts are made up of stories – stories of wars, military conquests, dynasties, medical and scientific breakthroughs, political regime changes, prominent historical figures, among others. By means of personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), participants are allowed to make audible their perspectives; furthermore, it allows the inquirer to sieve out invaluable and significant information

from their narratives. Stories are rich sources of data – data which would conform to Dewey’s (1938) notion of education, life and experiences as inextricably intertwined. Furthermore, to add on to Dewey’s notion is Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1964) remarks in his autobiography that ‘a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it’ (p.39).

‘Experience happens narratively. ... Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.19). The close interconnectedness between narrative and human experience means that the experiences of my participants cannot be simply noted, measured and described using empirical methods or figures. The very complexity of any such experience demands a way of getting into the ‘thick of things’ to investigate the phenomena. Stories would allow me to get inside such experiences which would normally otherwise go unaccounted for, especially in traditional research methods (Clough, 2002).

I use this approach because many of the teachers’ voices and experiences have largely gone unaccounted for in the Singapore system. Empirical methods that produce large amount of numbers, graphs and tables have been used to explain what is going on in the classrooms, but how relevant are they for the teacher? Do they allow the teacher to understand the very predicament he or she is in? Do they allow the teacher to have a better grasp and understanding of the complex forces at work in the schools? By using narrative inquiry, I seek to illuminate the experiences of and for the teachers; I seek to

illustrate how the social and theoretical contexts shaped their beliefs and practices. I seek to find out how my participants' knowledge is 'narratively composed, embodied in person and expressed in practice' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.124) and how that large social world influences it. This is akin to what Goodley & Clough (2004) suggest – that stories 'are not only personal accounts of schooling, but also they tell narratives of wider socio-historical, political and cultural events' (p.349).

As Eisner (1992) puts it:

I believe we are better served by recognizing that whatever it is we think we know is a function of a transaction between the qualities of the world we cannot know in their pure, nonmediated form, and the frames of reference, personal skills, and individual histories we bring to them. (p.13)

It is thus the transaction between the social world with its own sets of conditions and the co-researchers' personal frames of understanding that I am interested to know and to make sense of. It is the experiences encountered, reflected, accepted, rejected or adapted that I seek. Experience that is made and not simply had; experience that is conceived as a form of human achievement (Eisner, 1992). I use this inquiry because the stories shared capture 'more than scores or mathematical formulae ever can, the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences as teachers and the complexity of our understanding of what teaching is' (Carter, 1993, p.5).

Finally, I chose narrative inquiry because it, more so than other types of communicative methods, allowed me access to an 'inner world of subjectivity' to which I as the inquirer has privileged access to (Conle, 2001). The participants, as narrators, 'expressed desires', 'conveyed emotions', 'described mood' or simply told what was on their minds. Even though 'self deception is always a possibility and probably never completely avoidable' (Conle, 2001, p.28), it is the perceived reality that I am seeking and not the factual reality. The perceived reality is that which sheds light on the participants' personal beliefs and the narrative shared allows the understanding of why that reality was created. A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of everything or even what actually happened in the person's life (Riessman, 1993). As Atkinson (2007) puts it succinctly, 'Historical truth is not the main issue in narrative. What matters is if the life story is deemed trustworthy, more than "true". We are, after all, seeking the subjective reality.' (p.239)

Before I move on to describe how I used Narrative Inquiry in my research, I think it is appropriate at this point to elucidate on how I selected the participants in this inquiry.

3.1.2 Inquiry into the participants. There are three teacher training programmes at the Teacher Training Institute – the two-year Diploma in Education programme, the four-year Bachelor of Arts/Science (Education) programme and the one-year Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (i.e. PGDE) programme. The largest number of teachers comes from the PGDE programme. There were 1036 trainees in the PGDE programme (Mrs. Ivy Kim, the Assistant Head of Admissions and Records,

personal communication, June 15, 2007), 612 in the Diploma in Education programme and 254 in the Bachelor of Arts/Science (Education) programme in the July 2007 intake (personal communication, July 18, 2007). Since the PGDE programme is the largest, the participants were selected from this programme.

Selection process. Selective, or non-random, sampling is a practical necessity that is 'shaped by the time the researcher has available to him, by his framework, by his starting and developing interests, and by any restrictions placed upon his observations by his hosts' (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p. 39). As such, I shall be utilising selective sampling for this inquiry. The three types of selective sampling used for the selection of the participants are – Convenience, Purposeful and Maximum Variation sampling.

Convenience sampling is 'the selection of individuals who happen to be available for study' (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p.122). In the midst of my search for my methodology, I was teaching two classes of postgraduate students training to be primary school teachers. We met daily in the first two weeks of the July semester in 2007. This intensive delivery and contact created a close bond and built a good rapport between us that was not found in the other courses. Thus, I decided to select the participants from these two classes.

To narrow down from the two classes, I used purposeful sampling. According to Patton (1990):

logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p. 169)

All members of the teacher trainee population were not assumed to be equivalent data sources. They were a mixed bunch of teacher-trainees: some were fresh graduates and some had switched professions; those who switched professions had a varying number of years of experience. Hence, those selected for this group were those perceived to be information-rich cases (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). One of the strategies described by Patton (1990) for purposefully selecting information-rich cases is Maximum Variation sampling. This is a strategy by which a certain number of participants are selected for the sample because they provide the greatest differences in certain characteristics. This is intended to generate two types of information: the detailed descriptions of the cases that highlight their differences, and the commonalities across the cases in spite of their variations (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p.312). The characteristics considered for the sample in this study were sex (i.e. male and female) and working experience.

The characteristic of sex was chosen because schools generally have different expectations of graduate male and female teachers. Graduate male teachers are usually encouraged to take up varying leadership roles in the schools, more so than female graduate teachers. Working experience as a characteristic was chosen because

the Ministry of Education (MOE) intentionally targets ‘⁶Mid-Career Professionals’ in its recruitment drives. In its press release ‘Stepping Up Teacher Recruitment’ on 13 Aug 2001, it stated:

Given their varied background and experience, mid-career entrants to the teaching service play a key role in contributing to the rich diversity of the teaching fraternity. The life skills and knowledge gained in their working experience will benefit our students.

(MOE, 2001)

In its latest press release, ‘Investing in Educators’, it stated:

Many of our mid-career officers are making a positive contribution to our schools and increasingly taking up key positions in schools and MOE Headquarters. School leaders have found that mid-career teachers inject a greater diversity of experiences and perspectives which has enriched the learning for our students.

(MOE, 2009a)

To such an extent that MOE values teachers with prior working experience, the then Minister for Education, Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, during his annual address at the Work Plan Seminar 2007, declared:

We want to recognise the contributions of our mid-career officers, in line with those of other good teachers who joined the service after graduation. We will adjust the pay and progression of new mid-career teachers who join us so that they catch up with their peers by their 4th year of service after their TTI training. We will do this through *higher starting salaries for mid-career entrants* in recognition of their past working experience, *faster promotions* and additional salary increments upon promotion.

For existing mid-career Education Officers, we will similarly close the gap between them and their peers in service through faster promotions and granting additional salary increments.

(MOE, 2007c; emphasis MOE’s)

⁶ Mid-Career Professionals in the MOE context merely means anyone who has had work experience prior to joining the education teaching service.

Four participants were thus then selected: Hope Tan, female, 22, a fresh graduate; Ishmael Dee, male, 26, a fresh graduate and an MOE scholar; Nathaniel Ho, male, 28, a former finance executive; Harriet Lee, female, 35, a former industrial trainer. The four participants selected were two male and two female teacher trainees.

After the one-year PGDE training, the four were posted to their teaching practice schools. Harriet Lee was posted to a relatively young but popular school in the southeast, Jacaranda Primary School, with a student population of about 1, 500; Nathaniel Ho was posted to a very popular and established school in the northwest with a student population of about 2, 500, Angsana Primary School; Ishmael Dee was posted to a very established school in the central part of Singapore with a student population of more than 2, 500, Tembusu Primary School; Hope Tan was posted to an established school in the northeast with a student population of about 2, 000, Frangipani Primary School. The age at commencement of study, work experience, contract teaching experience and the school posted to for their teaching practice and first school are summarised in the below table (Table 3.1):

Name, Age	Work experience	Length of Contract teaching	School posted to
Hope Tan, 22	None; fresh graduate	None	Frangipani Primary School
Ishmael Dee, 26	None; fresh graduate	None	Tembusu Primary School
Nathaniel Ho, 28	former finance executive	none	Angsana Primary School
Harriet Lee, 35	former industrial trainer	Six months	Jacaranda Primary School

Table 3.1: General particulars of participants

Ethical considerations. My ethics application approval letter was received via email on the 23rd of June 2007 (see Appendix A). Upon receipt of the university's ethics approval to conduct my study, I hence proceeded to look for suitable participants. These four participants were my students for two intensive weeks in July 2007 as part of their PGDE training programme. Since I had a shared history of an educational event with my participants, we did not start our research relationship as total strangers. We had corresponded via emails regularly throughout the two-week intensive grammar course, as well as the few weeks that followed after the course had ended. I had coffee with each of the four participants separately on a few occasions to catch up and find out how they were progressing in their teacher training programme.

It was in one of these coffee conversations that I asked if they might be interested to participate in a research study I intended to carry out. When I asked them to be part of my study, I had already finished teaching them; I was no longer their tutor. I shared with them my rationale of the study, what I hoped to achieve at the end of the study and how I intended to go about conducting it. They were intrigued by the study and the methodology. I also ensured that they knew they could pull out any time at all with no penalty. It was only after I had explained the research intent, told them the research timeline, described the data collection method and the frequency of the interviews, and mentioned the personal rights issue, that I obtained their acquiescence to be my participants.

The Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form for the research (see Appendices B & C) were then shared with them, and an understanding that if they ever chose to pull out of the research at any point, they were free to do so. They were assured that all personal information and any other identifying factual information would be anonymised to safeguard their identities. This was done in accordance to the university's research guidelines that human rights are to be guarded and participation is not to be harmful. Since I was no longer their tutor when I asked them, and I had also ensured that I would not be their tutor for any other course, they could very well have rejected me since there was no way I would have any bearing on their assessment in any of the courses they took as part of their teacher training. I had approached six students, and two of them declined due to the timeframe involved. In addition to the measures mentioned, I waited until their semester had ended before I asked for their availability to meet up for the first interview on the 28th of November 2007. This was to ensure that there was no dependent relationship as a result of being their tutors' colleague. Incidentally, my secondment to the university was about to end; my last day at the university was December 31, 2007. Hence, all narrative interviews carried out for this inquiry had no impact on their teacher training course assessment.

Collaborative research relies on the relationship built on trust and rapport, and this foundation had already been laid. As this research requires a close, personal and professional relationship, the friendship that started in the intensive two-week course became an asset. As I intended this inquiry to be a shared narrative, I thus looked upon the entire process over the past few months as a negotiation of ways in which my participants and I would work, and the ways in which to establish a collaborative

working relationship. Hence, I did not view the process as merely obtaining permission to embark on the research with them.

3.1.3 Inquiry into the method. Connelly and Clandinin (1994) suggest that ‘we need to create space so teachers and students can begin to tell their stories and have responses from many different voices in order to help them imagine new possible retellings’ (p.158). Thus, I sought to create such a space for my participants. A space where they could safely share their lives with me; a space where they could pause for a little while before moving on; a space to stop and share their stories.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out:

As researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue. Furthermore, the places in which they live and work, their classrooms, their schools, and their communities, are also in the midst when we researchers arrive. Their institutions and communities, their landscapes in the broadest sense, are also in the midst of stories. (pp.63-64)

I thus sought to create a momentary respite for them to think and reflect before we carry on with our lives. Such respites are also the data sources for this inquiry. They include narrative interviews (i.e. unstructured interview sessions for the interviewees

to tell their stories), phone text messages, journal writing, and field notes of shared experiences.

Narrative interviews. In narrative inquiry, the ‘goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements’ (Riessman, 2008, p.23). One does not construct a story around preset questions designed by someone else. Mishler (1986b) argues that using the traditional research interview format, which requires a large number of interactive turns between the interviewer and interviewee, prescribes a certain type of short response from the interviewees, or it interrupts the narrative when it is being recounted. If I were to organize a set of questions, then I am in a sense digging for specific answers. Although there may be ‘particular paths we want to cover related to the substantive and theoretical foci of our studies, narrative interviewing necessitates following participants down *their* (author’s emphasis) trails’ (Riessman, 2008, p.24). This empowers the interviewees, as Mishler (1986b) explains: ‘It is not surprising that when the interview situation is opened up in this way, when the balance of power is shifted, respondents are likely to tell “stories”’ (pp.118-119).

Narrative inquirers begin with a ‘tell me your story’ invitation, asking the participants to share their experiences or lives. The focus of the interview resides in the detailed sharing by the participants. Hence, questions are restricted to a small number. This is to ensure that the story thread is not cut by the researcher. Czarniawska (2004)

delineates three types of story collection: Spontaneous storytelling, eliciting stories and asking for stories.

The first type is spontaneous storytelling. As the name implies, the storytelling arises naturally without planning, without being forced, or without any form of practice.

Spontaneous stories are stories told by the participants during the interviews. They are unexpected rich sources of data.

The second type of story collection is when researchers elicit; researchers elicit stories when participants allude to critical events in their spontaneous stories. A critical event has the following characteristics: 'it has impacted the performance of the participant in a professional or work-related role; it may have a traumatic component; it may attract some excessive interest by the public or the media; it may introduce risk in the form of personal exposure' (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.74). The major critical events or phases within the natural progression of a career as identified by Sikes, Measor & Woods (1985) and which are focused on for this inquiry are: 1) Entering the teaching profession; 2) First teaching practice and 3) First 18 months (p.58). It is at such a critical event stage that the story begins to intensify in a specific area; the researcher then senses that this is where the story is caught in the twilight zone. This is where I would need to story and re-story the event because this is the event that is likely to require reconciliation through the storying and re-storying.

The third type of story collection is when researchers ask for stories. These are times when the researchers seek to find out the thoughts and feelings of the participants. Hearing their stories allows me, as the researcher, to understand the participants' thinking, actions and reactions (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricoeur, 1991). This is the form invariably most often used.

The main and primary sources of data for this inquiry are the oral stories of the participants elicited from their interaction with me through the unstructured recorded narrative interviews. These recorded interviews are then transcribed and sent to the participants for verification. This thus becomes a field text for the researcher to analyse (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interview begins with the following prompt:

Tell me the story of your experience during _____ (the major critical events or phases). Take as much time as you would like. I am not going to interrupt you, but I will be recording your story. When you are finished, I will then ask you for a few more details based upon what you have shared with me.
(See Appendix D)

There is no interjection at any point of the recounting so that there is minimal disruption to the story-telling. As Mishler (1986a) mentioned: 'If we allow respondents to continue in their own way until they indicate they have finished their answer, we are likely to find stories; if we cut them off, . . . if we do not appear to be listening to their stories . . . then we are unlikely to find stories' (p.235). The interview is grounded in the participants' own lives and experiences. This type of interview is like a journey, a journey whereby the researcher and participant travel together, and where the latter tells the researcher of their 'lived' world (Kvale, 1996).

We had our first interviews in March 2008, just before their teaching practice, which would last for ten weeks. Our second set of interviews were held after their teaching practice in June 2008, and thence in the long holiday breaks in December 2008 (six months as beginning teachers), June 2009 (12 months as beginning teachers), December 2009 (18 months as beginning teachers). We decided together that if we were available, we could arrange to meet up in between those dates. Those chosen points in time (see Table 3.2) were the crucial time-markers in their journey of becoming a teacher. Each interview lasted between thirty minutes to ninety minutes, and they were usually held in a neutral venue in a café on the outskirts of the prime shopping district in Singapore. As the location was central, and the days arranged were always on Saturdays, the participants did not mind.

Order of planned interview	Time period	Stage of teacher journey
1st	March 2008	Before teaching practice
2 nd	June 2008	After teaching practice & end of teacher training
3rd	December 2008	After 6 months as beginning teacher
4 th	June 2009	After 12 months as beginning teacher
5th	December 2009	After 18 months as beginning teacher

Table 3.2: Schedule of interviews

Eliciting stories from the participants was not a problem at all. As Mishler (1986a) noted:

Narratives are a recurrent and prominent feature of accounts offered in all types of interviews. If respondents are allowed to continue in their own way until they indicate that they have completed their answers, they are likely to relate stories. (p.235)

Corroborating this view, Polkinghorne (1988) states: 'the premise the researcher works from is that people strive to organise their temporal experience into meaningful wholes and to use the narrative form as a pattern for writing the events of their lives into unfolding themes' (p.163). My experiences with my participants attest to Mishler's and Polkinghorne's views. My participants readily shared their stories from their past lives and from their immediate past encounters in schools. They did not hold back; their stories flowed out unhesitatingly. Perhaps it is like Clandinin (1992) says of narrative inquiry – it is 'less a matter of the application of a scholarly technique to understanding phenomena than it is a matter of "entering into" the phenomena and partaking of them' (p.126). I, the interviewer, was not seen as an outsider but as a fellow traveller 'partaking' in that same experience.

Email correspondence. Emailing was another data source that the participants were invited to engage in. Using the modern technology of electronic-mail (i.e. email), I would collect and generate data from my participants. The traditional boundaries between interviews, conversations, journal writing, auto-biographical writing and letter writing could be blurred. As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) observe: 'Stories slip into autobiographical writing, autobiographical writing fades into journals, and so forth. ... Rather, we encourage other narrative inquirers, and ourselves, to be open about the imaginative possibilities for composing field texts' (p.116).

As Giddens (1991) comments, the 'self' in modernity is as a reflexive project that is maintained by the construction of biographical narratives and developed through

social interactions and activities that enhance the narrative. The email mode provided the participants with:

a more or less open environment to compose their narratives, to recall and better understand how they came to see themselves in their past and present careers as they picked up on issues that slipped temporarily out of view through the course of the interviews, and as they returned to earlier aspects of the narrative at their convenience.

(James, 2007, p.967)

It allowed them to address the phenomena as it unfolded over time. It provided time for them to attend to taken-for-granted aspects of encounters in a way that the interviews might not have been able to offer. It afforded them time to articulate the events in a way that differs from the on-the-spot interviews. The participants were free to choose the time, the place, and the duration that they wished to take part in the detailing of the accounts using email. Perhaps because of the amount of time the participants could take in responding to an email, in contrast to that of a face-to-face interview, they would consider the issues in depth before they replied. This increase in time to accommodate their schedule somehow seemed to lead to an increase in reflexivity. This medium thus made the 'socially constructed nature of "reality" more transparent' (Morgan & Symon, 2004, p.31).

Furthermore, through such a means of story-retelling, I could compose field texts to 'help fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape, returning the reflecting researcher to a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory alone is likely to construct' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 83). This was due to the

fact that the participants were able to share their stories on the day itself, and even in that instant itself, through this means of instantaneous communication. In addition, emails could be used as a relational method; through the multiple conversations that traditional interviews, conversations and letter writing could not generate, it assisted in building the trust and rapport that was crucial in this inquiry. Thus, it made the relationship between me and the participants central (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). On average, the participants and I exchanged emails at least once fortnightly. Thus, at the end of the study, I analysed an average of 36 emails per participant.

While the email as a tool of communication did not necessarily allow for subtle communication, markers that the body language or verbal pauses would indicate, as would normally form part of the face-to-face interview mode, an important strength of this email mode was that the participant would not be overly influenced by my area of interest, preference or prejudice. This delivery mode allowed some neutrality in which the question could be considered without my subconscious body language influencing him/her.

In spite of its strengths, the weakness of the email must also be considered. Even though a certain sense of neutrality existed with the delivery of questions, the questions themselves might limit the discussion of an issue to that which I might have in mind when I was framing the set of questions. Moreover, the interpretation by the participant of my questions might be different from what I had intended. Through this mode, there was less likelihood for the participant to clarify as would have occurred in an interview. This was also a concern which Clandinin and Connelly (1998)

alluded to when they commented that ‘the kinds of questions asked and the ways they are structured provide a frame within which participants shape their accounts of their experience’ (p. 165-166). Furthermore, it is ‘widely recognized in the social sciences that the subjects of research are eager to comply with the wishes of the researcher and to provide the type of responses that the researcher is looking for.’ (Elliott, 2005)

In spite of this inherent weakness, I nonetheless decided to opt for the email. It has both journal-like and letter-like qualities. It has this ‘to-and fro’ feature of letter writing, and it has elements of reflection through the regular correspondence that my participants and I embark on. Furthermore, as writing an email requires one to carefully consider the words chosen, it permits me to have an added insight into my participants phenomenologically.

Phone text messages. Another medium that is similar to the email is the phone text messages. This distinctly twenty-first century communication medium allows instantaneous response to queries anytime and anywhere. As friends, we do send each other text messages as a means of keeping in contact. A survey of research suggests that text messages can nurture social bonds (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Pertierra, 2005). Other research has also shown that the appeal of the text message lies with its asynchrony and lack of intrusiveness (Ling, 2004; Geser, 2005). I encouraged my participants to send me a text message if they needed any help or information based on the fact that I have more experience in the teaching

service. In general, we arranged our interview meetings through the text message mode.

Perhaps due to the fact that we were comfortable with the use of the text message, and this was aided by my 'prior knowledge of the participants' on a professional and personal basis, they seemed to willing to 'reflect upon and transmit their experiences faithfully' (James, 2007, p.971) via this medium. As there was limited text space, it could not be used in the same way as the email. Moreover, as it was highly personal, it could be intrusive if text queries were sent too frequently. Hence, this medium was only used sparingly. But it was able to extract important data because my participants shared their frustrations in school almost as soon as it happened. More often than not, the sending of the text messages was to vent to someone who could understand them, and who was neutral and objective.

As this was unplanned in terms of regularity or frequency, the text messages were used as corroborating artefact to the other field texts in the forms of interviews and email correspondence. However, in the case of Harriet Lee, 35, the former industrial trainer, we exchanged text messages on a regular basis, twice weekly. Perhaps it was because we were of the same age, and had common friends, we were closer and hence utilised this medium of communication more often than the others. In her case, the phone text messages were considered as field texts. At the end of the study, I analysed 155 text messages from Harriet alone. For the others, I analysed an average of 20 text messages each.

Journal writing. As mentioned by Clandinin & Connelly (2000), journals are 'a powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experiences'. Journal record my experiences and encounters and provide me a mode by which to reflect on and puzzle over the past experiences. As May Sarton (cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.102) noted, 'Journals are a way of finding out where I really am. ... They have to do with encounters with people who came here, who talk to me, or friends whom I see, or the garden. They sort of make me feel that the fabric of my life has a meaning.' Even though this data source can be incredibly beneficial for this research, the participants were not asked to avail themselves of the journal. I had at first toyed with the idea of asking my participants to keep a journal, which I would have collected and used as field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I decided against it as I thought back to the time I was a teacher and a teacher-educator. When I was a teacher, I was just too busy in school. I wanted my free time to relax and to 'hang out'. I did not want to write journal entries for a researcher; for myself, maybe, but for a researcher, no. As a teacher-educator, some modules I taught in required daily reflection and journal writing. This was almost always greeted with resigned looks of '*Oh no! Reflection again?!*' It was looked upon as 'work', and not a means 'to give accounts of their experience' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.102). As beginning teachers, they would be assailed with a plethora of concerns, issues and transitions; asking them to do more would not have been understanding on my part, nor would it be ethical.

3.2 Inquiry into the Analysis

Bruner (2001) states that narrative structures 'organize and give meaning to experience' (p.267). Thus this study utilizes the stories shared and told by the participants to communicate the meaning of the experiences which they encountered and which they were subjected to. Such an approach allows voices that would normally have been shut out of the educational research discourse in Singapore to be heard. It allows the participants' voices to stand out from the normalization of subjects in other research when it imposes categories on them (Britzman, 2003). Yet, while allowing the stories to stand out, there is still a need to interpret the stories, to make sense of them; in a sense, to construct meaning from their stories told. As Bruner (2006) argues, life is not simply seen as 'how it was', but rather 'how it is interpreted and reinterpreted' (p.114). Thus, it is at this juncture, the question of analysis, or interpretation, needs to be addressed.

Before the question of analysis can be addressed, there is a need to look at the two distinct ways of knowing as suggested by Bruner (1986) – narrative and paradigmatic cognition. Narrative cognition is a way of knowing whereby elements of the experiences are emplotted into a story. The process of this cognition calls upon the pulling together of various anecdotal accounts, snippets of experiences and segments of encounters into a unified whole. The data is collected and synthesised to create a unitary narrative that provides an insight or a basis of understanding 'why a person acted as he or she did' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.11). In essence, it 'makes another's action, as well as our own, understandable' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.11).

Paradigmatic cognition is the traditional logical-scientific way of knowing whereby the elements of the experiences are recognised and classified as part of a category or belonging to a set of attributes that define a concept. The process of this cognition calls for a search of common ideas or themes found within the collected data. These ideas or themes are grouped, examined and then coded so as to identify them as part of a common set of attributes that belong to a category or concept. In a sense, it brings order to the experience by identifying 'the relationships that hold between and among the established categories' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.10), and revealing how these categories 'link to one another' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.10).

These two distinct ways of knowing are aligned to the two corresponding ways of analysing the data – narrative and paradigmatic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). In this study, I shall be using both types of analysis. In the narrative analysis, researchers 'collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.12). This approach 'organizes the data elements' found in the stories shared by the participants 'into a coherent developmental account' (p.15). The end product of this approach is a story. Chapters Five and Six are the products of narrative analysis. In the paradigmatic approach of analysis, termed as analysis of narratives by Polkinghorne (1995), researchers 'collect stories as data and analyze them', and in the analyses, the researchers produce 'descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in the taxonomies of types of stories, characters or settings' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.12). This approach seeks 'to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.13). Chapter Seven is the product of the analysis of narratives.

In the three sections that follow, I shall first define and differentiate the terms – story and narrative. This will allow a clearer understanding of the analysis and the study. Then I shall delineate the processes of how the two analytic approaches were used to analyse the experiences of the beginning teachers. I shall describe how the narratives of the individual beginning teachers were generated from the various data sources before describing the details of how the various data sources were analysed to generate both theoretically and inductively derived thematic categories.

3.2.1 Stories and narratives. In this study, the term ‘stories’ is defined as events and actions ‘drawn together into an organized whole by means of a plot’ whereby the plot is ‘a type of conceptual scheme by which a contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.7). Hence, what the participants shared with me during our narrative interviews are ‘stories’. In the process of analysis, I shall be looking at their stories in detail and interpreting them. Because these ‘stories’ have undergone a process of being analyzed, interpreted, reinterpreted and re-storied, I shall use a different term to distinguish them from what the participants originally shared with me. The term used for the process of analysis is ‘narratives’.

The definition of narrative offered by Hinchman & Hinchman (1997) is used in this study:

Narrative in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful

way for a definite audience and they offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it. (p. xvi)

Hence, the term 'narrative' denotes the collection of stories told by the participants and co-constructed by me and the participants. The participants' narratives span from the first story shared with me to the last, from their past to their present and to their future. This study is hence a concurrent construction and analysis of their narratives.

Having established the definitions of the two terms in this study, I now turn to provide a detailed description of how I analyse the participants' stories.

3.2.2 Narrative analysis – constructing the stories. Narrative analysis was used to construct a detailed chronological composite account of each individual beginning teacher. As Polkinghorne (1988) notes, the operative narrative of a person or group may not be immediately apparent to the researcher, and hence may have to be reconstructed from fragments of the story. The data from the various sources – narrative interviews, emails, and text messages – were gathered to construct these narratives. Four narratives were constructed for each participant. Each narrative presented the individual participant's account of his or her teacher journey at the end of teacher training, at the end of the first year, in the middle of and at the end of the second year. I will now describe in detail this process of analysing, interpreting and constructing the individual participant's narratives.

Step 1 – Immersing oneself in the data. Much like in any story, there is a beginning and an end. I first needed to delimit 'a temporal range which marks the

beginning and end of the story' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.7). Sikes *et al* (1985)

highlighted several critical periods of which the first three are directly relevant for this study:

1. Entering the teaching profession;
2. First teaching practice;
3. First 18 months.

The boundaries of each narrative were thus accordingly determined: August 2007 – May 2008 (teacher training and the 10-week teaching practice), June – November 2008 (first six months as a beginning teacher), January – June 2009 (second six months) and July – December 2009 (third six months). The first narrative which is titled *Crossing the Threshold* encompasses the two critical periods of entering the teaching profession and the first teaching practice. These two were put together because this was the period when they were introduced to teaching philosophies, principles and strategies. This was the period when the participants were still relatively care-free – free from the pressures of the school system. Even though they might have faced a certain element of socialisation and performativity pressures during the teaching practice, these pressures were ameliorated by the support they got from their fellow student-teachers, their teaching practice supervisors and their teacher educators whom they still had access to. Furthermore, they were only given a light teaching load that did not reflect actual teaching reality.

The second narrative's boundaries were determined to be from June 2008 to November 2008 because the participants were posted out to schools in June 2008 immediately upon the end of teacher training in end May 2008. In Singapore, the

⁷academic school year for primary schools follows the calendar year. Thus, the participants inherited their very own first form class in July 2008, and they taught this class until the end of that academic year of 2008. This was the period when they experienced the full teaching load and which they had to fulfil the teaching and work expectations of the school. This was their first six months. The third and fourth narratives' boundaries were determined to be from January 2009 to December 2009 because this was their first full year in school. This was also their seventh to 18th months in the school system.

After determining the boundaries, I listened to the audio recordings of the interview conducted in that time period several times so as to be familiar with the data as well as to check for the accuracy of the transcripts which I had earlier transcribed. It was also at this stage that I brainstormed and reflected on my initial reactions to the interviews (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; McCormack, 2004). This reflection on my initial reactions is important because

the underlying assumption here is that by trying to name how we are socially, emotionally and intellectually located in relation to our respondents, we can retain some grasp over the blurred boundary between their narratives and our interpretation of those narratives ... (and) that our intellectual and emotional reactions to other people constitute sources of knowledge.

(Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, pp.127-128)

⁷ The academic year in Singapore for primary schools starts in January and ends in the middle of November; the month of June is usually designated as the mid-year school holiday, with one week in the middle of March and in the middle of September designated as the termly school break.

Step 2 – Organisation of the data. At this point, the data were grouped into meaningful units. These meaningful units were ‘words and phrases’ which captured my attention because ‘they focus on the same thing or concepts or issues’ relevant to the study. These units were then ‘linked together to form key concepts’ (Goodfellow, 1998a, p.108), and possible links between the key concepts were also identified.

Step 3 – Crafting the first draft. I then established the context of the first draft narrative and the characters within that context. The initial situation or incident or critical events were identified. As defined by Woods (1993), critical events are ‘flash points’ that are ‘unplanned, unanticipated and uncontrolled’ (p.357). They ‘illuminate in an electrifying instant’ (Woods, 1993, p. 357) an event that would have challenged the participant’s current understanding or worldview (Webster & Mertova, 2007). These critical events and characters were then plotted onto the structure of a narrative (see Table 3.3):

Orientation	introducing the ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘who’ and setting
Development	the sequence of events leading to the complication, and the events leading to the resolution
Complication	the conflict or critical event that created dissonance
Resolution	how the conflict or critical event was resolved or brought to consonance

Table 3.3: Structure of a narrative

Evidence from the data sources were embedded into the narratives to substantiate the interpretations made throughout the construction of the narratives (Goodfellow, 1998a).

Step 4 – Feedback from the participants. The constructed narratives were then returned to the participants via email to ensure that my interpretations sufficiently represent them, their understanding of the situations they were in and the incidents they encountered (Goodfellow, 1998a; McCormack, 2004). An accompanying list of questions (McCormack, 2004) were provided for the participants to respond to:

- Does what I have written make sense to you?
- How does my account compare with your experience?
- Have any aspects of your experience been omitted? Please include them wherever you feel it is appropriate.
- Do you wish to remove any aspects of your experiences from this text?
- Please feel free to make any other comments.

(p.224)

Step 5 – Redrafting the narrative. After the first draft was read and responded to by the participants, it was revised based on their feedback (Goodfellow, 1998a; McCormack, 2004). The changes they requested were made and the second draft was returned to the participants for review and further feedback. This was to ensure that their voices were embedded in the text.

Step 6 – Writing the epilogue. After the second drafts were reviewed and returned with no further changes, I then constructed the epilogue for each narrative. The epilogue was where I reflected on the participants' experiences and their feedback given to the two drafts. This was where I constructed the epistemological

narrative. The epistemological narrative is the account ‘we may construct as researchers to make sense of the social world, and of other people’s experiences’; it is a method ‘of presenting social and historical knowledge’ (Elliott, 2005, p.13). It moves the focus from the participants’ understanding to my understanding and reflexive interpretation of the narratives; its goal being to ‘articulate the temporal, spatial, social, cultural, political, and economic connections between individuals’ telling of their experiences and the various social structures that are incorporated into everyday life’ (Harling Stalker, 2009, p.224). These epilogues can be found in sections 5.3 and 6.3 in Chapters Five and Six respectively, as well as embedded within each narrative using a layered account approach (Ronai, 1995, 1997).

The steps taken to construct each narrative are summarised in Table 3.4:

Steps taken	Process of analysis	Object / Product of analysis
1	Immersing oneself in the data <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Deciding the range of data sources for use Listening to audio recording several times Checking accuracy of transcription Brainstorming my initial reactions to data sources Reflecting on my assumptions for this set of data sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audio recordings - Interview transcripts - email correspondence - phone text messages - journal writing notes after each interview
2	Organisation of the data <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Deciding on meaningful units for analysis Linking these units to form key concepts Identifying possible links between the key concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual quotes (words, phrases , sentences or paragraphs)
3	Crafting the first draft <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing context & characters within that context Identifying initial situation / incident or critical event Configuring the experiences by means of a plot Ensuring that there is evidence to substantiate the interpretations made 	Interpretive texts (i.e. narratives) developed for each participant
4	Feedback from participants <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Constructed narratives are returned to participants for feedback An accompanying set of questions are provided for participants' response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interpretive texts - Set of questions
5	Redrafting the narrative <ol style="list-style-type: none"> First draft is revised based on participants' feedback Second draft returned to participants for review & further feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revised interpretive texts
6	Writing the epilogue <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reflections of participants' experiences and feedback are added 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete narrative

Table 3.4: Summary of the process of constructing narratives (adapted from Goodfellow, 1998a; 1998b; McCormack, 2004)

With these narratives constructed, it allowed me to view distinctive elements and events that were common in each of the participants' experiences in the school system. This thus facilitated the development of categories which I shall now turn to.

3.2.3 Analysis of narratives – analysing for themes. The second type of analysis that I now turn to is that of a paradigmatic analysis of narratives. As Polkinghorne (1995) states, ‘paradigmatic analysis is an examination of the data to identify particulars as instances of general notions or concepts’ (p.13). Essentially, the stories gleaned from the participants were looked at to identify the common paradigmatic thematic categories. Within this search for the thematic categories, two approaches were taken: one in which the concepts were derived from prior theory or logical possibilities and were applied to the data to determine whether instances of these concepts were to be found (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008); and the other in which concepts were inductively derived from the data (Polkinghorne, 1995). In the first approach, concepts delineated in the literature review in Chapter Two were used to analyse the stories. In the second approach, thematic categories that illuminated the common patterns of responding to an understanding of their experiences by the participants were inductively derived. I shall now explain in detail how the thematic analysis was carried out.

Themes. What is a theme? The anthropologist, Morris Opler (1945), as cited in Ryan & Bernard (2003), identified themes as the key in unlocking one’s understanding of cultures:

In every culture are found a limited number of dynamic affirmations, called themes, which control behaviour or stimulate activity. The activities, prohibition of activities, or references which result from the acceptance of a theme are its expressions ... The expressions of a theme, of course, aids us in discovering it. (p.86)

Thus, in order to conduct a narrative thematic analysis, I must have an understanding of what constitutes a viable theme. Braun & Clarke (2006) posit that ‘a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set’ (p.82; emphasis original). This is similar to Boyatzis’ (1998) definition:

a *pattern* found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon. A theme may be identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent level (underlying the phenomenon). (p.vii; emphasis added)

Polkinghorne (1988) likewise identifies themes by ‘noting *patterns* across examples of stories’ (p.177; emphasis added).

A theme seems to be a *pattern* that is found in the data. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2005), *pattern* is defined as ‘the regular way in which something happens or is done’ (p.1111). Hence, in order to search for themes, I must look for occurrences in the data that appears regularly. This repetition is what Bogdan & Taylor (1975) referred to as ‘topics that occur and reoccur’ (p.83), and what Guba (1978) mentioned as ‘recurring regularities’ (p.53). Ryan & Bernard (2003) list repetition as ‘one of the easiest ways to identify themes’ (p.89); so too does Porter Abbott (2002). As such, if the theme is derived from the data, with the researcher blocking, inhibiting or reducing the conceptual interference of his or her own cognitive abilities to formulate concepts while interpreting them, then the theme is an inductive one. However, if the themes are derived from previous research or theory pertaining to the field of study, then they are *a priori* ones.

An advantage in using previous research or theory to structure the analysis is that comparisons can be meaningfully drawn across the four participants since issues specific only to the individual is omitted (Hayes, 1997). Another advantage is the fact that since researchers cannot completely free themselves from their 'theoretical and epistemological commitments' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84), using theoretically-informed themes will allow the researchers to deal with the question of reflexivity more explicitly as theoretical links are made clear and systematized (Hayes, 1997).

Searching for themes. A distinguishing feature of narrative thematic analysis is its willing use of *a priori* themes (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Thus, from the literature, a number of *a priori* codes were generated. Codes are categories that organize information from the data; they are 'the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). Or simply, they are aspects of the data that appear interesting to me, the analyst (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding is thus a process of looking at the raw narrative data, which in the narrative thematic analysis will consist of contextualized sentences / paragraphs, and then putting those with a certain pattern together (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The ⁸data corpus was read twice, after transcription. Initial ideas were noted, and an initial set of codes were identified by the two readings. Both the *a priori* and inductive codes can be found in Table 3.5.

⁸ Data corpus: all data collected for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79)

	A) <i>a priori</i> codes		B) inductive codes
1	performativity (promotion / appraisal / results/ awards)	1	worksheet curriculum / pedagogy
		2	frustration due to performativity
2	socialisation	3	curricular fidelity
3	cognitive dissonance	4	accountability pressures
4	identity issues	5	narrowed curriculum
5	beliefs and practices	6	compliance to school norms
6	strategic compromise	7	shaken confidence
		8	feelings of pressure
		9	teaching to the test
		10	raising school scores
		11	time – lack of time; marking time
		12	idealism
		13	school politics

Table 3.5: Initial codes (n = 19)

After I had generated the set of initial codes, I reviewed and revised the list of codes against each ⁹ data set separately (Boyatzis, 1998). Each review and revision of codes against each of the four data sets was done over four weekends. This was to allow a fresh perspective when looking over the codes. The 19 codes were combined or eliminated into a smaller number. These can be found in Table 3.6:

	A) <i>a priori</i> codes		B) inductive codes
1	performativity (promotion / appraisal / results/ awards)	8	compliance to school norms
2	socialisation	9	shaken confidence
3	cognitive dissonance	10	teaching to the test
4	identity issues	11	time – lack of time; marking time
5	strategic compromise - beliefs & practices	12	idealism
6	worksheet curriculum / pedagogy	13	school politics
7	accountability pressures		

Table 3.6: Revised codes (n = 13)

The 13 codes were then collated into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Essentially, I am now analysing my data as I am fitting the codes into potential themes, by searching for likely relationships between the codes and grouping them

⁹ Data set: the set of data from the corpus that is used for analysis; in this study, a data set is each individual participant's stories.

together. The accompanying ¹⁰ data extracts were also collated with the potential themes. The review consisted of two levels – reviewing against the data extracts and reviewing against the individual data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data extracts from each theme was 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. Once all the data extracts matched the potential themes, the next level of review began.

All the themes were now reviewed against each of the data sets. The purpose of this second level of review was ‘to ascertain whether the themes “work” in relation to the data set’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). It is also to check if any significant data was left out earlier. Finally, after the themes were reviewed on the two levels, they were finalized and named. The themes for this study can be found in Table 3.7:

Theme 1	Socialisation of pedagogic practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worksheet curriculum / pedagogy • Time factor • Strategic compliance / compromise • Socialisation
Theme 2	Re-construction towards performativity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching to the test • Performativity • Shaken confidence • Idealism / accountability pressures
Theme 3	Re-formation of identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive dissonance • Identity issues
Theme 4	Micropolitics of teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School politics

Table 3.7: Analytical themes

¹⁰ Data extracts: an individual coded chunk of data which has been identified within and extracted from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79)

The themes serve as a framework from which to draw the experiences of each participant together. The information collected in each thematic category, both theoretically informed and inductively derived, was then used to describe in detail the ‘picture of the content universe in certain groups of people or cultures’ (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p.114). These thematic categories provided an opportunity to highlight the common elements of what the participants encountered and the consequences of their responses.

The process of the thematic analysis of narratives is summarised in Table 3.8:

Steps taken	Process of analysis	Object / Product of analysis
1	Generating initial codes	Individual quotes (words, phrases , sentences or paragraphs) that display commonalities identified, coded & tagged
2	Reviewing list of codes	Revising or combining codes as a result of reviewing initial codes against each of the data sets separately
3	Sorting coded data into deductive / inductive themes	Coded data with similar patterns drawn together
4	Reviewing of themes	Reviewing the themes against data extracts and individual data sets to ensure ‘fit’
5	Naming the deductive / inductive themes	Themes named as answers to the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What do the themes represent?</i> - <i>What do they tell about the participants?</i> - <i>What do they tell about their experiences?</i> - <i>What do they tell about the school system?</i>
6	Drawing results through thematic analysis	Thick descriptions that illustrate the issues addressed

Table 3.8: Summary of the process of thematic analysis

As Denzin & Lincoln (1994) posit: ‘The process of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation are neither terminal nor mechanical. They are always emergent, unpredictable, and unfinished’ (p. 479). So too is the analysis of themes. A cyclical approach was taken in the analysis – revisiting, reinterpreting, searching for underlying meaning, and re-presenting the data in order to identify and refine the themes. This permitted a more intense scrutiny of the data to clarify the complex issues that revolve around the participants and the school system. This process corroborates what Morse (1994) stated:

Doing qualitative research is not a passive endeavour ... theory does not magically emerge from data. ... Rather, data analysis is a process that requires astute questioning, a relentless search for answers, active observation, and accurate recall. It is a process of piecing together data, of making the invisible obvious, of recognizing the significant from the insignificant, of linking seemingly unrelated facts logically, of fitting categories one with another, and attributing consequences to antecedents. It is a process of conjecture and verification of correction and modification, of suggestion and defence. It is a creative process of organizing data so that the analytical scheme will appear obvious. (p. 25)

This study drew on both narrative and paradigmatic analytical approaches to highlight, illustrate and explicate the meaning behind the stories and the issues. It utilized the storied texts and the themes theoretically and inductively derived to understand the relationships and interaction between the personal/social, spatial and temporal factors. This was what Clandinin & Connelly (2000) advocated in any inquiry:

...any inquiry is defined by this three dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequence of places. (p.50)

3.3 Inquiry into Quality

'Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on. 'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'at least – I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know.'
'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter. 'You might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!

A Mad Tea Party (p.94), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
Lewis Carroll (1976), Penguin Books

In any research report, the questions of quality, namely validity, reliability and generalisability crop up. Much like the conversation that Alice had with the March Hare and the Hatter, it has a tendency to descend into a series of convoluted arguments which essentially is not particularly productive since each research project is derived from different epistemological and ontological paradigms. Seemingly, this debate about the research quality is akin to that of 'micropolitics' – 'those strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests' (Hoyle, 1982, p.88). Smith & Hodgkinson (2008) attest to this analogy. They state in no uncertain terms that 'academics strive explicitly and implicitly to influence those criteria (or lists of characteristics) that determine research quality as well as to perform well against them'; in other words, 'academics are micropolitical' (p.422).

For researchers who are operating from the newer research paradigms, which is essentially non-positivist or non-postpositivist (i.e. non-traditional research paradigms), they are perceived to be pushing the boundaries of the established *doxa* which Bourdieu (1990) defines as:

the coincidence of the objective structures and the internalized structures which provides the illusion of immediate understanding, characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe, and which at the same time excludes from that experience any inquiry as to its own conditions of possibility. (p.20)

Essentially, *doxa* is a way of doing things, and a way of understanding. *Doxa* is commonly found in all communities, as communities create a set of practices and conceptual understanding that has become familiar and comfortable, and that will be disseminated and transmitted within those communities. In such a scenario, 'the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.169). The *doxa* must be perpetuated, and hence the mavericks must be sidelined or transformed; resistance shall not go unchallenged. An excellent example of this reality was when Donmoyer (1996) spoke of his role as a 'gatekeeping' editor of *Educational Researcher*, a highly esteemed journal in education. Donmoyer (1996) stated that '(g)atekeepers cannot normally widen the gates they monitor; they simply get to decide which sorts of people can walk through them' (p.20). Even more telling was when he declared that 'if I decide to publish non-traditional manuscripts, there will be less space for traditional scholarly work' (p.20).

Similarly, Smith & Hodkinson (2008) listed the Shavelson and Towne's (2002) report in the United States and the Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis and Dillon's (2003) Cabinet Office's report in the United Kingdom as examples of strong government pressures for 'measured and supposedly objective performance criteria for research' (p.431) in the two countries. Thus, many who embark on qualitative research in the form of narrative study, which is situated within the interpretive-constructivist paradigm, are regularly queried for its rigour and its quality.

Within such a background, it is thus vital for me to ask myself the following:

How valid is this narrative approach? How valid is the analysis of the data?

How valid and reliable is the collection of these 'stories', and how can a story be valid as an analysis? If the data is collected through the participants' telling of their 'storied experiences', how do I know if they are being truthful? What if they made up a story or embellish the retelling? Will the research be valid then?

As I ponder over these questions of quality, I referred to the influential text on narrative inquiry for answers. However, these queries were not given a comprehensive, nor a conclusive response. What was said was that the criteria, 'namely apparency, verisimilitude and transferability', with which to assess the narrative inquiry's quality, 'continue to be developed and about which we encourage narrative inquirers to be thoughtful' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.188). To be 'thoughtful'? How can I convince others that narrative inquiry is a useful approach in studying the phenomena of human experiences? If I am not able to ensure that there is quality and rigour to such an approach, then potential consumers of this study will not see it as relevant for their knowledge or understanding of a beginning teacher's

experiences, and certainly will not see it as useful for any educational change or reform.

And to this search for quality, I must now turn.

3.3.1 Issue of paradigm assumptions. The search for quality, or specifically the criteria with which to ensure quality, which traditionally in positivist or postpositivist paradigms meant the criteria of validity, reliability and generalisability, is essential for the research to be accepted into the pantheon of knowledge and to be received as suitable for use in various means and ways. As J. K. Smith (1990) noted, ‘the problem of criteria seems to me one of the most difficult and important problems facing social and educational research’ (p.167). It is difficult because within social and educational research, there exists a number of paradigmatic assumptions, with different epistemological and ontological positions. Thus, a fixed set of criteria cannot be easily or pragmatically utilized across these various positions. Hence, the questions which Guba (cited in Smith, 1990, p.168) asked are appropriate for consideration here:

Is it possible to devise a set of goodness criteria that might apply to an inquiry regardless of the paradigm within which it was conducted? Or is it the case ... that goodness criteria are themselves generated from and legitimated by the self-same assumptions that undergird each inquiry paradigm, and hence are unique to each paradigm?

With regard to Guba’s first question, the answer is quite clear – different paradigmatic inquiries operate with different epistemological and ontological assumptions and

positions. Since this is the case, a fixed set of research criteria is not, cannot and will not be able to assess and ensure rigour and quality across the different paradigms. Thus, the traditional notions of quality, that of validity, reliability and generalisability which stems from the positivist roots, may not be the appropriate criteria with which to assess and ensure quality for studies that are not situated within the traditional paradigm.

I shall use the analogy of the choice of cutlery to illustrate this point: A spoon can easily scoop porridge in order for it to be consumed. Thus, it is considered to be efficient and useful for consuming a dish of porridge. The spoon, however, cannot cut a well-done sirloin steak with its edge easily. It can cut the steak into pieces, but only upon exertion of great strength and effort. It is thus not considered the most efficient, nor appropriate cutlery for the consumption of a steak. The spoon is not and cannot be the best cutlery for all types of food dishes. The spoon may be a good cutlery for porridge, but the cutlery of choice for the steak would be the fork and knife. This demonstrates that for different types of food, different types of cutlery are required.

Going back to Guba's second question, with the spoon as a simple analogy in mind, the answer implied in the question hence rings true. For a different inquiry paradigm, a different set of criteria is needed. Bateson (1972) posited that the researcher is 'bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which – regardless of ultimate truth or falsity – become partially self-validating' (p.314). This 'net' of epistemology (i.e. How can we be sure that we know what we know?) and ontology (i.e. What is the nature of reality?) together with methodology is termed a paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The paradigm is a set of beliefs that 'shape how the

qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.13); it is 'a set of assumptions we are willing to make, which serve as touchstones in guiding our activities' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.80). Thus, with different paradigms, researchers will see epistemological, ontological and methodological issues differently. And as such, different criteria will need to be utilized to assess and ensure quality for inquiries situated in different paradigmatic assumptions.

If this is so, then the next step would be to situate narrative study within the appropriate paradigm. Narrative researchers situate narrative study, regardless of its varied forms, in the constructivist paradigm – meaning of life experiences is *constructed*; it is not given as an established state: Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that the narrative is 'the primary form by which human experience is *made meaningful*' (p.1; emphasis mine); he goes on to add that '(t)hrough the action of emplotment, the narrative form constitutes human reality into wholes, manifests human values, and *bestows meaning* on life' (p.159; emphasis mine); Lieblich *et al* (1998) believe that 'stories are usually *constructed* around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and *interpretation* of these "remembered facts"' (p.8; emphasis mine); Clandinin & Connelly (2000) understand narrative as the 'best way of *representing and understanding experience*' (p.xxvi; emphasis mine); Riessman (2008) posits that 'individuals *make sense of events* through storytelling' (p.10; emphasis mine); Speedy (2008) finds 'the narrative invitation a useful means of *making sense* of things' (p.45 emphasis mine); Gubrium & Holstein (2009) postulate that narratives are 'the way individuals *construct* their identities as active agents of their lives' (p.8; emphasis mine).

Narratives in narrative inquiry are non-realist – ‘(t)he reality of meanings, intuitions, and purposes is found in the interpretation or is established by the interpretation’ (Smith, 1990, p.175). They are socially constructed reality, and as such, any inquiry situated in such a reality can only be properly judged by ‘criteria appropriate to the paradigm out of which the construction operates’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.143). Before moving on to the ‘criteria appropriate to the paradigm’, it is perhaps best to elucidate the paradigmatic assumptions of the narrative approach I have adopted – that of the constructivist paradigm. A summary of the assumptions is found in Table 3.9:

Item	Question	Constructivist assumptions
Epistemology	What is the nature of the relationship between the knower & what can be known?	Transactional & subjectivist – The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigation proceeds. The conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears.
Ontology	What is the form and nature of reality, and what is there that can be known about it?	Relativist – Realities are apprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. Constructions are not more or less ‘true’, in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated. Constructions are alterable, as are their associated ‘realities’.
Methodology	How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?	Hermeneutical & dialectical – The variable and personal nature of social construction suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interactions between and among investigator and respondents. These varying constructions are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques, and are compared and contrasted through a dialectal interchange. The final aim is to <i>distill</i> a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions.

Table 3.9: Summary of Constructivist paradigm assumptions
(Taken from Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp.108-111)

Each paradigm, of which the constructivist paradigm is one of the four posited by Guba & Lincoln (1994), namely positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism (see pp.109-111), has its own set of beliefs and hence its own ways of seeing, valuating and ensuring quality. Each paradigm has its own goals for the inquiry – explanation, prediction and control of the phenomena for positivism and postpositivism; critique and transformation of the structures that constrain and exploit humankind for critical theory; understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people initially hold for constructivism (see Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.113). With the variety of goals aimed for, by the different paradigms, it logically implies a variety of standards of evaluation for each of the paradigms.

Thus, it goes to show that in order to ensure and evaluate the quality of this narrative study of beginning teachers, I must first recognise the paradigm in which it is situated in, and then select from the list of criteria that exists in that particular paradigm which in this case is the constructivist paradigm. And to this list, I now turn.

3.3.2 Issue of trustworthiness. Why are the criteria by which to evaluate the quality of this narrative study important? Why is there a need to even have a set of criteria with which to evaluate? Garratt & Hodkinson (1998) suggest that '(a)ny prespecification of universal criteria is in danger of foisting on research artificial categories of judgment, and a framework of a priori conditions that may be impossible or inappropriate to meet ...' (p.533). So, then if this is the case, why should a list of criteria be searched for and applied in my narrative study?

If this present narrative study is to be acknowledged as making a 'distinctive contribution to the development of knowledge in a discipline' (Dunleavy, 2003, p.27) and be accepted to be of worth, then this list of criteria is needed. Elliott, Fisher & Rennie (1999) acknowledged that even though a list of criteria may be fundamentally be at odds with the spirit of qualitative research, they concluded that 'some form of widely-recognized evaluative guidelines for qualitative research are necessary in order to win wider recognition and acceptability for qualitative approaches' (p.225).

Over the past three decades, since the mid-1980s, which Denzin & Lincoln (1994) term as the ¹¹ fourth moment or the crisis of representation and legitimation, there has been a plethora of works attempting to articulate and list the criteria that describes the characteristics of what constitutes good qualitative research (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Packer & Addison, 1989; Mishler, 1990; Ely *et al*, 1991; Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Lincoln, 1995; Eisner, 1998; Sparkes, 1998; Elliott *et al*, 1999; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Whitemore *et al*, 2001; Patton, 2002; Seale, 1999, 2002; Gibbs, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2007; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Maxwell, 2005, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2011). Of note is the highly influential and much-cited classic work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), *Naturalistic Inquiry*. It is a work that set out what naturalistic inquiry is, the paradigm it is situated in, and the moves to make to ensure 'trustworthiness', their alternative term to replace the positivistic terms of validity, reliability and generalisability.

¹¹ Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont (1999) vigorously contend that Denzin & Lincoln's 'developmental model' of 'moments' is too 'neat'; instead, they prefer to view the various periods of qualitative research 'in terms of continuing tensions' (p.470). But as most qualitative research texts utilize Denzin & Lincoln's (1994, 2008) model of 'moments of qualitative research', I shall adhere to it.

As this work is highly regarded and much referred to by many of the works cited in the quality (or criteria) literature, it has in a way obtained a 'recognized' status with regard to its suggested quality, or in their terms, trustworthiness, guidelines. As Polkinghorne (2007) puts it, 'validity is a function of intersubjective judgements' and thus depends on 'a consensus within a community' (p.474). Since there needs to be intersubjective judgement, and a consensus needs to be reached within the community, then only this work by Lincoln and Guba has obtained the required status. Few works in the quality literature within qualitative research world has reached such a state of being accepted and constantly being cited.

Albeit there are some (notably Silverman, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) who disagree with the Lincoln & Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria and even choose not to make mention of the work; yet, they cite Seale's (1999) work as an example of 'an excellent overall treatment of the issues discussed in this chapter (i.e. Quality in qualitative research)' (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p.274). But in this same work, Seale (1999) recommends the procedures outlined by Lincoln and Guba as 'useful for qualitative researchers to know about and to *incorporate into their work* where relevant' (pp.45-46; emphasis mine). Thus, Seale accepts the consensus reached by the community and accords importance to the influential work by Lincoln & Guba (1985). There may be some disagreement over Lincoln & Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria as the yardstick with which to assess and ensure quality, but the larger qualitative research community as listed earlier does acknowledge their work as critical and highly influential. There is consensus within the larger qualitative research community, and hence to this work of trustworthiness will I turn, to evaluate and establish quality in this narrative study.

Table 3.10 lists Lincoln and Guba’s trustworthiness criteria and summarises the techniques for achieving them:

Criteria	Techniques	
Credibility (internal validity)	1) Prolonged engagement 2) Persistent observation 3) Triangulation (sources, methods, investigators) 4) Peer debriefing 5) Negative case analysis 6) Referential adequacy (archiving of data) 7) Member checks	(pp.301-304) (pp.304-305) (pp.305-307) (pp.308-309) (pp.309-313) (pp.313-314) (pp.314-316)
Transferability (external validity)	8) Thick description	(p.316)
Dependability (reliability)	9) Overlap methods (Triangulation of methods) 10) Dependability audit - examining the process of the inquiry (how data was collected; how data was kept; accuracy of data)	(p.317) (pp.317-318)
Confirmability (objectivity)	11) Confirmability audit - examines the product to attest that the findings, interpretations & recommendations are supported by data	(pp.318-327)
All 4 criteria	12) Reflexive journal (about self & method)	(p.327)

Table 3.10: Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) trustworthiness criteria & techniques for establishing them

These techniques to establish the trustworthiness of the study are recommended by Lincoln and Guba to ‘guide the field activities and to impose checks to be certain that the proposed procedures are in fact being followed’ (p.330). Having suggested the list of criteria and techniques, Lincoln and Guba also provided a practical caveat: ‘(i) it is dubious whether “perfect” criteria will ever emerge’ (p.331). This is aligned to the constructivist paradigm in that all knowledge is constructed; constructed knowledge is never ‘perfect’. Thus, the constructivist nature of the criteria and the techniques are implied. As such, this list (in Table 3.10) is merely to be used as a guide – a map of sorts to aid the constructivist researcher to navigate the terrain of understanding and ensuring the study’s quality and hence acceptance by the research community.

At this juncture, it is prudent to enquire about the consensus of the research community with regard to the trustworthiness criteria. To do so, I have referred to and compared with the qualitative research methods literature, situated in the constructivist paradigm, in the past decade. The criteria and techniques of consensus are found in Table 3.11:

Lincoln & Guba (1985)	Creswell & Miller (2000)	Patton (2002)	Maxwell (2005)	Maxwell (2009)	Merriam (2009)	Creswell (2009)	Yin (2011)
1) Prolonged engagement	pp.127-128	-	p.110	p.244	p.219	p.192	p.79
2) Persistent observation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3) Triangulation (sources, methods, investigators)	pp.126-127	pp.555-560	pp.112-113	p.245	pp.215-216	p.191	pp.81-82
4) Peer debriefing	p.129	p.562	-	-	p.220	p.192	-
5) Negative case analysis	p.127	pp.553-554	p.112	pp.244-245	-	p.192	pp.80-81
6) Referential adequacy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7) Member checks	p.127	pp.560-561	p.111	p.244	pp.217-219	p.191	p.79
8) Thick description	pp.128-129	-	pp.110-111	p.244	pp.244-227	pp.191-192	p.79
9) Overlap methods	-	pp.556-559	-	-	-	-	-
10) Dependability audit	Audit trail (p.128)	Expert audit review (p.562)	-	-	Audit trail (pp.222-223)	External auditor (p.192)	-
11) Confirmability audit			-	-			-
12) Reflexive journal	Researcher reflexivity (p.127)	Investigator effects (pp.567-570)	Researcher bias (pp.108-109)	Researcher bias (p.243)	Researcher bias (pp.219-220)	Researcher bias (192)	-

Table 3.11: Consensus of techniques in establishing trustworthiness

As Sparkes (2002) suggests, such criteria lists 'are not closed; they can be added to and subtracted from as the form and purposes of inquiries change' (p.211). Thus, from the survey of trustworthiness techniques found in the various standard qualitative research methods texts (i.e. Table 3.11), I have selected the following as appropriate for establishing trustworthiness in this current narrative study, with their accompanying reasons:

Prolonged engagement in the field. I believe that it is important that I engage and stay with my participants for a period of time long enough to ensure that I have a good sense and understanding of what they experienced and how they responded to the various experiences. It is only through staying committed and connected to their teacher journey will I be able to see and track their professional growth over the period of their entry into the profession, and the encounters in the various phases of the critical first two years. Furthermore, it is only by staying engaged with them that I can build a close rapport and deep level of trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2011). As such, I have remained in contact and engaged with my participants from the beginning of their teaching practice, to their first year of teaching as full-fledged teachers, to their second year of teacher-hood. During which time, I regularly met up with them over coffee/meals in a neutral environment (i.e. a quiet café located in the shopping district of Singapore), in May/June 2008 (at the end of their teaching practice), in November/December 2008 (after teaching a full academic semester in their first year of teaching), in June 2009 (after teaching the first academic semester in their second year of teaching), and in December 2009 (after teaching the second academic semester in their second year of teaching).

In addition to the officially planned sessions when we engage in actual recorded narrative interviews, I met up with the four participants twice more (during the one-week term break in September 2008 and March 2009) to find out how they are coping in school thus far at those points in time. These were sessions when we chatted without the use of recorders. In a sense, it was a conscious decision to do so, so that it would not be seen that every session we had was to be used for recording purposes. In another sense, it was to build a closer and deeper bond of friendship and trust with them.

Throughout the two years, I regularly emailed them, at least once a fortnight; again, this was to demonstrate a concern as to how they were coping in school, as well as to provide an avenue for them should they wish to bounce any idea off me or ask me for any suggestion pertaining to school life. I texted them via the mobile phone network for the same purpose. Through the use of the face-to-face 'meet-up' sessions, the email correspondence, and the phone text messages, I built a close relationship with my four participants.

Triangulation of data. For this second technique, the triangulation I am using is that of triangulating the data, as in 'different sources of the same information' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.305) to check for 'the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time' (Patton, 2002, p.559). This triangulation is done through the three ways of engaging with the participants mentioned earlier: face-to-face narrative conversation/interviews, emails, and phone text messages. The participants'

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.

Peer debriefing / review. Peer debriefing / review is a process of ‘exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirers’ mind’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.308). In a sense, the peer reviewer acts like the ‘devil’s advocate’, questioning ‘the quality of data collection and analysis’ (Patton, 2002, p.562).

A peer / colleague from the research centre within the same university, Jane, was asked to be my peer reviewer. She was a former primary school teacher, with nine years of teaching experience; has a postgraduate degree, an interest in the literature on narrative inquiry as she was thinking of using it for her potential doctoral research; and she goes out to schools weekly to work with primary school teachers for her research centre’s work. Her experiences as a teacher and as a researcher made her a suitable peer reviewer for my study.

During the data collection phase, after the completion of each face-to-face session (i.e. a total of four participants x six sessions = 24 sessions), I would share my thoughts, reflections and initial interpretations with Jane. To ensure that my thoughts about the interviews are still clear, I would share them with her on that day of the interview itself. She would provide an alternative perspective to my thoughts and my initial interpretations, and this led me to question my own interpretations, assumptions that led to those interpretations and my reflections. During the process of analysis, I would

summarise for her the relevant literature I read pertaining to the analysis, and how I went about it. Again, she provided a critical perspective for the entire process of the analysis, and led me to view different perspectives in my interpretations for both the narrative analysis and the thematic analysis of narratives. This technique is especially important for me as due to my friendship with the participants and my own history in the teaching profession, I hold certain assumptions and these assumptions provide a lens from which I interpret. Thus, with a second pair of eyes, via the peer reviewer, I can understand the participants' experiences better.

Member checking. Member checking is a process whereby 'the final report or specific description or themes' are taken back to the participants (Creswell, 2009, p.191) to offer them 'an opportunity to provide context and an alternative interpretation' (Patton, 2002, p.561). Since they are the ones in the actual experience studied, they would have detailed information about the context in which the experiences occurred, their personal reasons for the occurrence and their responses to it. There have been critiques of member checking over the years, namely by Fielding & Fielding (1986), Bloor (2001) and Silverman (2006). Their critiques center on the fact that there are 'many reasons and interests which can lead members to misreport to the researcher, and it must be borne in mind at all times that they have different purposes from the researcher's' (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p.43).

I do fully agree that the participants' purposes may be different from mine. They may have an agenda or indeed they may want to create a more positive self image when they refute or disagree with my interpretations. Thus, member *checking*, and therefore not member *validation*, is used as a form of follow-up data collection, to create 'an

occasion for extending and elaborating the researcher's analysis' (Bloor, 2001, p.393). The information garnered from the feedback given by the participants is included in the analysis and interpretation of the experiences. This was what Fielding & Fielding (1986) had in mind when they suggested that member checking be 'another valuable source of data and insight' (p.43). This is in part also alluded to by Lincoln & Guba (1985): 'Clearly the investigator is not bound to honor all the criticisms that are mounted (in member checking), but he or she is bound to hear them and weigh their meaningfulness' (p.315). It is ethical to allow the participants to have a look at their data and the interpretations derived from it, and offer their views regarding them. (see Appendix E for member checks)

And so, with this in mind, I propose to add two sub-categories within member-checking to aid in the establishment of trustworthiness of the interpretation – that of peer and audience validation.

Peer validation. My interpretation of the data may 'go beyond the subjects' self-understanding – what they themselves feel and think about a topic' (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.253), as I am looking at it not just as a former teacher who was, like the participants, a beginning teacher, but I am also looking at the data through a researcher's lens with the purpose of understanding the experiences, aided by the research and theoretical literature. Furthermore, I am also looking at it from a teacher educator perspective. Since the participants would be seeing the experience from a 'common sense understanding' (Kvale, 2007, p.125), it might be useful to seek validation from 'scholars familiar with the interview themes and with the theories applied to the interview texts' (p.125). After all, peers in the similar field of teacher

education, or working within a similar branch of research, would have some familiarity with the relevant research literature, research methods, and would have engaged in similar research work; thus, they would be able to provide some sort of corroboration with regard to the interpretation of the data. This was done with two peers who are familiar with teacher education and teacher research in Singapore. The interpretation in both narrative analysis and the thematic analysis of narratives were both sent to them as a form of check, and in return, they provided their views on what they agreed with and what they thought I might want to re-look and re-analyse. (see Appendix F for peer validation)

Audience validation. In addition to peer validation, I also suggest the use of ‘audience validation’ (Kvale, 2007). It is validation from the ‘primary intended users and readers’ of the study (Patton, 2002, p.561), and, I would add, from those whom the study is about – beginning teachers. As this study is on beginning teachers, and how beginning teachers experience school life in the critical first two years, other teachers would have had the relevant experience to assess whether the interpretation makes sense, whether the interpretation is reasonable and whether the interpretation connects to how beginning teachers understand the world within the school. The interpretation was given to two beginning teachers (one in his second year and one in her first year), an ex-teacher who was a former HOD, and a principal. Their views were solicited to assess if the interpretation made sense and ‘ring true’ (see Appendix G for audience validation). Their responses, as well as the two peers and the participants were used to refine the stories and interpretations. Member checking is important for establishing trustworthiness because the views from those in the field, participants, other teachers and researchers, allow for a fuller and rounder

understanding of what is happening in the field. It thus helps to keep my biases in check when I interpret the data.

Thick description. Clifford Geertz, in his classic *The Interpretation of Cultures*, borrowed Gilbert Ryle's notion of 'thick description' to explain that ethnography should not be merely '(u)sing an "I-am-a-camera", phenomenalist observation of a cultural enterprise or setting' (p.6). In fact, ethnography should be 'thick description'; he likens it to 'trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior' (p.10). This would mean descriptive details of what exactly happened – what was said, what was seen, what was heard, what was felt, and the characters who were involved. This would be the details that could present the 'multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit' (p.10). Geertz's own adaptation was later expanded by Denzin (1989):

A thick description ... does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It *establishes the significance* of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (p. 83; emphasis added)

Thick description is not just a detailed description of the episodic events, but it includes an interpretation of the events. This was corroborated by Schwandt (2001):

Most efforts to define it emphasize that thick description is not simply a matter of amassing relevant detail. Rather to thickly describe social action is actually to *begin to interpret* it by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterise a particular episode. It is this *interpretive characteristic* of description rather than detail per se that makes it thick. (p. 255; emphasis added)

Hence, to ensure that the results of the study can be used by others, as in transferring and applying the information to a different context, there needs to be enough details within the current study to allow for such a transfer. The features that allow for a clear delineation of thick description, and for the required transfer, are:

(1) It gives the context of an act; (2) it states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; (3) it traces the evolution and development of the act; (4) it presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. (Denzin, 1989, p.33)

Thus, the information provided about the setting, the characters, the encounters, and the experience as a whole must be 'detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on' (Maxwell, 2005, p.110; see also Merriam, 2009, pp.224-228). This can transport the reader of the study to the setting and find the 'fit' between the study and the setting to which it is transferred to. As Creswell & Miller (2000) posit, the purpose of such thick description is to enable 'readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar contexts' (p.129). This thus allows trustworthiness in the transferability.

Researcher reflexivity. In any research enterprise, the researcher's history and biases would influence the outcomes of the research in a certain number of ways. Thus, it is important that the researchers report on their 'personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry' (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.127); such subconscious psychological and emotional frames do affect one's decision-making. It is imperative that these 'predispositions or biases' not be allowed to inadvertently 'affect data analyses and interpretations' (Patton, 2002, p.569). It may not be possible to completely eliminate these subconscious influences, but with the use of the reflexive journal, 'a kind of diary in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about *self* and *method*' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.327), I am made more aware of them in my understanding and interpretation of the data. As Maxwell (2009) states, 'the main concern is not with eliminating *variance* between the researchers in the values and expectations that they bring to the study but with understanding how a particular researcher's values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study' (p.243). Reflections about the research process, and especially after each face-to-face session with the participants, were written in the journal. In addition to the journal, an autoethnographical chapter (Chapter 4) was written to lay bare the initial experiences that I experienced as a student and later as a teacher over the years. These experiences would have shaped and continue to shape how I viewed and interpreted the participant's experiences.

The six techniques to establish trustworthiness in this narrative study are summarised in Table 3.12 below:

1	Prolonged engagement in the field
2	Triangulation of data sources
3	Peer debriefing / review
4	Member checking
5	Thick description
6	Researcher reflexivity

Table 3.12: Summary of 6 trustworthiness technique used in study

In spite of these six techniques to establish trustworthiness in my narrative study, there remains a nagging doubt as to the ‘truth’ of the study. If the participants embellish certain truths to put themselves in a positive light, how will I know? Will they not have succeeded into leading me to their ‘version of truth’? But is this a valid question in the first place? Whose truth am I seeking to find in this study? Is it the historical truth? Whose truth is that then? Or am I searching for the meaning of the experiences that hold true for my participants? It is to address these questions that I now turn.

3.3.3 Issue of narrative truth. In his autobiography, the great blues singer, B.B. King, points out this important issue of truth:

When it comes to my own life, others may know the cold facts better than me. Scholars have told me to my face that I’m mixed up. I smile but don’t argue. Truth is, cold facts don’t tell the whole truth. Reading this, some may accuse me of remembering wrong. That’s okay, because I’m not writing a cold-blooded history. I’m writing a memory of my heart. That’s the truth I’m after – following my feelings, no matter where they lead. (King & Ritz, 1996, p.2)

Questions such as ‘Did the events really happen?’, ‘Did it happen exactly the way it was described?’ and ‘How do I know that to be true?’ abound for those who ascribe to the correspondence version of truth – that the truth is validated by actual facts and

history; this is also known as 'historical truth' (see Spence, 1982, pp.30-33). Or perhaps the question to be asked should be 'Is this the truth of the heart?', where the truth to be sought is the 'narrative truth' (Spence, 1982).

So which question, or specifically which version of 'truth', am I seeking? This is a narrative study of the beginning teachers' experiences in the first two years of school. A narrative study is the 'study of stories' (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.471). Stories shared and told by the participants about their experiences encountered and critical events faced in schools allow me, the researcher, a glimpse into their worlds, their personal worlds – what they feel about things, how they cope with the events, why they reacted or responded in particular ways to these incidents. These stories 'provide windows into lives that confront the constraints of circumstances' (Riessman, 2002, p.707).

These 'windows' allow an understanding of the issues the participants face and understand. These 'windows' allow understanding from *their* perspectives. As Eisner (1998) has mentioned, 'we are not seeking a purchase on reality "as it really is"' (p.109); rather, this study is seeking to learn of the world according to the participants, and hence, it is their points of view, their 'truths' that are being sought. Moreover, '(f)acts are products of an interpretive process' (Riessman, 1993, p.64); the participants thus interpret the facts in the experiences, in the events encountered, in the incidents faced, in their own way, and the retelling reflects such an interpretation. This truth is real to them; this 'narrative truth' as they understand it is what they perceive as real, as relevant. Their retelling is a 'reconstruction of the past, shaped by the particular context of its telling' (Mishler, 1990, p.427).

As a narrative researcher, I seek to learn not of facts, but of *interpretation* of the facts. Thus, I would agree with Riessman (2008) that 'a narrative is not simply a factual report of events, but instead one articulation told from a point of view that seeks to persuade others to see the events in a single way' (p.187). It is the personal meaning of the experiences that this study and I seek (Mishler, 1990; Atkinson, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2008). As Atkinson (2002) succinctly puts across, '(h)istorical reconstruction may not be the primary concern in life stories; rather, it may be how the individuals see themselves at given points in their lives, and how they want others to see them' (p.127). To learn of their realities, to learn of their emotional and mental responses to those realities, the meanings and interpretations the participants ascribe to these realities are 'the best evidence available to researchers about the realm of people's experience' (Polkinghorne, 2009, p.479).

Yet, having said this, there is a nagging doubt and question: How do we know that this is the perceived interpretation of their reality? This is a question that can be addressed by using Mishler's (1990) concept of 'text sampling procedure' (p.427). Multiple interviews with the same participant (i.e. triangulation of data sources), with 'repeated listenings to taped interviews and readings of transcripts', and focused analysis of the critical 'episodes' are used. This is to verify 'internal consistency' (p.427). Internal consistency is used as a measure to ascertain that what a participant says 'in one part of the narrative should not contradict what he or she says in another part' (Atkinson, 2002, p.134). This is used as a form of quality check by the interviewer, to verify the participant's personal interpretation of his or her reality. It can also be used to 'clarify earlier comments with recent insights if they appear to be different' (pp.134-135).

This study does not seek to verify facts, i.e. historical truth. This is not what a narrative study is about. Rather, this study seeks to learn the *meaning* made of these historical truths by the four participants. As Polkinghorne (2007) instructs:

Storyed evidence is gathered not to determine if events actually happened *but about the meaning* experienced by people whether or not the events are accurately described Storyed texts serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories. (p.479; emphasis mine)

3.3.4 Issues of verisimilitude & utility. If a narrative study is about the participant's particularized meaning-making interpretations, then how can it be of any relevance or use to the consumers of this study? If the study is not of use, then what is the *raison d'être* of the study? There are two issues to be addressed here – the first is that of verisimilitude, and the second is that of utility.

Verisimilitude. Verisimilitude is defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) as 'the quality of seeming to be true or real' (p.1698). Similarly, in the research literature, it is defined as 'a criterion for a good literary study, in which the writing seems "real" and "alive", transporting the reader directly into the world of the study' (Creswell, 2007, p.250). Verisimilitude is cited by Connelly & Clandinin (1990) and Connelly & Clandinin (2000) in both their influential works as an important criterion with which to judge the value of narrative inquiries.

Since narrative studies look at the interpretations of personal realities, it is important that these studies meet the criterion of verisimilitude. For the study to have trustworthiness, it must also achieve verisimilitude; it must 'ring true'; it must have believability – where 'audiences must experience a congruence with their own experiences of similar, parallel, or analogous situations' (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p.31). This quality of verisimilitude is important because it allows others to have a vicarious experience of being in the similar situation and thereby being able to understand the decisions made and the emotions felt by the participants in the study.

Verisimilitude thus 'makes it possible for others to have access not only to our lives when our stories are about them but also to the lives of others' (Eisner, 1997, p.264). When the narratives are well crafted, it permits insights, deepen empathy and sympathy, and aids in the understanding of the subjective world of the participants (Eisner, 1997; Lieblich *et al*, 1998; Sparkes, 2002; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Therefore, in order to establish verisimilitude in a narrative study, the study must 'resonate' and seem plausible to the consumers of the study. Hence, the trustworthiness technique of member checking, specifically peer validation and audience validation, are essential.

Utility. The second part to addressing the relevance of a study that looks at narrative truths is that of utility. Is this study useful? Is it relevant for use by members of the research community or by members of the teaching community? This is what Riessman (2008) considers as the 'ultimate test' – Does a piece of narrative research become a basis for others' work? (p.193) This criteria is also alluded to by Hammersley (2004). In his view, 'research should be aimed at producing knowledge

that contributes to the problem-solving capacities of some group of people' (p.244).

This makes good sense. If a study is so particular to only an individual or a group of individuals, what worth can it be for the community at large? It must have its use, its relevance, its utility (Packer & Addison, 1989; Eisner, 1998, 2001; Elliott *et al*, 1999; Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008).

Eisner (1998) provides a list of three criteria to test a study's usefulness – its 'instrumental utility':

1. Comprehension: can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing;
2. Anticipation: provides descriptions and interpretations that go beyond the information given about them;
3. Guide / map: highlights, explains, provides directions the reader can take into account; deepens and broadens our experience and helps us understand what we are looking at. (pp.58-59)

Again, to assess this criteria, the use of the trustworthiness technique of member checking, specifically the peer validator and audience validator, is essential. The members in the research community and in the audience, specifically beginning teachers, can attest whether the study is of use to them as researchers in teacher-related fields in the former, and as beginning teachers or student teachers in the form of a guide in the latter. In addition, the trustworthiness technique of 'Thick description' can also contribute in establishing this criteria of utility, since it is only by the detailed description of the context and the actions situated within that context can the answers raised and meanings made be transferred to a different and yet similar context.

As Barone (2000) exhorts:

If all discourse is culturally contextual, how do we decide which deserves our attention and respect? The pragmatists offer the criterion of usefulness for this purpose An idea, like a tool, has no intrinsic value and is 'true' only in its capacity to perform a desired service for its handler within a given situation.

When the criterion of usefulness is applied to context-bound, historically situated transactions between itself and a text, it helps us to judge which textual experiences are to be valued The gates are opened for textual encounters, in any inquiry, genre or tradition, that serve to fulfill an important human purpose.

(pp.169-170)

3.4 Inquiry into the Self

Yet before I can look into the narratives of my participants, I need to look into my own narrative. As Ellis (2004) suggests, it is what has happened to my own life that has brought me to this study. In my journey as a student, from the first instance I encountered a teacher as a student to my experiences as a student teacher, a beginning teacher, an experienced teacher, a head of department and a teacher educator, all these have impacted and influenced me as a teacher, a researcher and a person. These experiences have led me to an interest in this study and hence it is important to look at them for 'the recounted life pries open perspectives inaccessible to ordinary perception' (Kearney, 2002, p.132). By looking at my perspectives, I can see how my own narratives will affect and have affected the way I look and interpret the narratives of my participants. Gusdorf (1980) provides a powerful reason for why this is so:

An examination of consciousness limited to the present moment will give me only a fragmentary cutting from my personal being In the immediate

moment the agitation of things ordinarily surrounds me too much for me to be able to see it in its entirety. Memory gives me a certain remove and allows me to take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in time and space. As an aerial view sometimes reveals to an archaeologist the direction of a road or a fortification or the map of a city invisible to someone on the ground, so the reconstruction in spirit of my destiny bares the major lines that I have failed to notice, the demands of the deepest value I hold that, without my being clearly aware of it, have determined my most decisive choices. (p.38)

This explication and delineation of my own narratives is thus used to understand my participants' narratives, and 'provides a background for interpreting what is going on' (Ellis, 2004, p.73). It is only upon the calling forth of my experiences in the school system and my responses to it as teacher in that system over the years that will allow me to fully appreciate, understand and empathize with what my participants shared with me. And to do so, I shall utilize the tool of autoethnography.

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). The autoethnographer first looks through 'ethnographic wide-angle lens' to focus on social and cultural aspects of the personal experiences, and then 'look inward' to expose a 'vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations' (p.739). I recount my narrative as a way of seeking an understanding of the truth, the truth of my life, for as Frank (1995) posits, 'to think with a story is to experience it affecting one's own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one's life' (p.23). And in only so doing, can I fully understand how my truths lead me to understand my

participants' truths, how my experiences compare with theirs, and how the social and cultural contexts of our schools have shaped and impacted our beliefs and thinking about teaching and being a teacher.

Traditional conventions have led to a rule that the experiences, emotions and ideals should not and must not 'bias our scientific work' (Bochner, 2001, p.138). The scientific work needs to be completely objective and free from the contamination of the self; the scientific work is neutral and hence its results are possible to be transferred or generalized to other works. Yet, this is indeed questionable, for the understanding of the world and its reality is subjective; it is constructed by the person as the person reads, engages in conversations, views and observes his or her surroundings (Bateson, 1972).

My study is subjective. My narrative has led me to this study, and because it has, my work is 'inextricably connected to the meanings and values' I am 'working through' in my own life (Bochner, 2001, p.138). Thus, it is imperative that I lay my own life and my narrative bare before I look into the narratives of my participants. I need to obtain the truth of my own life before I can even attempt to obtain the truths of others. For as Freeman (1997) states,

it is only in retrospect, through narrative, that one is in a position to survey the whole that is one's life, and it is only through such a survey that there exists the possibility of obtaining the truth about that life, indefinite and ungraspable though it is. (p.387)

By using autoethnographic lens, I am laying bare my perspectives and my understanding of my experiences, past and present. For as Gudmundsdottir (2006) states, 'researchers supply meaning to what they hear – it is basic to all understanding and interpretation' (p.228). It is only by looking at my perspectives and understanding can I have a better grasp of the social and cultural factors that impacted the decisions made and the emotions felt by myself and my participants. It is only in looking at my self first can I then be in a better position to search 'for meaning, a characteristic central to all inquiry' (p.228). And to this endeavour, I now turn.

Chapter 4: An Autoethnographical Inquiry

Travellers who accept that their thesis journey emanates from their own deep values and beliefs experience many benefits. By beginning with themselves they build a foundation for their inquiry based on their own experienced knowledge.

Cole & Hunt (1994),
*The doctoral thesis journey:
Reflections from travellers and guides* (p.161)

This research, although essentially focusing on the development and socialisation of beginning teachers, is also focused on the world of classrooms and schools. I examine the contexts and pressures of my own induction and socialisation into the school system so as to place the stories of the four participants, i.e. the beginning teachers, in perspective. It is crucial that my experiences are shared before I can seek to understand the participants' stories. In the words of Gudmundsdottir (1996): 'To understand is to supply a wide range of background assumptions. What these "additions" are depends on our background and training as researchers ... they usually remain hidden and implicit ... yet influence the whole research process profoundly' (p.229). As I am writing their stories, I have to bear in mind that my 'additions' may influence the research process:

A story does not appear out of nowhere. It is written by a researcher who brings his or her own values to the writing process. Consequently, the story can be understood as the articulation of values of the writer, which communicates these values through its content and form. (McNiff, 2007, p.319)

My understanding of the participants' stories cannot be fully realized without a consideration of my own experiences, contexts and understanding. Thus, the function of this chapter is to reorder my thoughts and place them in a context that allow me to gain insights into my own story, and hence into the stories of the participants.

4.1 Living in a Landscape of Justice and Fairness

Two particular ¹²experiences occurred in my educational history that left indelible marks on my memory. These experiences affected me emotionally and mentally, and created within me an extreme aversion to favouritism. The first occurred when I was in primary five and the second when I was in my second year of ¹³Junior College, when I was scheduled to take the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) 'Advanced level' examinations.

The first experience occurred when I was in primary 5, in 1984. I had a form teacher whose name was Miss Tang. She was a young teacher, probably in her late twenties. Many of us liked her and tried hard to please her in our behaviour and school work. But she engaged in favouritism. She seemed to call on a particular group of my classmates more than the others. This group was the popular group in class. They were vocal and very expressive. I could tell that I was not part of this group because during the class excursions, she was always talking and joking with that particular group, to the extent that some of us were left to our own devices. I did not think much of these incidents until a similar experience occurred when I was in my second year of Junior College.

It was the year that I was to sit for the Singapore-Cambridge GCE 'Advanced level' examinations (or 'A' levels); this was the examination that the local universities

¹² All names and some identifying factual details in relation to my story have been changed to preserve anonymity.

¹³ Junior College: After taking the GCE 'O' level examination in Secondary 4 or 5, students can apply to study in the Junior Colleges. These are institutions that prepare the students to sit for the GCE 'A' level examinations.

required for admission. That year, in 1991, my form class had a new Civics tutor, Mr. Tee; he was also our Economics tutor. He was an effective teacher because he made the concepts a lot clearer than the previous Economics tutor. The class generally liked him. It was during our one-week term break that favouritism was explicitly demonstrated. We had a series of make-up Economics tutorials for those who were interested. I signed up for it as I wanted to do well for the 'A' levels. As we were walking to the tutorial room with Mr. Tee, I walked beside him and asked him about Michael Milken, the 1980s Wall Street 'junk bonds king' who was indicted in 1990 for insider trading and stock manipulation (U.S. Securities & Exchange Committee, 1990). As an 18-year old teenager, I was vastly intrigued by this person who was able to manipulate the biggest stock exchange in the world. I wanted to find out what junk bonds were, so I asked my Economics tutor: 'Mr. Tee, I recently read up on Michael Milken and junk bonds. Can you explain to me what junk bonds are?' He merely said that they were worthless pieces of paper traded by people. And then he turned away from me to talk to a classmate of mine who was from the 'in' group. They were students who formed the 'popular elite' of that form class I was in. Throughout that make-up tutorial, he asked that group of students questions, and even though I kept quiet, he did not seek to find out why. That incident affected me more deeply than I realized. I took more notice of the interaction that the tutor had with the 'popular elite' and I noticed that a couple of other students, such as an Indonesian student, and a student not well liked by the others, among others, were similarly ignored by this tutor. I was very irked by this behaviour and subsequently skipped his classes, once in a while.

These two experiences of favouritism stayed vividly with me throughout my training as a teacher, and as a trained teacher. I became very conscious of the fact that I should never engage in favouritism because I knew how the students who were not 'favourites' would be made to feel, and as a teacher, I definitely do not want my students to feel that way. That feeling of rejection was not something I want to put any students of mine through.

4.2 Living in a Landscape of Discipline

In my primary school years, I had two important teachers who have shaped me more than any other teacher in the first twelve years of education. They were Mrs. Ng in primary 3 and Mrs. Yong in primary 4; both of them were strict disciplinarians.

Mrs. Ng always wore her hair in a tight bun near the top of her head, and a pair of black thick rimmed glasses. She was very strict with us and had very high expectations for us in all our school work. I always looked forward to her lessons in spite of the rigidity in classroom procedures. It was a safe environment and expectations were made crystal clear.

Mrs. Yong was similar to Mrs. Ng in many ways. She was much shorter than Mrs. Ng but her stature as a teacher was phenomenally higher. I remembered I respected her a great deal and loved her thoroughly. I kept talking about her even at home. I would recount what had happened in class and what Mrs. Yong did or said or how she reprimanded or punished a classmate. Everything Mrs. Yong did was perfect, in my

eyes. Mrs. Yong told my class that she loved us as much as she loved her daughter, who was also in primary four, but in another class, and she would not hesitate to punish her daughter if she did something wrong. When my classmate and I did something wrong, we would compare our punishments and boast of how much more severe the punishment meted out was. She explained her punishments and why she needed to do so. To me, it was because she cared for us and wanted us to do well. That demonstrated love in a concrete way. I enjoyed every moment in primary four, even when I forgot to do my homework and would be reprimanded or punished.

I wanted to be a teacher like them. They were not considered fierce; rather, they are considered strict teachers; teachers who set high expectations for their pupils in every area, whether academic or behavioral. In addition, they demonstrated their love by their doggedness in ensuring that if we did something wrong, we would learn from the mistakes by their reprimands and punishments. They were not afraid to 'lose' lesson time when they meted out the consequences, and when they followed up with those consequences with explanations. They were models for me when I started teaching. They embodied what the then Director of Schools, Mr. Wong Siew Hoong, stated in a press release (August 18, 2010) on the Ministry of Education's stand on discipline:

MOE is committed to high standards of discipline in our schools and will take the necessary measures to ensure that schools are safe and conducive learning environments for all our students. We believe that an orderly classroom environment, marked by respect for teachers and peers, is necessary for learning to take place. (Ministry of Education, 2010a)

I set high expectations in every area and I would spend time to reprimand, to punish and then followed up with explanations of why I did so, and the suggestions for improvement. It was something that marked me out as different from many teachers in the current educational system. Many teachers tend not to want to 'lose' their precious lesson time to do these things and I find that to be a loss for the pupils of today.

4.3 Living in a Landscape of Learning and Support

Two other teachers made a huge impact on me. One was my Cooperating Teacher (CT) in my first teaching practicum, and the other was my Head of Department for Discipline in my first school after graduating as a trained graduate teacher.

I was posted to a school in the West Coast of Singapore, West Clementi Primary. It was a school with a small enrollment of pupils, and the staff were extremely friendly and helpful. They were like a family, helping each other as and when there was a need. There were no airs at all; they did not treat me and my three course mates, the four teacher trainees, as trainees. They welcomed us as colleagues, and made us feel as part of the family. I was assigned two CTs, and one of them was Mrs. Ching, for the teaching of English language. She was also the afternoon session's discipline mistress. I remembered that I was extremely impressed with her lessons in my first week of observation. She put into practice what I was taught in my first semester of teacher training – using cooperative learning strategies, when many teachers did not. I was impressed with that mainly because she was one of the teachers in their late forties,

and yet was so willing to try strategies that others in her age group did not deem useful.

In one of my lessons that was to be formally observed and assessed by Mrs. Ching, it did not go too well because I had 'squeezed too much information and concepts into that day's lesson', and that I 'shouldn't continue teaching when the globe (i.e. teaching resource for social studies) was being passed around as they (i.e. the pupils) will be distracted by the globe', and that I 'shouldn't depend on too many chorus answers' and that I 'depended too much on students' background knowledge'. After giving me her comments, 'she still encouraged me, that I should reinforce the concepts more'. Her encouragement meant a lot to me:

I've decided to make up for it in the next Social Studies lesson. I'm going to do it, not for myself or my own self-satisfaction, but for the students' sake, for their understanding and *for my CT* (emphasis added).

(Practicum Teaching Log, 26 January 1995)

But the main impact she had on me was in my second teaching practicum in 1996, a year later. I was posted back to West Clementi primary school, and I was assigned two new CTs. Even though Mrs. Ching was not my CT in that second practicum, she took the initiative to ask me how I was doing and how I was coping with my teaching. One day, in that second teaching practicum, I conducted a bad primary 6 Social Studies lesson. My comments in my Practicum Teaching Log were: '...but for a few sparks of interest, today's lesson was mired in a mudflow of disinterest'. However, when Mrs. Ching saw how disappointed and dejected I was, she came by to find out about the lesson and encouraged me:

My previous CT told me that it is not my fault. She told me that no teacher would ever have the joy of conducting great motivational lessons every day. Sometimes one

would be able to conduct such a great lesson while other times, not such a great lesson. It is not to be expected everyday but as long as one perseveres, that great lesson would come, if one works for it.

This CT has been very caring to me. She really takes care of me even though I'm not her student teacher this year. She's more of a 'mother' teacher than a CT, and she's not even that this year. I'm truly blessed to be her student teacher last year.

(Practicum Teaching Log, 18 April 1996)

She did not feel that since I was no longer her student teacher, she did not need to be concerned about me; she still did. She let me know if I needed any help, I could ask her if my current CT then was not around or free. Her offer of help and guidance was deeply appreciated by me, especially since this second practicum was my formal assessment to be a primary school teacher. The school environment, the principal and the colleagues can have a big impact on how one responds to teaching. The school I was in made me feel appreciated and want to do more, to be a better teacher and to contribute in many ways. This was demonstrated at the end of my second teaching practicum:

The teachers, the principal, the school attendants and the children have all responded, more or less, positively to me. I feel as if I were a part of this family. I'm glad I took up this career option, it has been tremendously rewarding. I do hope and pray that it will continue.

(Practicum Teaching Log, 10 May 1996)

The second person to have a major impact on my teaching was Mrs. Yi, the Head of Department for Discipline in my first school after graduation in 1998. Two of my former colleagues whom I kept in contact also felt that Mrs. Yi was a major influence on me:

I think Mrs. Yi influenced you quite a lot. You listened to her readily as a mentee. (¹⁴A2, former colleague from first school, Personal communication, June 5, 2010)

¹⁴ 'A' denotes first school; 'B' denotes second school; 'C' denotes third school.

Your mentor, Mrs. Yi, was a major factor. (A3, former colleague from first school, Personal communication, June 6, 2010).

After half a year in teaching, Mrs. Yi approached me to be her assistant Discipline Master (ADM). As I was a firm believer in discipline, I readily agreed to take up that role. She was always willing to listen to my suggestions, and would never put down any of my suggestions for setting up school and classroom discipline procedures. She put me solely in charge of the afternoon session discipline, while she took care of the morning session. We met almost daily, to have short chats about the happenings of each day, and had weekly lunches and informal meetings. We met regularly for the first and last week of the school holidays to review and plan the school's disciplinary management procedures and rules. She was always supportive and provided guidance in every way possible. She would caution me in a gentle way if she felt that my plans were overly-ambitious and would not be accepted by the other teachers; she would encourage me to refine the plans, and she would praise me for a job well done. Her praises and encouragement were always sincere and very willingly given. She never criticized; she merely advised, and I would always accept her inputs. I grew and matured as a teacher and as a Discipline Master under her firm yet gentle guidance.

Mrs. Yi's impression of me as a beginning teacher was:

Anyway your first impression to me was that you are full of confident (sic) and you are willing to learn, willing to help. A very hardworking teacher. Firm with everything when you know that you are right. You fight for it, dare to say and dare to do when you know that you could do it. You really helped me a lot and I have not met teachers like you after you left.

I would say that you change things from impossible to possible. I like your way of doing things. I don't see any of my new and young teachers like you. You have a lot of good ideas and you put (them) into work; that's why (you) made the changes for the Dept. (Mrs Yi, Personal communication, June 15, 2010)

I left the school for a few reasons, and the only regret I had was that I could no longer work with Mrs. Yi. Upon reflection, I realized that the impact the Reporting Officer (RO) has on a subordinate can be quite substantial. The RO can aid the subordinate to grow and develop through a close working relationship built on mutual respect and understanding of his / her strengths and weaknesses. The environment that a teacher works in can have a tremendous effect on his / her passion for the profession (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Gratch, 2001; Jeffrey, 2002; Gardiner, 2010; Nilsson & van Driel, 2010).

4.4 Living in a Landscape of Passion

I remember that I was a very passionate teacher in two distinct areas – reading and discipline. I wanted to make a change in the area English language teaching: I used group competition to teach and motivate pupils to learn spelling; I used group round-robin writing format to heighten interest in writing; I instituted a weekly Book of the week for my primary 5 class to create interest in books and hone the pupils' oral presentation skills; I apportioned five to ten minutes of read aloud time daily without fail, because I firmly believe in the power of reading aloud (Trelease, 2006). These were pedagogical practices that were seldom used in the two schools I was teaching in, and which were noticed by my colleagues then:

You were nicknamed the 'Walking Dictionary' by a few teachers due to your passion towards English. (A1, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 3, 2010)

'Passionate' would be a good word to describe you. You had high expectations of yourself, your students and others ... You spoke passionately about educational issues and held strong beliefs. (A3, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 6, 2010)

You carried yourself in a very professional manner and always spoke in perfect English. My impression was that you had very good content knowledge in the

teaching of the English language ... As a colleague, you became more comfortable about sharing your ideas and content knowledge, and assuming a leading role in discussions etc because of your passion towards improving the teaching of the English language. (B1, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 7, 2010)

By the way you handled your class, I thought u were firm but highly respected teacher. From the way you looked, you were an 'A' grade teacher who would deliver all effective lessons ... U (sic) made the effort to make lessons easy to understand for them. Though teachers do that a lot of time, but u (sic) were genuine. (¹⁵B3, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 4, 2010)

You getting that award (i.e. Outstanding Contribution Award, a yearly award given out to an individual staff member of each school) for your dedication to make pupils like ¹⁶Dillan being able to read is well deserved! (B4, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 8, 2010)

I was passionate about reading because I attribute my learning and love for the English language to reading extensively and voraciously when I was young:

I began reading Enid Blyton, maybe at P3 or P4. I think it was at the school library or something, that I started borrowing them from there. There were many different series by Enid Blyton and I love them all. I tried one and I loved it and moved on to another series. My favorite was the Famous Five series.

My parents, though not well off, saved money so that they could buy me books at the end of every year. It became a form of reward. I looked forward to it. Sometimes I would get 2 to 3 books at the end of every year. I really looked forward to it. I loved to read. I didn't have the privilege of a rich environment; nobody spoke in English much at home, so I read a lot. I read widely, loved going to the library, loved going shopping for books.

(¹⁷me, Interview, March, 6, 2008)

Research over the past 40 years (Allington, 1977, 1984; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Stanovich, 1986; Foertsch, 1990; Krashen, 2004) has attested to the fact that

¹⁵ I was B3's Cooperating Teacher when she had her ten-week teaching practicum in 2001. She was later posted back to the same school and we became colleagues.

¹⁶ Dillan - a primary 5 pupil who was not able to read in the beginning of primary 5; name is a pseudonym.

¹⁷ I was interviewed by a researcher on my narrative history in 2008 for a research project.

regardless of a child's socioeconomic background, sex, race, or nationality, the child who reads the most will be able to read well and do well academically. Thus, my belief and practice was to ensure that all my pupils had that opportunity to engage in this activity and in order to interest and motivate them to imbibe this reading habit, I would implement a reading aloud session daily:

Well, my best practice is instituting a reading time for the children. For every single one of my class from day 1 of my teaching career of 10 years, I read with my students in class. First of all, I firmly believe in it, because that's how I picked up language. So I believe in reading. And to ensure that my children will have time. And I'm the form teacher, so I have 3 subjects to play with; English, Mathematics, Science. So I will allocate 15 minutes everyday in the beginning just to do silent reading. Sometimes in the beginning of the day, in the middle of the day, at the end of the day. Mostly in the beginning and in the middle of the day. Because I strongly believe that it is important for them to read, to find joy in reading and in reading they will be able to pick up language and that's their key. If they don't have time, then they can't really practise what they have learnt through English language lessons. Reading allows them to practise in their minds. They have to read everyday. (And) because I believe in it, I found time.

First I will teach them how to choose a book. I will take them to the library to choose a book they can read. Then I read aloud to them everyday. At the beginning of everyday, at the start of the academic year, I will use picture books to read to the P5s and P6s every day and usually also at the end of the day. And it's very heartening to know that when they are pressed for time, and the clock is ticking away, they'd ask me for a story. Then it reaffirms that, yes, this strategy is working because they love to listen to my stories. So I'll read to them. And after I run out of my picture books, I start on chapter books. Usually something simple.

The first chapter book I started was Harry Potter and it was in 1999 and that was phenomenal, the reaction. Then, Harry Potter was still not as famous at that point in time. So they just loved the book. I'd read for a few chapters... then I'd stop and tell them to go and get the book. They loved it! The library had a few copies, not many, and some of them went to buy one on their own. Some of them bought it and followed me as I read. Sometimes I'd check for understanding but I didn't ask directly. I didn't want to break the momentum.

We can make the time if we really believe in reading, and I believed in what I did, so I made that time.

(me, personal interview, March, 6, 2008)

I was thus particularly livid when I saw that many teachers in both schools I was in did not model the act of reading. To quote Nuttall (1996, p. 229), 'reading is caught; not taught', and if the teachers themselves do not model that behaviour, how could the pupils 'catch' it (Loh, 2009)? I thus saw my role as a champion of reading and would read with my pupils in the assembly area and in the classroom during the school's and class' reading periods. This was noticed by other teachers as well:

You were a role model, (I) remember you sat and read with the kids in the hall during silent reading' (A2, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 5, 2010)

I also recall you (were) always with a thick book during (and) before school silent reading time in the hall. I thought that is a good role model for the pupils and colleagues' (A4, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 12, 2010).

I was also very particular about the values my pupils had. I believed that a teacher teaches pupils, and not the subjects. I taught them values of self-discipline, self-respect, mutual respect and politeness, and I demanded my pupils to exhibit these values at all times:

You were confident, firm and strict with the kids. (A2, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 5, 2010)

You were very good in classroom management and set high standards for your class. You put a lot of your heart into your work, especially towards the building of strong bonds with your pupils. (B1, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 7, 2010)

Your love and dedication to your pupils also affected my impression of you. Your pupils' behaviour reflected your dedication. I remembered teachers praising your hard work too. Your pupils were polite and well-behaved and truly I had experienced it myself when I did relief once in the class you taught. 'Thank you Ms Tan, have a nice day Ms Tan!' It showed your belief and values you uphold strongly and had inculcated in your pupils. These meaningful encounters had influenced me as a young teacher in the teaching service. (B2, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 5, 2010)

I was passionate about discipline due to the influence of my primary three and primary four teachers, Mrs. Ng and Mrs. Yong. I instituted a safe environment in my

classroom through a set of rules and consequences where bullying or ridiculing of others was not allowed. I believe pupils learn best when they need not fear reprisals or ridicule from their peers who might be less or more academically able. I tried to extend this practice to the entire school when I was the ADM in 1999 and 2000 in my first school, and when I was asked to help out in the school discipline in the second school:

You were consistently strict and firm as a teacher and Assistant Discipline Master. The whole hall would be filled with silence whenever you stood on stage. Even as I walked past your classroom, there would be silence even in the EM3 classes. (A1, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 3, 2010)

...think you grew most in the discipline comm. (It) could be your nature, it's in you to be prim & proper... (A2, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 5, 2010).

You had high expectations of yourself, your students and others. You were also very much a disciplinarian. (A3, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 6, 2010)

It was the same in the area of discipline, which you felt strongly about. Gradually, you took on a bigger role in the discipline of the pupils, extending from your class, to the level, and then to the assembly of the whole session. (B1, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 7, 2010)

As a teacher you were a no nonsense type. And this is the image you have throughout your stint in B primary school. (B4, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 8, 2010)

As I reflected on these practices of mine, I realised that I clearly knew what I had wanted to achieve as a teacher, whether as a language teacher or as a discipline teacher. I had a certain set of beliefs and values which I held strongly to and which permeated whatever I did. This was made very clear to my former colleagues when I carried out my roles and responsibilities:

You were responsible and committed to your work. The best incident would be our P5 camp experience. Your strong sense of belief always gives you a clear direction and purpose in your course of work. (A1, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 3, 2010)

... you gave me the impression you have a mind of your own, not easy to persuade you... (A2, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 5, 2010).

Teaching was a serious job to you and you had wanted to change and touch lives. (A3, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 6, 2010)

You were very fixed on certain principles. You came across as someone who put across your view points very strongly. (A4, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 6, 2010)

As a peer/friend I could always rely and depend on you. ... You have your own point of view as to how teaching should be done and not easily swayed by the kps (i.e. Key Personnel) at that time. (B4, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 8, 2010)

Yet, it was because of this passion as a teacher, a deep desire to make a change, and a strong belief that guided my own practice, that I found myself coming directly in conflict with the key players in the school organisation.

4.5 Living in a Landscape of Conflicts

In the first school. Under the leadership of my first principal in my first school, from 1998 to 1999, I helped to revamp the extensive reading programme in that school in my first year, and in my second year, I helped Mrs. Yi revamp the school's discipline structure and procedures. We reformed the prefectorial board, recruited new prefects and trained the prefects personally through weekly meetings and feedback sessions. I organized a mid-year field trip on May 31, 1999 as a form of reward for the prefects – an adventure trail to the historical Fort Canning Park and an excursion to the historical Battle Box at Fort Canning Hill, and we ended the academic year of 1999 on a high by organizing a prefects' leadership camp on November 19 and 20, with an excursion to the Singapore Zoo's Night Safari on November 19 night as a form of reward.

In the year 2000, a new principal, Ms Devi, was posted in to replace the first principal. She was newly promoted and was eager to prove herself. In a short span of time, she showed that she wanted control over every aspect of the running of the school. She was known to scold a number of the heads of department during the school's Management committee meetings. She was also known to have a short temper.

When the second principal came, I was no longer an asset; I became a liability because I didn't quite agree with her way of doing things. For example, she tended to discipline based on her emotions of that day itself – so the school culture became: 'How's the weather in the office now?' – as in the Principal's office – that's the talk in the staff room so everybody was on the edge of their toes because they don't know what's the 'weather' of the Principal.

(me, personal interview, March, 6, 2008)

I did not take too well to this manner of running a school. I did not like the fact that we, the teachers of the school, had to tread carefully when the principal was in a bad mood for fear of offending her. The school culture changed. I did not like what the school had become in such a short period of time. A comment from a former colleague when asked what may have caused a change in me is very telling: '... maybe Ms Devi make (sic) you disgusted with teaching for a while' (A2, former colleague from first school, personal email communication, June 5, 2010). There was a feeling of disgust. But things came to the fore over two incidents.

Two primary 5 pupils of the school had shoplifted something from a provision shop in the neighbourhood early in the week. This matter was brought to the immediate attention of the principal as she wanted first-hand knowledge of everything. She told the boys not to commit such an offence again and let them off. According to the school's Code of Conduct, theft/shoplifting was considered a serious offence and

required a stiffer consequence than a mere telling off. In that same week, on Wednesday, October 11, 2000, a primary five prefect, Wendy, had left the school with her two friends before school started. The afternoon session pupils in that first school were not allowed to leave the school once they had entered the school compound, even though they might be early and the ¹⁸afternoon session had not started. She and her two friends went out to the neighbourhood to 'hang out'. Her two friends were caught, but she was not. That afternoon, while Ms Devi reprimanded her two friends, Wendy on her own accord went and confessed that she was with her two friends who had left the school premises earlier before school started. Ms Devi scolded Wendy severely and stripped her of the prefect's tie.

I was indignant as I was the afternoon session's Discipline Master; the afternoon session's prefects came under my purview. It was Wendy's first misdemeanour, and she was normally a model pupil. I compared the two incidents and felt that the punishments meted out were unfair and unjust. Just because she was in a 'better mood' on that day of shoplifting, the boy was left off with a warning; and just because she was in a 'bad mood' when the prefect left the school premises, the prefect was severely scolded and stripped of her status as a prefect. I thus wrote a letter, on Thursday, October 12, 2000, to appeal against this action:

... The school prefect, Wendy, may not be the perfect prefect in this school, but she has been a very conscientious and responsible one at that. This can be personally vouched for by myself, her prefect-master, and Mr. Ang, her P.E. teacher for the past two years. ... I do not disagree that she must be punished for it. Yet the degree of her punishment is much too severe. ... As the school prefect, she has been in the school's 'eyes' for nearly a whole year.

¹⁸ In Singapore, there are two sessions in the primary school system. The morning session officially starts at 7.30 am and the afternoon session at 1 pm.

Furthermore, she has been invested with the tie and the authority that comes with it in the beginning of the year in the sight of the whole school. Moreover, in performing her duty, she has asserted her leadership in the running of the school at the ground-level. ...

... The recent shoplifting case comes to mind. Why were the convicted shoplifters who only admitted to their crimes after much interrogation, were let off with one scolding? They were already given a chance by not reporting them to the police. Yet, they were still given another chance when they were not given the punishment as stated very clearly in the school rules. Moreover, these rules were explicitly told in the beginning of the year with the punishments as well. ...

... after such a scolding, the boys merely treated it as nothing. Have they learnt that what they have done is wrong, since the school does not feel that there is a great need to punish them for stealing? Yet the school feels there is a great need to punish a girl who mustered up her courage to tell the truth on her own free will. To tell the truth of a misdemeanour as compared to refusing to admit to a crime. Which is more serious?

... Should we not be encouraging moral courage ...? She must be punished. In that, I totally agree. But the severity of it, I absolutely do not! ... If one were to get punished more severely because of telling the truth than those who refused to tell the truth willingly, then one would learn it is better not to volunteer the truth in future. ...

(my letter to Ms Devi, October 12, 2000)

In that span of the ten months that I worked with Ms Devi, I came to perceive her as one who did not wish to manage the school with a team of people she did not choose. She chose to manage the school personally by herself in as many areas as possible; I perceived it as micro-management. As a teacher in his third year, filled with youthful passion and who felt that the school system should be a fair and transparent one and based on a set of rules and proper procedures, the fact that the school teachers and the office staff felt they had to 'watch their steps' based on her moods rankled me. The fact that I was ignored in many of the matters with regard to the discipline and prefects in the afternoon session, even though I was supposedly placed in charge of them, galled me. I hence perceived her in an arrogant manner. Just as Lugones (1987) mentioned in her insightful paper on cross-cultural and cross-racial loving:

To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them – fail to love them ... (p. 4),

I was guilty of failing to identify with Ms Devi and I continued to see her only as a product of my ‘arrogant perception’. My lack of trust in her to make a fair judgement call over the span of those ten months led to an increase in an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ thinking. I was hence not able to view her with ‘the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one’s own will and interests and fears and imagination’– the loving eye (Frye in Lugones, 1987, p.8). I was called in for a meeting with her with Mrs. Yi as the witness the day after. We could not reach an agreement and I left the office after more than an hour, with both of us not being able to see each other’s perspective.

The Ministry of Education’s (2010b) basic philosophy and approach for developing good discipline in pupils are as follows:

- The goal of discipline is to develop self-discipline.
- Discipline is an educative process to develop pupils’ thinking and moral faculties.
- Strong leadership is the over-riding factor for success.
- A whole-school, multi-pronged approach is required.

I fully agreed with the philosophy and the approach, and perhaps it was because I wholly recognized and acknowledged that ‘(s)trong leadership is the over-riding factor for success’, I did not perceive Ms Devi as that factor. I asked for a transfer to another school that year and I left.

In the second school. In my second school, school B, which I joined in 2001,

I kept my views to myself because of the incident in my first school, to the extent of being 'aloof', as attested by my former colleagues:

In terms of a colleague/peer, you were polite and humble, keeping your opinions to yourself mostly. I had the impression that you wanted to keep your focus/energy on your class and hence, kept a low profile beyond that. The word 'aloof' does come to my mind when I think of you back then.

(B1, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 7, 2010)

My first impression of you initially was an unfriendly, fierce teacher.

(B2, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 5, 2010)

You were not so friendly as a peer/ colleague at first (very cool), only after we started talking more then I found you quite deep in thinking. You had your reservations and were still careful when we started to talk more.

(B3, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 4, 2010)

I sought to protect myself by withdrawing from the staff room community. I did not express my views as openly as I did in my first school. I still kept to and held on to my beliefs. A close friend and former colleague, B4, shared this with me: 'Over the span of your time there (Jan 2001 – Dec 2005), you became a bit more receptive though not necessarily submissive - you turning down your post is an example'

(B4, personal email communication, June 8, 2010). The 'post' he referred to was the 'Level Head' position, and the reason for turning down the position was a result of me holding on to my teaching beliefs:

In my next school, the Principal wanted me to be the Assistant to the Head of Department – of English. I thought I could make a difference by de-emphasizing the worksheets and emphasizing more on the reading programme, the aspects of reading and on other reading strategies. I thought I could share this and I thought that certain things could be changed. Sad to say, that wasn't to be the case. I realized when I was in this Executive Committee that this Principal had her own way of doing things and she did not change her policies at all. Her requirement was that we agreed to whatever she said and we just did it. All the meetings were merely to revise the worksheets, to churn out more worksheets, to prepare more worksheets and I couldn't quite agree with this aspect because I knew from my own experiences that worksheets are not a guarantee that learning takes place and worksheets are a chore to children if too many are given. More time should be given to teaching rather than finishing the worksheets but because this Principal believed so much in worksheets, tonnes and

tonnes of worksheets were printed during the holidays so when the teachers came back, they had to clear all these worksheets during that term and many a time, as a teacher, we complained that we have to rush through the clearing of these worksheets rather than teaching.

The principal wasn't too happy because I was supposed to be Assistant to the Head of Department and I didn't quite believe in this policy of hers and I believe in reading so I instituted a 15 minutes to 20 minutes time of reading for my own class. And so the worksheets or workbook was used as a form of reinforcement of the learning that took place. I did not use that excessive amount of worksheets so that the extra worksheets that were printed – I didn't really use them, I just kept them in the cupboard.

During file checking time, she was not too happy about it. Because mine was the best class, she expected it to be the thickest of the whole lot for the whole level because the best class could do a lot more but I didn't quite believe in it so my files were not as thick as the others and so she was shocked, so she's not too happy about it. Well, it showed disobedience; I didn't quite toe the line and it didn't look good because I had sort of defied her policy. Of course, she didn't put it across that way. ...

(me, personal interview, March, 6, 2008)

I resisted the 'worksheet' policy. The principal was prescribing a practice that was symptomatic of the primary school system since the 1990s. Sullivan, a former teacher educator at the Teacher Training Institute, 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). The principal, Mrs Chen, was continuing with this policy of hers, and the thickness of each pupil's worksheet files was a measurement of whether the teacher was doing his/her work.

I had resisted in this practice and the principal was not too pleased. A result for people who resist in organizations was accurately described by Chomsky (1999):

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).

I believed that this was what had happened:

After that experience, I was blacklisted; I was punished. The first two years of my second school, I was teaching the best class, ¹⁹EM1. During the next three years, I was placed in the lowest stream of students in P5 and P6, the EM3.

(me, personal interview, March, 6, 2008)

In addition, I was also appalled by the comment that the principal made during the ²⁰semestral result analysis: 'If we don't prepare the Primary 1s for the ²¹PSLE, then when do we prepare them?' It was a comment made because she wanted the primary one examination papers to be 'challenging', and because of that, the primary ones usually had only a 50% pass rate for English language. I was not the only one who remembered this comment:

Yes I remember, during result analysis.
(B3, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 8, 2010)

¹⁹ In Singapore primary schools, pupils are streamed, using the streaming examination results at the end of primary 4, to EM1, EM2 and EM3, with EM1 being highest in demonstrated academic potential and EM3 being the lowest.

²⁰ In Singapore, semester 1 is from January to end of May; Semester 2 is from early July to mid-November; June is considered the mid-year break and November/December the end-of-year break.

²¹ PSLE: Primary School Leaving Examination – a national secondary school placement examination for all primary six pupils.

... practically every review of result analysis, she'd make that comment.
(B4, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 6, 2010)

This comment particularly affected the primary one teachers:

I seem to remember it being a 'standard' comment from her during every ²²SA result analysis in general. At least during the 2 years I taught P1, 2001-02. When I moved on P3, I was not directly affected ... I remember I was quite upset after one SA as the paper was really ridiculously tough. I was so mad I did a very detailed comparison with the P2 paper to show that it was really 'killing' the p1s eg. number of words in the sentences for mcqs (*i.e. multiple choice questions*) were on average longer than those in the p2 paper ...
(B1, former colleague from second school, personal email communication, June 7, 2010)

Even though I was not a lower primary teacher in that year, I felt that the comment and perspective was not educationally sound. I had resigned from the LH post prior to her making such a comment in June 2002, and when I heard it again, I felt I was right to have resigned from that post. I was tired; I was tired of fighting the worksheet policy and I was tired of being expected to administer educational policies that did not fit with my teaching beliefs. I began to see her with arrogant perception. I did not trust that any change could be made with her management, and hence I was not able to see her with loving perception. It is only by 'travelling to other people's "worlds" we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, living beings, resisters, constructors of visions...'
(Lugones, 1987, p.18). I chose not to cross into her 'world' of worksheets and overly 'challenging' examination papers. And yet, 'without knowing the other's "world", one does not know the other, and without knowing the other, one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one' (Lugones, 1987, p. 18). I thus could not know her, and neither she me.

²² SA: Semestral Assessment – an examination administered after the end of each teaching semester; usually administered two weeks prior to the end of the semester.

4.6 Living in a Landscape of Resignation

At the end of 2007, I took up the position of Head of Department (HOD) for the English language in a new school that was to start operations in January 2008. The team was hand-picked by the principal, Mr Lee. Mr Lee was a forward-thinking principal. He was very willing to try new ways of teaching and implementing new instructional programmes. He felt that the way to move forward is to change. At that point in time, I was glad I took up the position:

When I took on this position, I thought I could, I really thought, I really genuinely thought I could put into practice my beliefs, my personal beliefs about the importance of reading, the importance of certain pedagogical practices for English language learning. I thought the group of teachers that we got for our new school would be more open and willing to try things out.

The first thing, I wanted to put less focus on was examination, that was the first thing – I didn't want to have so many worksheets – I wanted them to focus on teaching itself, of getting the pupils interested in reading, I wanted the teachers to read aloud to the pupils daily, regularly – or at least regularly, not daily. I wanted the teachers to share with the pupils books, good books, to teach them how to read, to read along with them, to use the big books to engage them, to plan activities around the big books, em, what else? Well, these are some of the practices that I wanted to implement.

(me, personal interview, March, 6, 2008)

I wanted to make a difference in the school system, at least in the school where I had more influence. That was the reason why I applied to take up the position of HOD in the first place. I knew that in order to bring the teachers on board to what I was doing, I had to model or 'walk the talk'. Frank Smith in his leadership book, *Learning to Lead* (1986), states that once the leader's identity and actions are consistent, the results he/she gets will be too. In the book on leadership that the principal gave to all his HODs, *The 360° Leader* by John C. Maxwell (2005), it states: 'Leaders set the tone and the pace for all the people working for them. Therefore they need to be what they want to see.' (p.243)

I implemented a daily read-aloud session for the entire school in the mornings for the pupils who came early in the mornings. I wanted and hoped that the teachers would read aloud to their pupils on a daily basis. I modelled this practice in front of the whole school every morning. I believed in the usefulness of the Picture-Word Inductive Model (Calhoun, 1999), or PWIM for short. It is a strategy that is widely used and adopted in the Canadian province of Alberta. The model uses a picture as a starting point and the teacher leads the pupils to inquire about the picture and identify what they see in the picture. The teacher then labels the picture by drawing a line from the identified object or area, says the word, writes the word, asks the students to spell and read the word out loud. The teacher does the same for each of the words or objects identified. The teacher subsequently leads the class to read and review the picture word chart (also known as PWIM charts). In the lessons that follow, the students will 'use the picture word chart to read their own sets of words, classify words according to properties they can identify, and develop titles, sentences, and paragraphs about their picture' (Calhoun, 1999, p.22). I conducted a full-day workshop for the teachers in the beginning of December 2007, video-filmed myself conducting the PWIM lessons, shared these video lessons during weekly meetings with the teachers, and invited them to my classroom to observe me use PWIM. I believed that in order for others to implement these practices, I had to show them and 'walk the talk':

Your exposure in TTI and the fact that you're doing your PhD made you a more convicted and skilful teacher as when you were in school A. I guess it must be the learning and language theories that shape your course of actions. The English teachers would always seek your advice in any matters related to English. The P5 pupils, whom we co-teach, also loved and praised about your English lessons... As a HOD-EL, colleagues, the middle management and school leaders would hold you in

high regards as you would ensure excellence in the work you do, even at the expense of your health. (²³A1, personal email communication, June 3, 2010)

I thought you commanded the respect of many of the teachers. Many of them spoke highly of you. ... You are always willing to put in the extra effort to see to the work done. One example was the packing of the English Oral scripts on your birthday. You could have dedicated it to the teachers or activate other teachers but you put it upon your shoulders and stayed back to pack. ... You are still as helpful as ever showing us the ways on PWIM and later Novel Study Approach. (*A4, personal email communication, June 6, 2010)

I see a passionate, hard working and responsible HOD who wants the best for the children as well as taking good care of teacher's welfare. You understand what it means to be a leader. As your subordinate, I'm assured of being fairly treated and the trust you gave enabled one to want to strive for the betterment of the department. You walk your talk to the best of your ability. There were very trying times whereby I saw your weariness but you did not complain. In the business of work, you reminded me to go home early. You made your subordinates feel important and cared for their welfare.

(²⁴B2, personal email communication, June 5, 2010)

However, not every teacher was as accepting and willing to try new pedagogical practices as my two former colleagues:

A few weeks down the road in the beginning of this year (i.e. 2008), quite a number of teachers were not comfortable with the lack of worksheets, they were not comfortable with the fact that I want to empower them to make the decisions for themselves, planning not only the school-based curriculum but the class-based curriculum to be in line with this belief of the importance of reading – having more reading practices within the classroom – they were not comfortable at all that there were not enough worksheets given/printed, they were not comfortable at all that they were not told exactly what to do for every single thing – they wanted to be told exactly what must be done, what should be done, they wanted to have ready a full set of worksheets that they can dish out and I found it quite puzzling because I thought wouldn't empowerment be something fulfilling for a teacher? Wouldn't giving you that decision make you feel...give you that ownership of that class? But it didn't turn out to be so. So I ran up against the wall and this time, it's a wall of..., a group of vocal, experienced teachers.

(me, personal interview, March, 6, 2008)

As I did not believe in the value of the 'worksheet' policy that was widely implemented in many schools, I did not provide the teachers with extra worksheets.

²³ A1 & A4 were former colleagues from my first school who joined me in my third school (i.e. new school).

²⁴ B2 was a former colleague from my second school who joined me in my third school.

They were required to focus on their teaching, plan for lessons that engage the pupils, implement daily read-alouds, incorporate an extensive reading programme for their individual classes and use PWIM for vocabulary, spelling, grammar, phonics and writing lessons. Thus, I encountered some resistance:

The culture of Singapore schools is the 'worksheet culture'. Whenever we go to any school, there is always a ready set of worksheets available. During department work time, during the holidays, when I ask my friends who are Heads of Departments in other schools, most of the Department work were centred around revising and creating new worksheets so that could have created a mental model for them whereby they are used to and very familiar with this way of carrying things out. They are always told what exactly they need to do, what exactly they need to finish by a certain time. I don't know, but from my own perspective, give me the liberty, the flexibility to do things that I want in my own classroom. That makes me a professional teacher. That is the outlook, the perspective that I had and I thought most teachers have that but I was disappointed that it was not to be – not so.

(me, personal interview, March, 6, 2008)

Today, one of the teachers was worried about her class performance on the diagnostic test to be held on Monday, that she told the P1 teachers to give back the EL files and inform their parents that the children need to study for it.

I called the P1 teachers to the stage area, but she 'conveniently' did not hear the announcement made by the teacher in charge. I informed them that this was a diagnostic test, and that the children need not study for it. So there was no need to get them to take their EL files home to study. As this is not a summative assessment, but for evaluating our teaching and their learning, it is important that we know how the pupils did without studying. It is to gauge their actual understanding and retention of that understanding. This is something which people like the teacher in question need to learn and accept. She is too used to traditional methods of testing, and she is too anxious over the results. The results are not the main thing; the main thing is to find out their understanding.

(Personal journal entry, April 11, 2008)

In a review of the curriculum (MOE, 1998), the workbook syndrome (i.e. the extensive use of worksheets and workbooks) was specifically mentioned as one of the problems in the curriculum in quite a number of sections:

3. The lack of a positive learning culture has many causes, of which an important factor is the overemphasis on drilling students for class tests and terminal examinations. As the dominant mode of assessment at the primary school level is the pen-and-paper test which captures what students have learnt (the 'product') rather than how they learn (the 'process'), *teachers tend to focus on repetitive, structured exercises using workbooks and assessment sheets to train them to produce the right responses to examination questions* rather than engage the students in more creative forms of learning activity such as play, drama, games, experiments, project work,

field-trips and hands-on learning experiences. The balance between *equipping the students with a structured, teacher-directed, worksheet-centred environment for learning* and providing them with the opportunities to develop creativity and initiative *seems heavily weighted towards the former*. (emphases mine)

9. To counter the negative effects of the so-called 'workbook syndrome', principals and teachers should be encouraged to exercise greater discretion as to the type and number of worksheets to be covered and parents should be informed of the decisions accordingly.

10. Learning episodes which are highly structured and teacher-centred or which involve completing worksheets designed for repetitive practice have their place in the classroom but *should not become the sole teaching/learning strategy*. (emphasis mine)

13. ... While prescribed worksheets have their use and indeed could form the basis of creative teaching activities, *teachers should also devise teaching and learning strategies which are more interaction-based* such as 'show and tell', projects and field-trips. (Emphasis mine)

It seemed that the teachers in that new school were still not willing to move away from the extensive use of worksheets, and hence the lack of more worksheets created a form of dissonance for them. I wanted to make a difference and yet I found perhaps that difference was not sought nor welcomed by some.

4.7 Conclusion

Over the years, my experiences have shaped me to be passionate about justice and fairness, to be passionate about self-discipline and discipline, to be passionate about teaching and not to be a 'regimented clone'. As a teacher, I sought to embody these ideals in my practice as a teacher, a colleague and as a school leader. I started out filled with fire, passion and vigour, yet over time in all three schools, these 'fires' were slowly extinguished with and by 'wet blankets'. Much like what Lopez (1988) posits: 'The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes' (p.65).

Much of what I have experienced within the school system has fashioned my understanding of what it means to be a teacher – how the first school management allowed me to share my ‘fire’ for English and discipline; how my success in that first school allowed me to hold strong views about the importance of actual teaching rather than be dependent on and beholden to worksheets, and hence not agreeable to the worksheet policy in the second school; how the experience with the first principal wrought a more silent individual in the next school, not so keen on sharing; how the passion and willingness to share from Mrs. Ching and Mrs. Yi influenced me to be open and willing to share with the teachers in the third school.

To understand what might influence the four beginning teachers as they embark on their journey of teacher-hood, it is thus essential to look at the relationships in the school ecosystem. It is hence important to understand their stories, as suggested by Lopez (1988) because these stories told by them highlight and illustrate the knowledge needed to comprehend their experiences and the forces that influence and shape them. As Lopez (1988) explains, ‘Inherent in story is the power to reorder a state of psychological confusion through contact with the pervasive truth of those relationships we call “the land”’ (p.68).

Being and becoming a teacher is not a black and white issue; inherent in the story is a complex and intricate tale, one that cannot be reduced to formulas or clichés or maxims. Experiences matter; they are the planned and unplanned stops that one makes in a long journey, and the stories that we can relate to. Hence to learn more of the four beginning teachers, I need to travel to their landscapes of imaginings and truth; of pain and joy; of hurt and anger, much like what is asserted by Lopez (1988):

the interior landscape is a metaphorical representation of the exterior landscape, that the truth reveals itself most fully not in dogma but in the paradox, irony, and contradictions that distinguish compelling narratives- beyond this there are only failures of imagination; reductionism in science; fundamentalism in religion; fascism in politics. (p.71)

Yet even as I traverse to their landscapes, how will I read their experiences? Will I see their conflicts merely as a result of them challenging the dominant policy discourse, much like what happened to me in my conflicts in my first two schools? Will I see the tensions they face merely as a result of them facing a dilemma over whether to comply or defy the pedagogic norm in the schools they are in, much like what happened to me in the second and third schools I was in? These are questions I bear in mind as I listen to and write the four beginning teachers' stories, for the responses to these questions will impact my interpretation of their stories.

Another question I have as I interpret their stories is: Do I see hegemonic forces reaching into their classrooms to compel the choices that they make? Bourdieu (1990) provides an explanation of this concept in *The Logic of Practice*:

The theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the habitus, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions . . . The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence

produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (pp. 52 – 53)

Yet, my interpretation is not that 'habitus' in the schools produces 'mindless obedience or acquiescence' (Glassman, 2011, p.35), but rather what Bourdieu (1984) explains as necessity: 'Necessity imposes a taste for necessity which implies a form of adaptation to and consequently acceptance of the necessary, a resignation to the inevitable, a deep-seated disposition which is in no way incompatible with a revolutionary intention . . .' (p. 372). Thus, the necessity to conform to the performativity discourse, to the dominant policy discourse, and to the pedagogic norms of the school engender a propensity to comply; for, if the teachers do not comply, the tool of appraisal will be used to bear on the teachers.

Will the socialisation forces of habitus, which I too faced as a beginning teacher and later as an experienced teacher, create the tensions and conflicts for the four beginning teachers? Will they accept it as a necessity and move on, or will it create a dissonance for them? To this, I now turn – the stories of the four beginning teachers.

Chapter 5

Analytic Inquiry 1 – From Fantasy to Survival

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968, p.30)

Adopting the calls by Atkinson and Delamont (2006) to maintain ‘a commitment to an analytic stance’ (p.169) and Atkinson, Coffrey and Delamont (2003) to ‘not lose sight of the ethnographic imperative that we are seeking to understand and make sense of complex social worlds of which we are only part (but a part nevertheless)’ (p.57), I hence adopted a *layered account* (Ronai, 1995, 1997) as a method of presenting the four beginning teachers’ narratives. Layered account is a ‘postmodern ethnographic reporting technique that embodies a theory of consciousness and a method of reporting in one stroke’ (Ronai, 1995, p.396). Using such a format provides the readers with different points of views and different layers of experience to draw from so as to interpret the narratives. Thus, I use this technique of layered account to invite the readers to question, to understand, to learn of the roles of the teacher training institute, the school, and the individual in the induction and development of the beginning teacher.

In this chapter and the chapter that follows, I present the narratives of the four beginning teachers. The organizational asterisks are used to guide the reader through the layered accounts, and italicized font is used to denote a shift to a different perspective. Ryan (1986) proposed a four stage life cycle for teacher development:

fantasy, survival, mastery and impact. A number of studies (Bullough, 1989; Baptiste & Sheerer, 1997; Bevan, 2004; Certo, 2006) have used Ryan's (1986) stages as a frame of reference to examine teachers' developmental process. As I too agree that there are a series of developmental stages that a teacher will encounter, I have thus used Ryan's (1986) stages as an overarching frame for organising the narratives in this and the following chapter. This chapter traces the four beginning teachers from the *fantasy* stage to the beginning of the *survival* 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). This roughly translates to the time of preservice training to their first six months (June – December 2008) in the school. The first six months were chosen because this is the second semester of the Singapore school calendar, and the beginning teachers would have followed their first form class to the end of the academic year. The next chapter traces the beginning teachers' development in their second calendar year (January – December 2009). The *survival* period supposedly stretches into this period, and will vary according to each individual. Thus, the next chapter focuses on the *survival* and the *mastery* stages.

Within each chapter, the narratives are organised using Vogler's (2007) stages of the hero's journey. The reason I chose Vogler's stages is because the participants' journey is akin to the archetypal hero's journey. They are the men and women who

are facing the battles for survival and mastery; they are battling the forces that seek to constrain their ideas and ideals. As Vogler (1985) states:

Stories built on the model of the hero myth have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they spring from a universal source in the collective unconscious, and because they reflect universal concerns.

The preservice stage is that of *Crossing the Threshold*, since the beginning teachers have made a commitment to train to be teachers and enter the *special world* (i.e. the school). The stage of *Test, Allies, Enemies* follow, and this corresponds to their first six months since that is the time they will be tested and find out who their possible allies and enemies are. And without further ado, let's meet the beginning teachers.

5.1 Act 1 – Crossing the First Threshold

We enter a strange no-man's-land, a world between worlds, a zone of crossing that may be desolate and lonely, or in places, crowded with life. You sense the presence of other beings, other forces with sharp thorns or claws, guarding the way to the treasure you seek. But there's no turning back now, we all feel it; the adventure has begun for good or ill.

Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (2007, p.127)

Nathaniel Ho. Nathaniel Ho, 28, applied to be a teacher in 2006, after working in the finance sector for three years. He was heavily involved in his church work, particularly in the youth ministry for a number of years. He liked working with the youth and partly it was due to this exposure that he decided to give teaching a try. He felt that teaching was his spiritual calling at this juncture of his life. In his work with the youth, he realized that he had a passion to teach and to communicate his life values with those he was put in charge of. He loved children, could relate to the

church youth very well, and hence aspired to be an inspiration to them. In short, he felt that teaching was very rewarding.

Nathaniel was given a year's experience as a ²⁵contract teacher in ²⁶Angsana Primary School. Even though he did not have a pleasant experience as a contract teacher in Angsana Primary School, he persisted in finishing the contract and then embarking on the one-year Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) teacher training programme. During his one-year training, Nathaniel was inspired by the passion of a number of teacher educators. These teacher educators that made an impact on him had crafted fun and interesting lessons for his tutorials, and he hoped to emulate them in this aspect – by making his own lessons fun, engaging and meaningful for his future ²⁷pupils. In addition, he felt that the enthusiasm of these teacher educators was demonstrated in the student-centred activities which they carried out during the tutorials; furthermore, these activities displayed the application of the content knowledge that was taught. This was the kind of teacher he wanted to be.

* * *

When I was Nathaniel's tutor for an intensive two-week grammar course at the start of his teacher training programme, I was impressed with his thirst for knowledge. He almost always had questions in every single tutorial. He would express himself confidently and he never once came across as being rude or disrespectful. The questions he posed were genuine queries intended for clarification, and these

²⁵ Contract teacher: A person who is untrained as a teacher but is given a short contract to be a teacher as a form of initial exposure before the actual teacher training.

²⁶ Names of all educational institutions are anonymised.

²⁷ The term 'pupils' is specifically used in this study to denote the learners in the primary classroom; the term 'students' is used to denote learners in general and in all other levels.

questions served also to help his tutorial mates understand the content better. In the group discussion activities, when I moved around to facilitate, I could tell that he collaborated well with his group and they could complete all their tasks with great camaraderie, even though they did not know each other prior to the programme. Nathaniel would volunteer to present his group's discussion to the rest of the class, and I could see that some of the more reticent groupmates of his were very appreciative of that gesture.

* * *

In the second semester, after seven weeks, the PGDE students were sent out for their all-important ten-week Teaching Practice (TP). Nathaniel was sent to his contract school, Angsana Primary. Angsana Primary was located in the northwestern part of Singapore. It was a ²⁸mega school, with an enrolment of about 2, 500 pupils. It had more than 40 years of history; it was well known for its achievements in the academics and sports, and for its use of Information & Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching. It had won numerous top awards as set out in the MOE's Masterplan of Awards, and these awards were prominently advertised in the school's website and compound. Due to Nathaniel's prior experience in Angsana Primary, he had hoped he would not be posted back. When he found out about it, he had mixed feelings. On one hand, he was looking forward to TP because he wanted to put into practice what he had learnt during teacher training; on the other hand, he was apprehensive about going back to that school. But he kept a positive outlook and endeavoured to try out what he had learnt.

²⁸ In this study, a mid-sized school is one with a pupil enrolment between 1,000 and 2,000; a small-sized school has an enrolment of less than 1,000; a big-sized or mega school has an enrolment above 2,000.

* * *

Just as Ball (2003) posited that '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), Angsana primary prominently displays its 'performances' as 'displays of quality'. It is a form of fabrication where the organisation seeks to present a version of itself to the general public. And possibly, this fabrication might become 'something to be sustained, lived up to' (Ball, 2004, p.148).

* * *

As it turned out, it was not a positive experience. In the first week of TP, all student teachers were supposed to observe their cooperating teachers' (CTs) lessons, so that they could see how pedagogical approaches and strategies learnt during teacher training could be applied in the classroom. Nathaniel did not have an opportunity to observe the student-centred approaches and strategies which he learnt being enacted in the actual classrooms. All he observed were teacher-directed lessons with a number of observation lessons spent on drilling, practicing, and doing corrections. He asked repeatedly if he could observe more lessons but the CTs told him that they had no time. Nathaniel felt that since he was only a student teacher, he should not impose on them; so, he gave up requesting. From the second to tenth week, all student teachers were required to take over the teaching of their CTs' classes, while the CTs would formally observe their lessons eight times, and their TP supervisors from the teacher training institute would formally observe them twice. These ten observations were evaluative, and they would be used as a platform for discussion by the supervisor,

CTs, the ²⁹School Coordinating Mentor (SCM), and the school's principal or vice-principal at the end of the ten weeks to formally assign a grade for the student teachers' TP.

During the nine weeks, Nathaniel was constantly asked to complete the syllabus by his main CT, who taught the English Language (EL). Even though Nathaniel was ahead of his fellow student teachers with regard to completing the syllabus, his main CT still felt he was behind time. The reason she wanted him to 'hurry up' was because she wanted to revise with her class before the mid-year examinations. His main CT provided very little help or advice in preparing for his daily lessons, for their eight formal observation lessons, or for his supervisor's two observation lessons. The main CT emphasized to him that the tuning-in part of the lesson was crucial and must be interesting enough to engage the pupils. Thus, Nathaniel requested for examples of such tuning-in. Even though the main CT agreed to provide examples of what she wanted to see in the lesson observation, in the end, she did not. Nathaniel was especially indignant about this when he shared his experience with me. He felt that it was not realistic and totally unreasonable for his main CT to have certain expectations when these expectations were not clearly spelled out. He felt that the main CT should have modeled what was required in his observation lessons, so that he would have an idea, and hence be able to plan for and exhibit the very trait, skill or component in his lessons. He felt that it was not a fair assessment of his teaching ability.

²⁹ School Coordinating Mentor: A senior teacher or head of department assigned by the principal to be the person-in-charge of coordinating the TP, liaising with the TP supervisor, and leading the mentoring of the student teachers.

Teaching practice was not totally a negative experience for Nathaniel. He enjoyed the actual teaching itself. He loved his classes because his pupils were so eager to learn from him. Their eagerness and excitement for learning was infectious, and he thoroughly enjoyed teaching them. On his own, he experimented with his teaching techniques by using jig saw puzzles, crossword puzzles, role playing and readers' theatre among the many student-centred activities he had learnt. He believed that such activities were more useful than teacher-directed lessons since the teaching points could be embedded in the activities and the pupils could learn while enjoying the activities. When Nathaniel shared on this aspect of his TP, he was smiling throughout; his face was suffused with excitement and joy.

* * *

Nathaniel enjoyed his interaction with the children and the experience of teaching them. But he certainly did not enjoy the experience of the TP. His main CT was not supportive or helpful, and he was not able to learn from them how to apply what he had learnt from teacher training. The theory-practice gap could be bridged, or at least narrowed, during a student teacher's teaching practice, if the CT could demonstrate how the various teaching strategies and approaches were adapted and applied in the classroom. With such guidance, student teachers would be more confident in doing so for his / her subsequent lessons. It was a missed opportunity for Nathaniel and his CTs.

* * *

Ishmael Dee. Ishmael Dee wanted to be a teacher; he had been influenced by quite a number of his own teachers in the past, namely his Chinese Language (CL) teachers. He remembered them most distinctly because 'they mean what they say,

they say what they mean.’ For him, that was very important because these CL teachers also taught the subject of Civics and Moral Education (CME). They did not just teach him about the Chinese language and culture, they taught him about himself and life in general. He remembered these lessons more than the language ones. With encouragement from some of these teachers, Ishmael went on to pursue his first degree on a prestigious teaching scholarship in one of the ³⁰Times Higher Education top 50 universities. Ishmael emphasized the importance of imparting these same values that his CL teachers taught him throughout the interviews we had. He saw himself as someone in a position to influence others, to impart character, to focus on the moral dimension of teaching, rather than the teaching of content itself. He believed that the teacher’s job is to set a moral example and inculcate the right values to the next generation.

Ishmael also saw teaching as a profession of hope, where the teacher went to the classroom in the hope of changing lives, and hoping that the children could hope for themselves. He saw the interactions within the classroom as ‘little miracles happening’, where the teacher ignited the flames of curiosity and interest in the learning.

Ishmael, 25, went into the PGDE teacher training programme in 2007 filled with passion and idealism. He wanted to make a difference in the lives of children, much as the CL teachers had made a difference in his life. As such, based on what he had read and learnt during teacher training, he believed that he could make a difference in

³⁰ Top 50 based on the Times Higher Education (2010-2011) ranking:
<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2010-2011/top-200.html>

the children's way of learning. In his opinion, one of the problems with the school system was that the more senior teachers socialize the newer teachers into a certain pedagogical practice because that was the way they had always taught and thus they did not see it as a problem. This was due to the fact that he perceived the school system as a form of hierarchy, where the contract teacher and the student teacher were at the bottom of the food chain – 'the algae'. Thus, the more senior teachers could impose their practices on those at the bottom. Ishmael believed there were two outcomes to this challenge of socialisation. One was to fight the system within one's classroom, while trying to 'stave off challenge and negativity from the outside.' He could not agree with the current state of affairs; he felt that 'the boat (was) supposed to be rocked all the time.' The other outcome was to give up – to leave the system if one cannot effect any change at all. This was because he was mindful of an advice a friend had shared with him – not to let the system change him because upon becoming part of the system, one's personality ceased to exist as an independent entity.

* * *

Ishmael is a person with strong beliefs. He believes that he can make a difference to the lives of his pupils just as his own teachers had done for him. At this juncture, he has a strong identity – he knew the kind of teacher he envisaged himself to be. Ishmael feels that certain aspects of school teaching needs to be changed. The traditional and dominant mode of drill-and-practice instruction needs to be abandoned, and new ways of engaging the pupils need to be set in place. He believes he can accomplish this, in spite of the all-powerful pervasive influence and attraction of the traditional way of teaching. He seems to believe he will not be changed by this systemic teaching structure.

* * *

Ishmael was quite happy with his TP posting. Tembusu Primary School was an established school located in the central part of Singapore. It has a history of more than 50 years; it was a mega school, with a pupil enrolment of around 2, 500. Over the years, it had established a reputation of being good in its academic achievements. Like Angsana primary school, Tembusu primary had also won several of MOE's top awards, and similarly had advertised these awards prominently on its websites and in the school compound. He was happy with his SCM and his main CT. They were very helpful and most accommodating. They allowed him to observe other classes he was not attached to for the first week of observation. And most importantly, they did not allow him to perform any relief teaching duties. Thus, all his free periods were used for his own planning and reflection. His CTs also took great pains to give advice on teaching practices and other issues related to the profession. They also took time to reassure him when he expressed any self doubts. Thus, Ishmael really looked forward to the actual teaching from week two to week ten with excitement and anticipation. He felt that Tembusu Primary's staffroom had a 'hardwork ethic' and that hard work was appreciated. He also believed that the leadership roles and positions available in the school were for the taking if one were interested.

What surprised him about the school was that, on the whole, it did not see him as merely a trainee, but a student in need of guidance and help. He especially appreciated the guidance provided by his main CT, who was his EL CT. She was very helpful and shared with him all the techniques and activities she used in the classroom. She demonstrated the use of ³¹KWL strategy for reading comprehension, the use of

³¹ KWL: An instructional graphic organizer created by Ogle (1986) to organize information for better understanding.

information-gap activities for oral discussions, and the use of role playing for understanding of adverbs. They had such a close working relationship that the CT even asked if Ishmael might be willing to give the EL leadership position in the school a try, since there was currently then no EL HoD, and she was the stand-in for the interim period. Ishmael felt very honored by his CT's suggestion, but he told her that he was not ready yet and would like to spend the next three years learning, building resources, and expanding his teaching repertoire. Then, at that juncture, he would consider. But he also acknowledged that since he was a teaching scholarship holder, he might not have that luxury of time to wait before he was asked to take on a leadership position. Ishmael did not seem to mind the suggestion, and would readily take on the challenge if need be.

A problem that Ishmael faced during TP was the heavy emphasis on drill and practice, and the emphasis of preparing the children for the examinations. The lessons which he observed were mostly teacher-directed. Many of the teachers he observed teaching taught to the examinations using the textbook and the worksheets. He spoke to the teachers and they told him that because they had targets to meet for the number of worksheets and workbook exercises, they had no choice but to restrict their teaching to using the worksheets. Even though they felt constrained and frustrated by this situation, and even expressed regret, they still had to do so because of the heavy emphasis on examination results, and as such the practice of using worksheets was dominant. Ishmael admitted that it would be tough to 'buck the trend' of teaching using worksheets, activity books and textbooks. He personally felt that such an approach did not work because such worksheets and practice exercises were completely decontextualised and artificial. He was glad and thankful that TTI had

exposed him to a 'myriad of tricks that could be used for teaching English', and he planned to use the 'myriad of tricks'. But he acknowledged that the use of worksheets was a practice he could not avoid. The school had monthly grammar tests, fortnightly practice papers, and a lot of worksheets; to him, the 'worksheets is (sic) hell'. He personally felt that the workbook should be done away with so as to create more time to finish and refine the worksheets, but many of the teachers prefer to continue with the workbooks in addition to the worksheets as 'they need a crutch'. Ishmael acknowledged the utility of the worksheets since they were examination-oriented; it prepares the children for the examinations. He also acknowledged that worksheets do provide some form of accountability of the teachers' work, but he also felt it was not the most ideal way.

At the end of his TP, Ishmael was of the opinion that he needed to rethink how he did his work. He felt the tension between efficiency and his own judgement of what he wanted to do: 'If I go for the efficient method of having pupils copy answers, I don't feel good. But I don't want to spend 13 hours in the office and still not get the work done. It's not something I'm comfortable with.' He believed that if he started thinking he wanted to do his best by being efficient, then 'the system creeps in,' and he would fall down the slippery slope of socialisation. Ishmael realized the reality of the school situation in his ten weeks of TP. His CTs started telling in the last three weeks of his TP to ignore the lesson planning and just focus on the worksheets, as it was approaching the mid-year examination. He was shocked at the amount of worksheets he had to clear, but he also realized that should he give in to this situation, he might be changed. This was a tension Ishmael faced at the end of his TP.

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Ishmael was clearly supported during this crucial phase of teacher training. He had a supportive CT who was incidentally the interim HoD. This is an advantage because having a school leader as one's mentor does open doors. It provides more leadership opportunities if one were interested in the leadership track. This was evident when Ishmael's CT asked if he might be interested to take over her position one day. It is indeed a great opportunity but Ishmael wisely felt that it might be better for him to gain the necessary teaching experience and perhaps the credential before he leads.

At the end of the TP, Ishmael faced the reality of school teaching. Even though he firmly believed in a more ³²constructivist form of teaching, he was compelled to use the worksheets as a form of instruction since it prepared the pupils for the examination. The heavy hand of the examination pressed down heavily on everyone in Tembusu Primary, even on Ishmael's CT who had demonstrated some of the more constructivist teaching approaches in the beginning. All three of his CTs even told him explicitly to just focus on preparing the pupils for the examination and not on lesson planning. TP is a time for the preservice teacher to learn to put theory into practice; to put what one has learnt in the pedagogy courses to good use; to adapt the student-centred teaching strategies to fit the needs of the class pupils. TP, in a way, is also preparing the preservice teachers to be aware of the reality of school life, and this seems to be what the CTs were doing. They were preparing Ishmael for school life – the result-driven school system. They were preparing him to engage with the dominant performativity discourse that is seldom, if at all, mentioned during teacher

³² For the sake of brevity, the terms 'constructivist' and 'traditional' will be employed throughout this thesis to denote the opposite ends of the learning theory spectrum, where constructivist teaching places emphasis on learners' active participation and the social nature of learning, and where traditional teaching views learning as an acquisition of certain behaviour through conditioning.

training. But this was a discourse that was repugnant to Ishmael, and which he wanted to disregard and discard, and which he did not want to be seduced by. This situation thus sets up a potential clash of values between Ishmael and Tembusu Primary.

* * *

Hope Tan. Hope Tan, 22, had always been interested in Science and hence after graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree, she applied to be a teacher in 2007. She wanted to continue to be in touch with Science as a learning subject, and teaching as a job provided that avenue. Another reason she wanted to teach was the stable working hours. It was a routine that she was very familiar with because her fiancé had been teaching for 15 years. In the span of the four years she was with him as his girlfriend and then his fiancée, she had heard about teaching and the reality of the school system from both him and his friends who were all teachers. Hence, Hope did not have any preconceptions about teaching and what it entailed. She had heard enough about it to be psychologically aware and prepared for the profession. She came in to teaching with the understanding that things were not always going to be rosy.

During teacher training, Hope gleefully picked up new ideas from her teacher educators when she thought the pedagogical approaches and strategies would come in handy in future. But for certain courses, she was rather critical because she did not feel they would be useful in reality. Hope did not view the TP as a special distinct phase of training, but rather as a form of assessment that she had to take at the end of any course of learning. She was very practical in her outlook on life. Thus, she was not gripped with anxiety as some of the student teachers were. In fact, she was excited

about it as she looked upon it as a challenge; she 'like(d) the challenge and stress in being assessed.' She liked the feeling of doing better and getting better feedback in each subsequent observation. It gave her satisfaction to rise to the challenges.

Furthermore, she knew that this was 'probably the only time I can give undivided attention to the pedagogy and strategies in my teaching career.'

* * *

Hope seemed to have a very pragmatic view of teacher training. It was to equip her with the skills for her to do well in school. Skills that were deemed unrealistic were immediately scoffed at and ignored; only those strategies and ideas she found could be of use were retained in her notes for future reference. Even her view of the TP was a pragmatic one. It was to assess her ability as a future teacher. In this sense, Hope is very different from the other three beginning teachers (BTs).

* * *

The school she was posted to for her TP was Frangipani Primary. It was located in the northeastern part of Singapore. It was a popular school; it had an enrolment of 2,000 pupils. The school was supportive of the student teachers. They were given more than the stipulated 21 periods of observations, which Hope was delighted with. She got the chance to see how different teachers manage their classes. She noted that she did not observe any lessons out of the ordinary; most were drill and practice, and some were quite 'boring, of course.' It was a matter of fact to her. She did not have high expectations that teachers would adopt the myriad of strategies she was taught at TTI. She believed that 'in reality, teachers do need to produce results' and hence teaching to the test was part and parcel of a teacher's life. This impression was further reinforced when her CTs put it across explicitly to her that she needed to cover the textbook and complete the syllabus for the mid-year examinations.

During the TP, Hope was very focused in learning the tools of the teaching trade. She was enthusiastic about going for the EL and Science workshops arranged by the school for the teaching staff. As a student teacher, she did not have to attend, but she did anyway because she was keen to learn. The only reality she was concerned with was the amount of marking. The worksheet kept piling during this period, and she had to spend long hours to complete the marking. But she was able to attribute it to the fact that she had to spend an inordinate amount of time to plan her lessons as this was a TP. She was very clear that she did not want her weekends with her fiancé to be spent marking. She was determined to complete her marking on weekdays so that she could spend her weekends with her fiancé and for her own activities.

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Hope was very supported during her TP. She was given more than the required number of observations which she readily accepted. She took them as opportunities to learn from other teachers. But what is surprising is that she accepted the traditional mode of teaching as normal and nothing to be queried. She accepted this mode of teaching as the most efficient and realistic way of producing the examination results. This view of hers was affirmed by her CTs who explained the necessity of such preparation.

Hope's identity as a teacher seemed to be clearly aligned to her fiancé's and his friends' understanding of being a teacher. Her identity was very strongly influenced by their views of the reality of teaching. It was a common discourse they engaged in when they met as a group. Her D-identity and her A-identity were thus aligned due to

her affinity with her fiancé's friends and her constant exposure and acceptance of their discourse.

Her focus during this TP was not so much on adapting the strategies she learnt, but more of doing well for her TP assessment, and making sure that she cleared her marking before the weekends. Hope has a clear sense of her identity – one of a teacher and one of an individual outside of school. She seemed very intent on separating the two; her sense of self-preservation was very strong, much stronger than the other three BTs'.

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Harriet Lee. Harriet Lee, 35, had been an industrial trainer for eight years before she was retrenched and decided to apply to be a teacher in 2007. Harriet graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering, but she had read English Language as a minor subject. She loved to read extensively in any area that she was interested in at that particular period of her life. To her, books were 'food for the brain'. This habit was in part inculcated when her father very willingly gave her money to buy books but not to buy Sony Walkmans or fancy dresses when she was young. Because of her deep interest while reading Physics at the undergraduate level, she read many science books and articles. The book by Richard Feynman, *What do you care what other people think?*, was a major influence on her. Through the book, in Feynman's recount of his life, Harriet realized it would be advantageous to always be more knowledgeable than others in any field; this realization piqued her desire to always read beyond the syllabus, to read beyond what one should know.

During Harriet's six-month contract teaching before her PGDE teacher training started, she was left to herself most of the time. So, she decided to read to prepare herself for the teacher training; but none of her colleagues could tell her what to read. She felt that no one wanted to share with her. She found some books on her own, and shared some interesting ways to engage the pupils with her colleagues. But they told her they had no time; they needed to finish the syllabus. Harriet hoped she would not become like them in future.

Harriet had a positive experience during teacher training. She had a 'world class science educator', Dr. Felix Sharpe, who showed her classmates and her interesting, engaging, and practical pedagogical strategies to use in their science classes. She was inspired by his passion because she believed that passion was the most important ingredient in teaching, and the way to obtain passion was to be enthusiastic. Harriet believed that with sustained enthusiasm, passion would follow. As the TP neared, Harriet felt a sense of adventure and apprehension. She was excited because it was 'like a journey of discovery ahead'. She believed TP was a chance for her to 'better' herself with regard to teaching, and try out what was taught during teacher training. The reason she felt apprehension was that she was concerned with her grades; since she was competitive by nature, Harriet was 'going for gold'.

Harriet did well for TP. She was posted to Jacaranda Primary School. Jacaranda Primary was a relatively young but popular school located in the southeastern part of Singapore. It had an enrolment of 1, 500 pupils. 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 pupils.

Harriet's supervisor, main CT and SCM all commented that she excelled in her work attitude and that she had commendable enthusiasm for teaching. She was able to meet all the lesson outcomes she had planned for in her Science and Mathematics lessons. Harriet found a parallel to her Science teacher educator in her Science CT, Mdm. Oh. Harriet felt that Mdm. Oh was the female version of Dr, Felix Sharpe because she heard from her friends in other schools that most Science teachers did not bother with the inquiry approach of teaching. But Mdm. Oh, in spite of teaching for more than 20 years, used the inquiry approach of teaching in nearly all the lessons that Harriet observed.

* * *

Harriet has a hunger for learning new things, especially all things science. She reads widely because she firmly believes in the importance of learning more than is required. This innate desire for learning is a good trait to share and inculcate in her pupils. Furthermore, she had positive role models in the form of her Science teacher educator and her main CT. This provided her with ample opportunities to translate her beliefs into actual classroom practices. She believed in engaging her pupils through student-centred inquiry approaches in learning, and her CT affirmed and supported those beliefs since she herself utilised that approach too.

Having a supportive CT during one's TP is essential for any preservice teacher's learning. As Evertson and Smithey (2000) point out:

few mentors practice the kind of conceptually oriented, learner-centred teaching advocated by reformers ... [and] mentoring may have a conservative effect on teachers' practice, introducing and helping to support the status quo instead of encouraging new teachers to explore innovative practice. (p.294)

It is only when the CTs' beliefs and practices are aligned with that of teacher training can the preservice teachers see the theories translated into actual classroom practice. And only when that happens will there be a greater chance of the constructivist pedagogy being adopted after teacher training. But the problem is how can the teacher training institute identify and find enough of such CTs for all the preservice teachers? In the absence of such CTs, the teaching practice experience can be of little value (Keogh, Dole & Hudson, 2006). This is a systemic problem for teacher education in Singapore.

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Harriet, however, was not too pleased with her EL lessons because her EL CT, Mrs. Gan, did not provide much help. All the help she was provided with were just the four formal observations by the CT. Harriet did not even get a chance to observe any EL lessons in her observation week. Mrs. Gan was also the school's EL Head of department (HoD); she told Harriet to take over her EL lessons in the very first week of the TP when that should have been reserved for Harriet to observe. Harriet was quite unhappy with Mrs. Gan because she was aiming for a distinction for her TP, but due to the lack of support and guidance, Harriet was not able to learn how a realistic EL lesson could be carried out, or how she could have adopted the strategies she learnt at TTI. In fact, Mdm. Oh gave Harriet more support on the teaching of EL than Mrs. Gan, her EL CT, even though Mdm. Oh had not taught EL for many years. Harriet ended her TP with a deep appreciation for Mdm. Oh, but with a very negative impression of Mrs. Gan. She felt that Mrs. Gan should make a greater effort to guide a teacher since being an HoD meant one had a more varied experience and a broader perspective when it came to teaching that particular subject matter. Harriet felt that Mrs. Gan had neither.

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This is sadly a common problem faced by some preservice teachers. Studies (Gilbert, 2005; McCann, Johannessen & Ricca, 2005) have shown that frustration caused by poor mentoring matches is relatively common. Harriet was assigned an experienced teacher, an HoD in fact, who could share with her different approaches in teaching EL, since an HoD should and would have encountered a variety of teaching approaches by the very fact that HoDs need to observe all teachers under their purview. However, due to her position as an HoD, Mrs. Gan did not bother with planning any lesson for Harriet to observe. Mrs. Gan was seemingly busy with her department work and so had Harriet teach in the very first week of her TP, which was originally meant for observation of CTs only. This already demonstrated the lack of professionalism on Mrs. Gan's part. She was not much of a mentor, since she did not share her experiences nor allowed Harriet to observe her. In fact, all Mrs. Gan did was merely to critique Harriet's formal appraisal lessons and gave her no practical examples to learn from. This sort of mentoring defeats its very purpose. There was no learning; it seemed that the CT had used Harriet as a relief teacher in this case. As McCann et al (2005) suggest, 'it is better for a school to have no mentoring program at all than to have a bad mentoring program' (p. 32).

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5.2 Act 2 Scene 1 – Encountering Test, Allies, Enemies

We Seekers are in shock – this new world is so different from the home we've always known. Not only are the terrain and the local residents different, the rules of this place are strange as they can be. Different things are valued here and we have a lot to learn about the local currency, customs, and language. Strange creatures jump out at you! Think fast! Don't eat that, it could be poison!

Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (2007, p.135)

This next scene traces the four beginning teachers as they start teaching as qualified teachers. It is in the year 2008, from June – December.

Nathaniel Ho. Nathaniel was quite affected by his experience during the TP, but he put them behind him. He took his initiative to go for an interview in a neighbouring school, and the principal wrote in to MOE requesting for him. To his chagrin, MOE posted Nathaniel back to Angsana Primary.

* * *

I emailed Nathaniel at the end of the first week in ³³Term 3 (29 June 2008); it was his first week teaching his own class as a fully qualified teacher. He did not respond. I emailed him twice more, in weeks 3 (July 11) and 4 (July 16) to check if he were coping in school. I was worried since he did not respond to the three emails.

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³³ In Singapore schools, Term 1 means the 10 weeks of school from January to March; Term 2 means the 10 weeks of school from March to June; Term 3 means the 10 weeks of school from July to September; Term 4 means the 10 weeks for school from September to November. There is a one-week holiday between Terms 1 & 2, and Terms 3 & 4; there is a 4-week holiday between Terms 2 & 3; there is a 6-week holiday after Term 4.

Even though Nathaniel was a neophyte in the profession, a beginning teacher (BT), he was given the responsibilities of an ³⁴Arts Coordinator, and given the full teaching load of an experienced teacher – 38 periods. The Ministry of Education (MOE) had instituted a policy of giving beginning teachers 80% of the standard teaching load, so as to ‘ease the transition of the beginning teachers to the demands of the job’ (MOE, 2007a). This 80% teaching load would allow the BTs to have more time to plan their lessons and reflect on their teaching practices. This was the reflective teaching practice culture that the MOE had hoped to instil in the entire teaching force (MOE, 2006b, 2008, 2010). But with a full teaching load and a heavy portfolio of an Arts coordinator, Nathaniel was struggling to ‘keep afloat’. In his first six weeks as a newly qualified teacher, he had to prepare selected pupils for and take them to an Arts competition. He also had to plan an Arts learning journey and prepare the worksheet to accompany it. It was very tiring for him. As Angsana Primary ‘pursues awards’, it participates in numerous competitions; thus Nathaniel was heavily involved in them, especially when they are arts-related. The most frustrating thing he faced in his first six months as a BT was the time constraint. He found his lesson quality compromised as a result of his involvement in so many arts-related programmes and activities.

Nathaniel found it hard to find time to reflect on his own teaching practices and he was beginning to feel ‘jaded’. He felt ‘quite bad’ that he had been neglecting his teaching, and was considerably upset with himself when he got back his class examination results for the year end examinations.

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³⁴ Arts Coordinator: a leadership role in the school system; a person who plans and monitors the arts programme(s) in the school; also in charge of the arts resources for all the school teachers.

Nathaniel was tested early in his career as a teacher. Upon graduation, right in his first teaching semester, he was given a full teaching load and the portfolio of the school's Art Coordinator. This is certainly not something recommended for BTs. Studies (Serpell & Bozeman, 1999; Fullan, 2001; McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Clement, 2011) have shown that BTs need a period of adjustment to cope with the reality shock they encounter after teacher training. Yet, instead of off-loading Nathaniel's teaching load as recommended by the MOE, Angsana Primary did the very opposite. Before Nathaniel could even think about his lessons, he was 'forced' to give up his time of reflection in order to cope with the heavy worksheet load and the various responsibilities of being an Art Coordinator. As such, the easiest way to survive was to just teach and complete the worksheets, so that there is accountability to the school, to the parents and to oneself. The worksheets are the evidence that one has taught what was required – it was measurable. This is akin to what Woods and Jeffrey (2002) listed as one of the teacher dilemmas: 'Measurable quantities have replaced immeasurable qualities in assessment. Audit accountability sidesteps the personal and local...' (p.97). But, in doing so, Nathaniel seemed to have given up his teaching beliefs of making his lessons fun, engaging and meaningful. His drill-and-practice lessons contradicted those very beliefs. Nathaniel seemed to have relinquished a part of his teacher identity in order to survive during this phase.

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Ishmael Dee. Ishmael liked Tembusu Primary's supportive environment in the beginning. He appreciated the fact that the school took its support of BTs seriously; he got 29 periods for the first six months, which was aligned to the MOE's policy for BTs' teaching load. He was given an above average, in terms of the examination

results, Primary 5 class. The level colleagues also offered him many useful tips and suggestions on how he could hone his craft and manage the day-to-day administrative duties. As he was not given the extra administrative duties or the full teaching load, Ishmael volunteered to help the HoDs in a number of administrative tasks, such as updating the Primary 5 examination results, changing the formatting of the EL syllabus document for the school, and changing the formatting of the marksheets for efficient retrieval of results, among others. Ishmael felt that since he had more time, he should volunteer to help others.

Ishmael also found friendship with a group of BTs. This group of six comprised of the first and second year BTs. He felt that this group of BTs burnt with a fierce passion for teaching, so they put in longer hours than the other colleagues. He considered this group as his friends, and not just colleagues. They exchanged ideas about teaching and grew close. They even hung out together on weekends and certain public holidays. Ishmael felt that a possible reason for this camaraderie was their age. He felt they were 'less inhibited' and thus more 'natural with each other'; they could confide in each other. He acknowledged that as a group, they were 'quite loud'; akin to 'young Turks' who 'want to start a new revolution'. He believed that they were like a 'breath of fresh air' to the school because 'you need some new blood to shake up the system a bit'. As a group, they suggested many new programmes or improvements to the existing programmes for the school. However, he also admitted that there would be some who might not take too kindly to this 'shaking up'.

* * *

Ishmael was more fortunate than Nathaniel. Tembusu Primary was a lot more supportive; it off-loaded his teaching load and Ishmael was not given any extra

this situation – the workload, the number of school initiatives, and the number of worksheets.

The worksheet situation in Ishmael's school was 'very bad'. So bad, in fact, that 'after a while, we just give up'. Ishmael struggled to complete his marking, and after that find the time to explain the worksheets. As the EL teachers were left on their own, with no specific scheme of work, many of them fell back on the worksheets for they were examination-oriented. Thus, Ishmael felt he could not substitute the worksheets with better teaching tools or activities. He wished his lessons were 'more fun' but because of the examination, he had to teach the worksheets. He felt very bad about this situation. He felt sorry that he was teaching to the test and that the pupils were not getting the best from him. As a result of using and teaching the worksheets, Ishmael had to mark them. But he found that he had no time to finish marking the vast number of worksheets used. He became the last teacher to go home daily because he tried to finish marking all the piles that were stacked on his table. He even brought his marking out on some weekends when he hung out with his friends: 'I made my friends stressed for a period. (I) took out my marking when I met them for coffee. They questioned why I met them to work; might as well have stayed home to mark.' Ishmael felt more like a tutor than a teacher because of his test-centric-ness. He felt that 'schools are doing it wrongly', and that 'it is not a school-based problem; it's a system-based problem'. Ishmael ended his first six months with the feeling that teaching was a 'very self-denying job'. This was due to the fact that at times he had wanted to go out and have his own leisure time, but due to the marking he had to complete, he denied himself the time.

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administrative duties so that he could learn during this crucial phase of induction.

Ishmael was very appreciative of this support, and he reciprocated by volunteering to help his colleagues and HoDs with the paperwork. This would surely have created a positive impression of him in the school. Ishmael also found his 'allies' – a group of seemingly like-minded BTs (less than two years of experience) who were not afraid of hard work and who were very keen to try new ways of teaching and doing things. But, perhaps, due to their strong and loud group identity, it might have created an impression that did not sit too well with the older and more experienced colleagues. Ishmael was aware of this but he felt that it was necessary because the school should change certain of its ways of doing things – with change comes improvement. This is very much aligned to his beliefs that 'the boat (is) supposed to be rocked all the time', and that he was not going to give up his teaching ideals. Ishmael's identity is very strong at this juncture. His identity was affirmed by his affinity with this group of allies. Their similarities reinforced his identity; his D-identity corresponded with his A-identity in this group.

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Ishmael's favourite part as a BT was being with the children. He looked forward to teaching much more than marking or paperwork. He loved being a teacher, loved being in the classroom and interacting with the children: 'No matter how tired I am, no matter how I grumble, how I moan and groan, the moment I step into the classroom, I'm alive. I love talking to the children. I derive my energy from them.' However, he confessed that he did 'corridor planning' nowadays. He would plan for his next lesson while walking along the corridor. He felt sorry for his pupils as these were not the best lessons he could deliver. There were a number of reasons that led to

Ishmael's identity and beliefs were severely tested after an initial period of adjustment. Due to the flood of worksheets and the school's examination-oriented emphasis, Ishmael seemingly gave up his beliefs of teaching against the grain. In fact, he gave so many worksheets that he had a hard time marking them. He even resorted to taking them along to mark when he was out with his non-teacher friends. He was evidently not coping well with the marking. Due to the lack of time, as a result of the flood of worksheets, Ishmael was not able to properly plan for his lessons. And as a result, he resorted to the drill-and-practice way of teaching – the worksheet pedagogy. He was very aware of what he was doing and so there was cognitive dissonance – he confessed he felt 'very bad' and 'sorry' about the situation. It seemed he was conscious of this dissonance when he confessed teaching as a 'self-denying job'; he was denying his beliefs and his identity.

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Hope Tan. Hope was given a full teaching load of 38 periods. She was not given an 80% BT teaching load as stipulated by the MOE. She had a supportive Reporting Officer (RO) who was very encouraging and nurturing. She did not pick on or put Hope down. The RO was also Hope's Primary 4 level advisor. The RO encouraged her to be more than just a teacher, implying that Hope should give the leadership track a try. Hope was not too keen but did not reject the suggestion.

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Even though Hope was not offloaded as a BT, she had a supportive RO. This RO became a sort of 'ally' for Hope. In schools, the RO is an important person as he/she appraises the teacher for the year, and makes recommendations for the teachers performance ranking, grade and promotion. Thus, having such an ally would help any

teacher to do well. By the very fact that she was so encouraging of Hope's ability as a teacher, Hope was given opportunities to do well. For someone who is inclined towards the leadership track in the teaching profession, this would be an ideal situation. But for one who is not that keen to take on a leadership role, this may not be a good development as it will mean more extra-curricular work.

* * *

Hope was given the Science club as her ³⁵Co-Curricular Activity (CCA). Hope was happy to be involved in the Science club; it was where her passion lay. She got to learn new things about Science and she could share them with her Science club pupils. Hope was given a number of projects to handle during this first six months. One major project she had to manage was the inter-school science model-making competition. She led her pupils to create a model based on a scientific principle, and as her Primary 4 pupils were not independent, she had to direct them in all aspects of the project. She spent time after school, and involved her fiancé in the project. It was something she could not agree with, but she needed to get it done.

Hope was visibly more tired in this period. She was tired from the marking of the worksheets and from the four days of extra duties after school, such as remedial lessons, CCA, and meetings. She would usually go to school at 8 a.m. and leave at 7 p.m. Hope did not feel the worksheets were unnecessarily wasteful because, to her, worksheets could be a way of helping the pupils 'remember and consolidate the main ideas' she taught. She also believed that the worksheets allowed her pupils to put their thoughts on paper and thereby help to phrase their answers for the questions posed.

³⁵ Co-Curricular Activities, previously known as Extra Curricular Activities, are non-academic activities organised by schools to enrich the students' educational experience.

There was utility to the worksheets; hence, it was not a major issue for Hope. What was a major issue for Hope was time. Hope was very focused in her outlook on work. She kept her marking to her weekdays and tried to mark as fast as she could on those days. As she was planning to get married in a few months' time, she wanted to spend her weekends settling her wedding plans. She would spend her Saturday mornings in school to plan her lessons, so that she did not have to carry her textbooks home on Fridays. It was also to ensure she could have her weekends free from worries. Hope was aware that there was some politicking going on in school – some teachers had favourable treatment even though they shirked their responsibilities. She wished she worked in an environment like her fiancé's school because she hung out often with her fiancé and his colleagues who were also his close friends. She compared the two schools, and felt that there was unequal treatment of teachers in Franjipani Primary, and that there needed to be a more systematic way of addressing issues. But she would rather mind her own business: 'I'll just do what I have to do. I'm just there to work. I'm just a small fry. Don't disturb me. I just want to teach.'

* * *

The extra-curricular work that Hope had to do was her first test. She had to expend her most treasured commodity – her own time – in order to get the work done. She also had to enlist her fiancé to help out in the school work. She was indignant of this fact but she just wanted it done. Even though Hope did not and could not agree with this situation, she was adamant that the work was completed, and completed well. Hope knew the school system and was determined to succeed on her terms. She knew worksheets were an effective means to produce academic results. It was a tried-and-tested method which her fiancé and his friends attest to. She believed in its efficacy as well as its pedagogy. This was very similar to what she felt during teacher training.

The pedagogical approaches she learnt must be realistic and useful. The worksheet pedagogy was a very realistic and useful one. She had no qualms adopting it as her main pedagogical approach. In a sense, her belief was aligned to her practice. She believed in the use of the worksheets and she exploited it to the fullest.

Another belief she held dearly to was that her personal time should not be encroached upon by school work. She was fiercely protective of her personal time and would ensure she cleared what she needed to by late Saturday morning, so that she could have the rest of the weekends to herself and her fiancé.

Even though there was evidence that micropolitics existed in her school, Hope chose to ignore it. She accepted its existence, but she refused to be drawn in by isolating herself from it. She focused on teaching and delivering what her RO wanted her to. She did not do what was beyond the expectations, and so did not 'rock any boat'.

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Harriet Lee. Harriet started her teaching career with mixed feelings. On one hand, she was going back to a familiar school, Jacaranda Primary; on the other hand, she was 'totally tired everyday' when she reached home. But she also realized that the TP experience and the fact that there was no pressure of one's teaching being assessed regularly made a huge difference to how she taught as a fully qualified teacher. She also realized how unprepared she was during her six-month stint as a contract teacher. Teacher training did make a difference in the acquisition of teaching skills. Throughout the first six months, Harriet enjoyed her teaching. She only had 27 periods, so she could come up with many ideas of teaching Science, such as taking the pupils to explore wildlife in the school Science garden and the neighbourhood park.

She also used a paper aeroplane competition to teach the primary 5 pupils the principles of aerodynamics. Mdm. Oh was happy with Harriet's innovative use of strategies in teaching Science.

In Harriet's first week of school, because of her enthusiasm towards teaching and work in general, Mdm. Oh, Harriet's former CT, and the school's Science HoD, enlisted Harriet's help in submitting a last minute proposal on an approach of teaching Science without the use of the textbook. This was a proposal to obtain funds of up to \$55, 000 from the MOE. Even though Harriet was told of this only two days before the deadline, she very willingly helped Mdm. Oh with it. In that same month, Harriet was given a task at 7.30 p.m. (27 July) by the principal to write a proposal using iPods to teach Science. The principal intended to present the proposal to the Cluster Superintendent in the morning of 29th July. Even though Harriet was barely a month old as a qualified teacher, both Mdm. Oh and the principal tasked her to come up with innovative ideas for teaching because of her passion during TP. She had also been giving suggestions on how the Science department programmes could be modified during the department meetings. All these had suitably impressed the principal and Mdm. Oh.

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Harriet made an important 'ally' in Mdm. Oh, her former CT and the school's Science HoD. Mdm. Oh was very impressed with Harriet's knowledge of science and her ideas of how to improve the school's science programmes, and Harriet's innovative science lessons. It was due to this positive impression that the principal recruited Harriet to come up with a last minute Science proposal to present to the cluster superintendent. Even though it was very last minute, Harriet was more than

willing to take it up because of her passion in this subject area. Mdm. Oh correspondingly tapped on Harriet to elicit ideas during her department meetings. On one hand, it seems to be a positive development; on the other hand, Harriet's rising profile as Mdm. Oh's 'favourite' might not sit too well with the other colleagues.

* * *

Even though Harriet seemed to be doing well, she also felt the stress within the first month: 'It's crazy! It's like playing basketball with one hand, playing tennis with the other, kicking football with one foot and on top of all that, balancing an umbrella on your nose.' She was tasked to conduct three days of remedial classes after school and helping Mdm. Oh with the monitoring of her after-school Science programmes. Harriet felt overwhelmed: 'I'm dead! Just realized that with 80% workload, it's already so taxing! Next year, with a full load of teaching, I'm sure to die! Oh my god!' Harriet's time in school was spent on doing many things other than teaching or planning for her lessons. She questioned the possibility of planning any creative teaching with all the administrative work she had to do for Mdm. Oh's Science programmes. She even had to help Mdm. Oh with her inquiry-based Science workplan on some Saturdays. Although Jacaranda Primary was a mega school, Harriet seemed to be the only one who was doing so many things for Mdm. Oh. But due to Mdm. Oh's support for Harriet during her TP, Harriet did not blame Mdm. Oh in spite of the fact that most of her stress and administrative work came from Mdm. Oh's programmes and last minute projects. Rather, Harriet blamed the system for creating the unnecessary paperwork that took up so much of her time.

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Even though Harriet was off-loaded from her teaching hours, she did not have the luxury of adjusting to the reality of school life because she was given more than her

share of extra-curricular workload. She helped Mdm. Oh to oversee quite a number of Science programmes. This was a strange development because usually the more experienced colleagues will be tasked to monitor existing school programmes. I wonder why Mdm. Oh did not tap on the other teachers to help her out, and why only Harriet. Was it because of Harriet's passion and her knowledge? Or was it because of her willingness?

Harriet felt the stress in the increasing administrative workload but she did not attribute it to Mdm. Oh. Instead, she blamed the 'system' for creating so much administrative work for the teachers. It seemed that Mdm. Oh had found a very willing and loyal 'subject'.

* * *

Harriet had a run-in with Mrs. Gan, the EL HoD, who was incidentally Harriet's EL CT during her TP. Mrs. Gan was not happy to find out about the iPod proposal which the principal asked Harriet to come up with. Mrs. Gan was not told about it by Harriet or the principal even though the proposal listed EL as one of the subjects that would be involved. Coincidentally, Mrs. Gan had given Harriet's personal mobile number to one of the school parents without seeking Harriet's permission first. This angered Harriet because Harriet felt that what Mrs. Gan did was unethical. Harriet's permission should have been sought first. Harriet was, later in the year, told by Mdm. Oh that during the school ranking meeting, Mrs. Gan was the only one who disparaged Harriet's enthusiasm and positive work attitude towards teaching and work. It seemed that Mrs. Gan was not particularly impressed with Harriet.

At the end of the first six months, Harriet could sense that there was politicking in school. She felt that everyone was 'chasing their own targets without regard to practicality or feasibility' and that it was 'each person for themselves (sic)'. She felt sad that there were such signs of politicking in school. She had originally thought that politicking was a phenomenon that occurred in the private sector and should not be occurring in the school system. She was proved wrong.

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Harriet encountered her 'enemy' in the form of Mrs. Gan, her former EL CT and the school's EL HoD. Due to the experience in her TP, Harriet had a very low opinion of Mrs. Gan. It did not help that Mrs. Gan was unhappy with not being told of the iPod proposal which involved the teaching of EL, and that she also gave away Harriet's mobile number to a parent without asking Harriet. It created a great degree of dislike on the part of Harriet. It seemed that the dislike was mutual when it was revealed that Mrs. Gan was the only dissenting voice during the ranking exercise in which Harriet was appraised positively and highly by the school management. It seemed that it was no longer a work issue but a personal one for Mrs. Gan.

Harriet continued her high level of involvement with Mdm. Oh, and she found signs of politicking in school. Her colleagues seemingly worked to 'chase their own targets', but I wonder if it were because of Harriet. Could Harriet's high level of involvement have created a situation where the colleagues felt they needed to achieve something on their own so as to protect themselves from being ranked low? After all, Harriet was only a BT, and not even a year old at that! And they were the experienced teachers.

* * *

5.3 An Interlude

At the end of their first teaching semester, all four BTs felt tired – Nathaniel due to his role as the school’s Art Coordinator, his use of the drill-and-practice worksheet pedagogy, and the number of worksheets he had to mark; Ishmael due to his use of the worksheet pedagogy and the large number of worksheets he had to mark; Harriet due to the amount of extra-curricular work she had to do; Hope due to the amount of marking. There seems to be a similarity in the reasons for Nathaniel, Ishmael and Hope. But in fact the reason for Hope is vastly different from that of the other two. Hope chose to adopt the worksheet curriculum and pedagogy. Her overt compliance was an outcome of her D- and A-identities. She found no cognitive dissonance with what she did; in fact, it was consonant with her beliefs about how to teach. Her drive and goal at this juncture was to ensure that she produced examination results and obtain a favourable appraisal of her ability as a BT. She succeeded in this aim of hers. Hope was ‘re-formed’; she was a post professional in the performativity-driven school system. Her tiredness stems from her giving out so many worksheets due to her quest for academic success in the form of her pupils’ examination results. Hope’s tiredness was that of physical tiredness.

Nathaniel and Ishmael are very much more similar in their tiredness. Both had expressed desires to utilize a student-centred constructivist teaching approach in the beginning. Yet both succumbed to the dominant worksheet discourse in both their schools. Nathaniel, due to his involvement in his role as the Art Coordinator, gave up his teaching beliefs in order to cope with the workload. Furthermore, with the requirement that the worksheets allocated to the pupils must be completed before the examination, he had to accept it as the means to survival. Ishmael, even though he

held no school-wide role like Nathaniel, had to manage a worksheet load that he was not prepared to face. The school utilised a worksheet curriculum to such an extent that Ishmael gave up his beliefs and identity in order to survive. Both Nathaniel and Ishmael had similar constructivist teaching beliefs but these beliefs could not be put into practice as they would have liked to. Their beliefs were at odds with the schools' traditional teaching beliefs.

Their beliefs in survival were stronger and more desperate than their teaching beliefs. Much like what Green (1971) posited, there are clusters of beliefs; each cluster of beliefs is distinct and separate. In the situation that one finds oneself in, the cluster of beliefs that best fits the situation will be the one that is enacted in practice. In this case, for both of them, the cluster of beliefs that it is essential to survive took precedence over the cluster of beliefs in constructivist teaching. Even though both adopted the survival beliefs in their teaching practice, there were visible signs of cognitive dissonance on both their parts. Both regretted what they did and wished they could do otherwise. It seems that the cluster of constructivist teaching beliefs was more central than that of survival. It led to them feeling a sense of dissonance – cognitive dissonance. Reassurances of their classroom practice were not found, and so there was regret expressed. This demonstrated that they were still holding on to their initial teacher identity. The I-identities ascribed to them was not aligned to their D-identities. Their 're-formation' into post professionals was not yet complete.

For Harriet, her tiredness stems from the extra-curricular work, or *second order activities*, she 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 she respects most in school. Harriet's identity was very much aligned to that ascribed by Mdm. Oh. Her I-identity matched her D-identity and her A-identity. Her pedagogical discourse was very much aligned to her affinity with Mdm. Oh. The constant encouragement to perform and do well for the extra-curricular work was highly seductive for Harriet. Harriet had wanted to 'go for the gold' for her TP but because of the lack of support given by Mrs. Gan, she was not able to. Since she was doing well in Mdm. Oh's department, she genuinely felt there was a good chance she could perform well in the school, in terms of appraisal by the EPMS. Harriet readily adopted the performativity discourse and seemed to be on her way to becoming a post professional.

In the next chapter, I shall be looking at the next part of their journey into teacherhood, their first full academic year, 2009, and if there were any changes to their beliefs and practices, and teacher identities.

Chapter 6

Analytic Inquiry 2 – From Survival to Mastery/Crisis

We have not to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the heroic path, and where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world.

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*
(1968, p.30)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the narratives are organised using Vogler's stages of the hero's journey. The stage of *Approach to Inmost Cave* corresponds to the first six months (January – June 2009) of their second year, since the beginning teachers were preparing for a major challenge, which was taking on their first form class from the beginning of the academic year, setting class rules and procedures from scratch, and participating in all the school activities. It is also the year that they will be appraised and compared fully with the other teachers. Their first six months in 2008 were only appraised ³⁶*pro rata*. The stage of *Facing the Ordeal* follows, and this corresponds to their next six months (July – December 2009) since this is the time they will face their greatest fear – the crisis of identity. Let's now make the approach to the beginning teachers' narratives.

³⁶ *pro rata*: calculated according to how much of something has been used, the amount of work done, etc. (Retrieved from the online Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/pro+rata>)

6.1 Act 2 Scene 2 – Making the Approach to Inmost Cave

Look around at your fellow Seekers. We've changed already and new qualities are emerging. Who's the leader now? Some who were not suited for life in the Ordinary World are now thriving. Others who seemed ideal for adventure are turning out to be the least able. A new perception of yourself and others is forming. Based on this new awareness, you can make plans and direct yourself towards getting what you want from the Special World. Soon you will be ready to enter the Inmost Cave.

Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (2007, p.143)

Nathaniel Ho. Nathaniel left his church youth ministry at the end of 2008, six months after becoming a teacher. He felt he had 'lost' his direction in life at that juncture. This was compounded by the fact that the colleague he had been working closely with in the Arts department left the teaching service in the beginning of 2009. Furthermore, Nathaniel had a strained relationship with the other colleague in the Arts department. The former colleague had been the buffer between Nathaniel and the remaining colleague. This colleague, who was a ³⁷Mother Tongue teacher and who had been a teacher far longer than Nathaniel, did not teach art at all. Nathaniel felt that by using the excuse that his EL was 'not as good', this colleague 'shirked' many of the Arts-related work. As a result, Nathaniel had to prepare all the Arts-related worksheets, oversee the arts enrichment programmes for digital art, manga art, ceramic art, plan all the art learning journeys, and plan and organise the whole-school Arts Festival. In addition, he had to write all the reports required for the programmes and activities. He was 'scrambling' to get it all done on time, on his own. He felt that there was a severe lack of support in these areas and thus he was frustrated.

³⁷ Mother Tongue teacher: A teacher who teaches one of the official Mother Tongue languages in Singapore: Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

Adding to Nathaniel's frustration was the number of worksheets that he had to use in his teaching. These were worksheets in addition to those provided by the national curriculum. Nathaniel cited an example of this occurrence in an EL lesson on preposition. The EL department provided 10 follow up worksheets just for that one preposition lesson. Nathaniel struggled to cope with completing the use of these worksheets in class and marking them. The ideas that he had, such as bringing in real-life examples to connect to the concepts taught, had to be forfeited because there was not enough time to 'finish all the worksheets'. He also felt bad that his lessons were 'boring', and thus 'shortchanging' his pupils. When Nathaniel expressed this concern and queried the rationale for this number of worksheets, he was told 'tactfully' that he might be too 'outspoken'.

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Nathaniel encountered micropolitics with his Art committee colleague. The colleague was evidently as capable of doing the administrative work as Nathaniel, especially since he was more experienced in the committee, but he chose to shirk his responsibility by giving an excuse that his English Language was poor. Nathaniel did not raise any objection nor did he lodge a complaint on this colleague. Instead, he took the entire committee work upon himself. This situation, coupled with the unending number of worksheets contributed substantially to his choice of the mode of instruction – worksheet pedagogy.

When Nathaniel decided to ask for reasons for this exacting number of worksheets, he was perceived as a sort of rebel. It seemed that the management did not 'entertain' questions about decisions already made. Many schools have HoDs who are not

experts in the subject areas they are in charge of. This stems from the promotional basis of the system. The system promotes those who are willing to do above and beyond what is required of them, and those who want to take on a leadership role can volunteer to take on more responsibilities and prove their ability at planning, managing and coordinating programmes, events or projects. Since many of the primary school teachers are generalists, meaning they did not read Mathematics, English Language studies, or Science as an academic subject for their first degree, they tend not to be knowledgeable in the subject areas that they head. There have been cases where even a non Physical Education teacher heads the physical Education department. They were given positions because they wanted to 'climb' the leadership ladder. As such, due to the lack of pedagogical or content knowledge specific to the subject they are in charge of, they tend to utilize tried-and-tested methods of delivering examination results, as their own appraisal by the principals are measured by the entire school's examination performance in the subject area. This might possibly have contributed to the HoD's alarm at Nathaniel's questions, and therefore deemed him as 'outspoken'.

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In another critical incident, Nathaniel was told to 'brush up' his spoken English by the Physical Education HoD after a lesson observation. Nathaniel (who in my opinion speaks fluent standard English) was puzzled and so asked for specific examples so that he would be aware of his mistakes and correct them. But his very act of asking for the examples was taken as 'questioning authority', and thenceforth, the HoD was unhappy with him. In another instance, Nathaniel queried the practice of giving composition practices just a week before the examination. He felt that it was too last minute and might not be of any educational benefit. His RO told him that he was 'too

opinionated for their liking'. It hurt Nathaniel since he was merely trying to improve the school's practices. He realized that he needed to be 'more politically correct' and 'package' his comments or questions in a better way for the things he really believed in. Otherwise, he felt he should 'just shut (his) mouth.'

Nathaniel speaks his mind. He means no harm or disrespect. He merely wishes to know the reasons behind the things that are done or said. Thus, this revelation from him came as a huge surprise to me when I heard it. Nathaniel has never given me the feeling that his queries were meant to question authority. But this seems to be the case in this school. These different incidents all contributed to making Nathaniel depressed. This was revealed in his recounting of his experiences – his voice was emotional and trembled at times, and his sclera (i.e. the whites of his eyes) were bloodshot. One could easily tell that he was unhappy; Nathaniel himself could tell that he was 'so very unhappy'. He compared himself at the beginning of his second school year with the time at TTI – he felt so inspired to teach then; he was so unmotivated at this point in time. Nathaniel acknowledged the irony of the situation; it was only the beginning of the brand new school year, and not even the middle of the year. He simply did not feel at all supported in this school. Nathaniel felt that the school was too focused in trying to get awards and he wished he could relinquish his Arts coordinator portfolio so that he could have more time for his class. He felt like 'a small fry trying to survive' and wished he could transfer to another school. (As he had not completed two years in his first school then, the MOE would not approve any request for transfers.)

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The fact that Nathaniel's RO told him that he was 'too opinionated for their liking' revealed the lack of acceptance by the management of questions that are perceived to

be accusatory. Nathaniel certainly would not feel accepted in such a situation. It was a huge contrast to him during teacher training, when he was so enthusiastic and looking forward to teaching. I wonder if schools realize that many BTs just want to teach and to teach well (Wong, 2003). They want to learn and it is only in asking that they will learn. But do schools really want to convince the teachers of the rationale of certain practices? It seems that in this case, as long as the practices are implemented, the teachers' understanding is not a requirement.

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In spite of this situation, Nathaniel still enjoyed teaching. He found it 'meaningful and delightful' when his pupils were able to apply what he had taught in previous lessons. The sense of satisfaction gained from that was 'indescribable'. Nathaniel posited that such a feeling was difficult to find anywhere else. As he recounted this, his face became more enthusiastic and joyful. His eyes lit up and I could see he was really interested in this aspect of his job. It was the administrative work and 'all the other extra stuff' that ate into his passion and his joy for teaching.

* * *

Evidently Nathaniel enjoys teaching. It is his calling as he believes it to be. He just wants to teach and to teach well – one who can lead the pupils to understand and apply the concepts taught. Serow (1994), in his study on those who viewed teaching as their calling in life, found that such teachers displayed 'significantly greater enthusiasm and commitment' to teaching and were more 'mindful of its potential impact on other people' (pp.70-71). Why can't schools in Singapore just let teachers teach? Why must schools pile on extra-curricular work on teachers, especially when the teachers have indicated that they do not wish to be on the leadership track? If teachers were allowed to have the time to plan and teach, to teach and reflect, would

not the lessons be more engaging and more meaningful for both the pupils and the teachers?

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Ishmael Dee. Ishmael had a hard time coping in the second six months as a BT. He was given the best class in Primary 5 as well as appointed the primary 5 level representative of Mathematics. The level representative had to send worksheets for printing, disseminate information from the Mathematics department to the level during level meetings, plan for and coordinate level meetings. A colleague questioned the principal via an anonymous feedback channel on the choice of Ishmael as the form teacher for the best class. The colleague felt that a BT should not be given such a class and queried if favouritism were being shown. The principal had to explain to the entire school staff that she wanted to encourage BTs to remain teaching in the upper primary levels as there was always a shortage of upper primary teachers. By giving BTs a good start, they might thus be more motivated to stay on to teach at those levels. Even though the anonymous complaint was a sign of unhappiness among the colleagues, Ishmael still felt that the staffroom was a 'healthy place to be in'. Ishmael was also appointed as the teacher-in-charge of the school's niche CCA, tennis. He had to conduct training sessions thrice a week and even more intensively during the mid-year June holidays.

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Evidently, Ishmael was doing well in school. The principal trusted him enough to give him the best class of the level. But this choice might have created some sort of dissension and unhappiness among the more experienced colleagues. Ishmael belonged to the group of BTs who were akin to the 'young Turks aiming to start a

revolution'. They were loud and suggested many changes to existing programmes. The voice of complaint might have been just the tip of the iceberg. The dissension must have been great enough to prompt such an action from a colleague. Certainly, micropolitics was at play; micropolitics of dissension. Ishmael did not see it as a negative situation. He did not feel it was representative of the staffroom. He was still committed to the school and poured himself into his role as the form teacher of the best class, and as the teacher-in-charge of the school's niche CCA, table tennis. Being given such opportunities, it is not surprising that the post professional identity is so seductive; after all, 'we learn we can become more than we were and be better than others – we can be "outstanding", "successful", "above the average"' (Ball, 2003, p.219).

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Due to this heavy involvement in the CCA, Ishmael was pressed for time to mark. He even checked into a hotel in the last week of the June holidays to complete his marking. He questioned whether this was due to his inefficiency or the way he was handling the work given by the school. Colleagues had told him since his TP that he should guide the pupils to fill in the answers, especially in Science; otherwise, he would have a hard time marking. He had refused to accept the practice and pursued in his inquiry-based approach of teaching, and hence a myriad of answers were given by his pupils. This definitely made his marking more difficult and time-consuming. He had remarked, with regard to the amount of marking, that 'it's crazy'. He wanted to give comments in his marking and not merely 'tick, tick and tick' as advised by some of his colleagues. He wanted to give feedback that would help the child to learn. So he was caught in a dilemma – to mark efficiently with no written feedback or to give written feedback which would mean spending more time per worksheet. Due to the

struggles with finishing the Primary 5 syllabus, and the new roles that Ishmael had to take on, stress got to him. He was not able to meet for the scheduled interviews, and for three months, Ishmael did not respond to any emails or text messages sent him.

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Ishmael seemed to have given in to his survival beliefs in the previous semester in 2008. But this semester, he strived to enact his constructivist teaching beliefs in his classroom teaching. He did not give up his beliefs without a fight, so to speak. But, his teaching beliefs created a situation – it added to his already heavy marking load. An inquiry approach to teaching requires an exploration of understanding, and that means a wide spread of opinions when the pupils answer questions. After all, it is an approach that encourages self-discovery of understanding and answers. And with the variety of responses, the teacher would lead the pupils to an understanding of the concepts. It was essentially an inductive way of teaching and learning. But Ishmael's colleagues advised him to utilize the deductive approach of focusing on the answers and marking without any written feedback. Again, this went against what Ishmael believed in. He struggled with this tension – to give in to the practices of survival or to persist with his practices of constructivism. He was so bogged down by this intense struggle, a clash of beliefs, that he withdrew into himself for a period of time, contemplating his role as a teacher; contemplating his identity.

* * *

Hope Tan. In her second six months, Hope was given the best Primary 3 class; it was the class that comprised of the top 40 pupils based on the previous year's end-of-year examination results. Hope was co-opted into the Staff Welfare Committee and was made the EL representative for her level. Both her EL HOD and her RO were

very supportive. They told her not to worry about taking on this role as they would be there to help and guide her. Her RO also told her that the school did not want to overload her, so if she needed help, Hope could ask her.

Marking for Hope still took up a substantial amount of her time. She felt she was struggling to cope with the marking, but it was because she had given her class ‘a lot of work’. She felt that the work she gave her class was essential since it was the most academically able class for the level. Even though she had so much to mark, she was glad to be given the class because she enjoyed teaching them. She found her class pupils motivated, and thus she could set more challenging work for them. But Hope acknowledged that she had to rush through the teaching as she gave them a lot of class work and homework to do. As such, it was difficult for her to teach them the strategies she had learnt during teacher training. Furthermore, as she did not have as much time to prepare for her lessons as the previous year, due to her extra involvement in her school work and the extra marking, she reduced student-centred activities. She also gave more independent work since her pupils were more academically able. She was delighted that her pupils took to the online forum discussions well, and even helped each other to learn in such a platform.

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Hope was familiar with the school system. She knew what she needed to do to succeed. She took on the roles of the EL representative and SWC member without any complaint – she managed the roles. It was not an issue for her; it was just a job she had to do, and she did it. Hope thrived in the role of being a form teacher of the best class of the level. She utilised the worksheet pedagogy to a large extent because her pupils were able to cope with the increasing number of worksheets. She wanted to

fully prepare them to do well for the examination, and she did. Again, it was a job she was given and she did it well. She did as was expected of her by the management. According to Ball (2004), there would be a potential dilemma between 'the teacher's own judgement about "good practice" and students' "needs" on the one hand, and the rigours of performance on the other' (p.146). However, it would seem that there is no such dilemma on the part of Hope. The 'good practice' she enacted in the form of the worksheet pedagogy met the 'needs' of her pupils, which she perceived as doing well in the examination, and met the 'rigours of performativity'. They were all aligned.

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Hope was still very focused in ensuring she had her personal time on weekends, in spite of the increase in marking. She felt it was easier than the previous year's marking because of the pupils' academic ability. She spent nearly every weekend from January to May preparing for her wedding, and monitoring the renovation of her new home. This was an aspect of her life she would not give up to the school work. Hope continued to maintain a collegial relationship with her colleagues. She spent her time in the staffroom marking; she did not spend much time to talk or to socialize. She felt that since she was 'just a small fry', she was not caught in any of the staffroom politics. She was sure that since she did not 'really sit around and chit chat', she was not bothered by any of the politicking. It also helped that she saw her husband happily planning lessons at home; it provided a real focus for her – there is a life outside school.

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Hope's self-identity was very clear. Her identity as a teacher was to do what was expected of her by the school – if worksheets produce results, and since the school adopts a worksheet curriculum, then so be it. Her identity outside of school was very

strong. She expected no less from herself with regard to this. Her personal time was sacrosanct; thus, school work needs to be finished on time, so as not to encroach onto her personal time with her fiancé. Her I-, D- and A-identities all merge as a unified whole. There was no dissonance as a result.

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Harriet Lee. Harriet felt that her experience in Jacaranda was really tiring but also rewarding. She tried to teach what she felt was right for her pupils and did not bother with what others thought of her. She quoted *What do you care what others think?* by Richard Feynman as the reason. Harriet used the worksheet-based curriculum for her teaching in Science because she felt it was ‘great for consolidation and reinforcement’. But she also realized that the worksheets helped when the concepts were already understood; otherwise, ‘time was better spent re-teaching the concepts or planning how to teach it right the first time.’ Harriet was at a loss when it came to EL because the EL HoD, Mrs. Gan, did not give any directions to the school teachers. So, Harriet was particularly affected when Mdm. Oh recounted to him about what Mrs. Gan had said about Harriet. Mrs. Gan had said that Harriet was a failure at teaching EL based on the book and file checking exercise and the examination results in 2008. Harriet was indignant when she heard this: ‘How can she blame others for failing when as a head she did not monitor and act to prevent it?’ She was livid because Mrs. Gan did not provide her with any form of guidance during her TP and when she was a qualified teacher in her first six months the previous year. Harriet felt the comments made were unjustified.

* * *

Harriet was in a more fortunate situation in that she did not need to follow a worksheet curriculum. The worksheets were merely used as reinforcement and consolidation, after actual teaching was done. But this was only for the subjects of Mathematics and Science. For EL, Harriet was not certain of her abilities. She was not given much guidance, so she merely followed what was required in the curriculum guide, and utilised the constructivist strategies she learnt during teacher training. Yet, her efforts were deemed unacceptable by Mrs. Gan. Mrs. Gan had never stepped into Harriet's class in the past 12 months to provide feedback, or guidance about Harriet's teaching. Surely, with the extra time she had due to the fact that as a HoD she had a lighter teaching load, she could have spared a period or two just to give pointers to Harriet which she did not give as a CT. The dislike that Mrs. Gan seemed to have of Harriet carried over to the book- and file-checking exercise; this was not to Harriet's advantage.

But most startling of all was the fact that Mdm. Oh actually told Harriet that Mrs. Gan called her a failure. Why would Mdm. Oh do such a thing? Does she not recognize that Harriet, who already had a poor impression of Mrs. Gan, might grow even more in her dislike towards her as a result of such a comment? Surely, Mdm. Oh could have put it across in another manner, without using the word 'failure'? There might possibly be micropolitics at play between the two HoDs, with Harriet caught in the middle.

* * *

Harriet put her heart and soul into helping Mdm. Oh because she felt that Mdm. Oh was a good and supportive RO. But by the end of the second six months, Harriet felt so overwhelmed and stretched by the work given to her. She was the teacher-in-

charge of two CCAs, Drama club and Science club; she was involved in the school's inter-disciplinary project work, inter-school science competition, and the school's curriculum innovation project. For a BT, she was given a very full plate indeed. Harriet was stressed and frustrated at the end of the second six months with her class' results: 'How can they compare me with teachers that taught for 15 years?' She got so frustrated with the comparison of her class' mid-year examination results with other classes that she decided worksheets were to go: 'Worksheets work. It produces results. All those pedagogies are good for fun and stuff, but when it comes to the crunch, results matter. I intend to come during the hols (sic) to create all the worksheets I need for my P3 class. I'm going to drill and practise all the way.'

* * *

At this juncture, Harriet was so overwhelmed by the extra-curricular activities and projects given by Mdm. Oh; yet, she did not request to be taken out of them. She was sure she wanted to help Mdm. Oh's department do well in comparison with the other departments. She seemed to do doing well in this area. However, with regard to her teaching, Harriet did not produce the academic results that were expected by the school management. She made a decision to reform her pedagogy to that of the dominant worksheet-driven one. She decided to adopt this pedagogy to produce the results that seemed to define her identity as a teacher. Harriet seemed to define herself by her accomplishments in the work she was assigned. This lack of achievements in her pupils' examination results created cognitive dissonance for her – she was not 'outstanding', 'successful' or 'above the average'. Thus, her reduction-of-dissonance decision in the form of adopting the worksheet pedagogy attests to Turner-Bisset (2007)'s statement that '(t)eachers compromise on the kinds of teaching in which they believe, and (enact) the kinds of teaching demanded by performativity'

(p.195). Harriet felt treasured and appreciated when she could help Mdm. Oh in so many areas, but when her results were called into question, Harriet did not find that acceptable. And so she chose to reform her instructional practice and, in a sense, her teacher identity to that of the post professional.

* * *

6.2 Act 2 Scene 3 – Facing the Ordeal

Seeker, enter the Inmost Cave and look for that which will restore life to the Home Tribe. The way grows narrow and dark. You must go alone on hands and knees and you feel the earth press close around you. You can hardly breathe. Suddenly you come out into the deepest chamber and find yourself face-to-face with a towering figure, a menacing Shadow composed of all your doubts and fears and well armed to defend a treasure. Here, in this moment, is the chance to win all or die. No matter what you came for, it's Death that now stares back at you. Whatever the outcome of the battle, you are about to taste death and it will change you.

Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (2007, p.155)

Nathaniel Ho. In the third six months, Nathaniel still enjoyed teaching. His pupils were the ones who had encouraged him so far in this profession. Their desire and hunger for learning, their eagerness and excitement when he executed 'a good lesson' spurred him to want to be a better teacher. It was the desire to be a better teacher that he supplemented the school's worksheets with his own at the end of the year so as to prepare his pupils for the year end examinations. On his own, he would look out for materials 'to do a personalized one' for reading passages and worksheets. He did not mind the extra work 'as long as they (his pupils) score well.' As he recounted his work with his own pupils, he did so with smiles and a positive upbeat tone.

* * *

It seems that at this juncture there was 'internalized adjustment' (Lacey, 1977, p.72) on the part of Nathaniel. He grew to accept the worksheet pedagogy and believed in its efficacy and utility. He thus decided to create his own worksheets for his pupils. He enjoyed teaching, and now he enjoyed teaching in the way that would help his pupils produce results that was expected by the school. His own judgement about 'good practice' and pupils' 'needs' looked as if they had merged with the 'teaching demanded by performativity' (Ball, 2004, p.195). Nathaniel appeared to have become a post professional in this aspect.

* * *

But when he spoke of the other aspects of his school work, he sounded resigned. One particular aspect of his school that affected him was his relationship with his RO. His RO said discouraging things to him. In front of Nathaniel, she had told him the lesson which she formally observed for the yearly appraisal was a good one. But behind his back, she said differently. When Nathaniel had come to know of it from his colleagues, he was baffled and disappointed. He felt that all his hard work was not recognized by his HOD and his RO. He kept reminding himself the reason why he had joined teaching, so as to cope with the situation that year.

* * *

A major crisis that Nathaniel faced was with his RO. His RO was not completely honest with him and commented negatively about Nathaniel behind his back. There appeared to be some sort of micropolitics where the RO is asserting her position to create a negative impression of Nathaniel in front of his colleagues. This definitely revealed a lack of satisfaction with Nathaniel as a subordinate. Perhaps Nathaniel was not 'subservient' enough for the RO due to his questioning in previous semesters.

Nathaniel had not been silent; he had not employed the social strategy of strategic compliance (Lacey, 1977) 'in which the individual complies with the authority figure's definition of the situation and the constraints of the situation but retains private reservations about them' (p.72). Nathaniel was not 'seen to be good' (p.72).

* * *

He acknowledged that his teaching had changed as a result of all the worksheets and different programmes he and his colleagues had to carry out in the school. He confessed that it might not necessarily be good if the pupils did not enjoy the learning process or if the lessons were not as interesting as it could have been due to the worksheets and programmes. But he felt his teaching beliefs had not changed. An example of this was when he shared about the speech and drama programme that was conducted every week and which took two EL periods away from his teaching. At the end of the year, the primary One pupils had to put up a performance to showcase what they had learnt from the programme. Nathaniel felt that it was not necessary to have a performance at the end since the pupils had picked up more than what was planned to be taught in the programme, such as the value of cooperation and harmony. By pressurizing the pupils to rehearse for the final production, he could see how tired the pupils got. To Nathaniel, the means was an end in itself. The end product as required by the school, the stage performance, did not add value to the pupils' learning.

* * *

In this situation, it appeared that Nathaniel was 'realising his(/her) educational values in one particular situation and then denying them in the next, depending on the existence and relative force of constraining factors' (Skelton, 1990, p.389). In this situation, since there was no compulsory requirement to complete the worksheets allocated, he was willing to speak up to question the rationale for the end-of-

production performance. He was able to find out the reason, and was convinced that the stage performance should take place, especially since he also realised that his pupils 'look(ed) forward to putting up a performance as it was a culmination of their hard work which they can take pride in' (Email, 2011, August 29).

* * *

Ishmael Dee. In the third six months, Ishmael felt swamped with the marking of the worksheets. To him, it was the 'depressing heap of worksheets' that was causing him to feel 'strangely drained and jaded'. He was not able to finish all the marking of the 'heaps of worksheets' for the file checking in the middle of that semester, and he did not look forward to the year-end examinations due to the expected academic performance required of his class by both the school and the pupils' parents. In addition to the frustration caused by the huge amount of marking, Ishmael was also frustrated by a disciplinary issue related to the moral dimension of teaching, the dimension that led him to teaching in the first place.

His class did something selfish and made certain insensitive remarks, and so Ishmael wanted to address these character weaknesses. He enlisted the help of his fellow colleagues who also taught his class; he asked them for their personal impressions of his class which he would then use to teach. But some of the more senior colleagues tried to dissuade him from this course of action because they were not comfortable with his approach. Due to this incident and the feeling of being swamped by the incessant amount of marking, Ishmael wondered if teaching was the job for him. He felt disconnected with his work, and also felt he was merely 'going through the motions'. Even his RO remarked that Ishmael seemed jaded and he had only been in

the school system for slightly more than a year. His colleagues also told him that he was taking the issues too hard and too personally. Ishmael felt that 'either I'm the problem or I don't fit in the system.' He believed that he needed to adjust his expectations of teaching. He had wanted to join teaching to make a difference and inculcate the right values, but it seemed that he was prevented from carrying out that which he believed in because the colleagues were not comfortable with his approach. He wanted to teach in a way that would allow fun and engagement while learning, but teaching thus far was not conducted as he had envisaged. He felt disappointed and frustrated that he was not able to address and focus on the character aspect of education which he so firmly believed in. He was perturbed because he was behind in the curriculum due to the chasing and marking of the inordinate number of worksheets.

* * *

Ishmael was evidently facing a crisis – a crisis of uncertainty. He was uncertain who he was as a teacher – a professional, as he had envisaged himself to be when he took up the teaching scholarship, or a post professional, one who responds swiftly to 'external requirements and specified targets, armed with formulaic methods' (Ball, 2004b, p.17). The hegemonic performativity discourse in school implied a re-formation of the teacher's soul, where the teacher is "properly passionate" about excellence, about achieving "peak performance" (Ball, 2004a, p.148). But Ishmael did not see himself as such a teacher. He saw himself as the champion of values, a champion of constructivist learning. It did not make sense to him that he had subconsciously imbibed and inadvertently succumbed to this technology of subjugation. But perhaps it did make sense to him – it was part of the school's culture; it was a requirement for him in order to survive in such a performativity-driven

system. After all, he would be appraised with the EPMS, a performativity-derived assessment tool. But it created post decision dissonance, one which he could not find reassurance, and as such, it haunted him no end. It was a crisis of identity.

* * *

Another cause of his frustration was his relationship with the school's middle management. His colleagues told him he was too unconventional in his approach towards teaching and that he had too many questions for a BT. The middle management seemed to feel threatened by him because he had asked too many questions about existing school procedures and policies. It reached a stage where his RO had a frank talk with Ishmael about the school's expectations of a BT. Ishmael's RO told him that there was too much attention on him and it was not a good development. She had found it hard to defend him during the weekly school management committee meetings. She also told Ishmael that not everyone was open to new ideas, and that the middle management felt Ishmael did not have all the information to make a fair evaluation of the school's policies. After Ishmael was told about these concerns, he felt dejected. He just wanted to teach and fulfil his bond obligations. He did not want to think beyond the bond, as he felt disappointed with the system. For three months after that, Ishmael kept quiet. He did not respond to my emails or text messages, and did not meet for the scheduled interviews.

* * *

Ishmael was a thinker and he thrived in an environment where knowledge could be debated and contested – the university. It was through constant questioning and engagement that he learnt and cognitively grew. He had merely continued with these practices of questioning and giving feedback in the school; it was an acceptable and normative practice in institutes of higher learning. However, it turned out to be

otherwise in a school environment. His constant questioning and feedback were not received well over time. Ishmael was not employing any of Lacey (1977)'s three social strategies nor Sikes et al (1985)'s strategic compromise strategy at this juncture. His dissonance did not allow him to. In the new performativity discourse, schools maintain strictly 'hierarchical relations', and such constant 'questioning of authority' did not sit well with the management. After all, there is a set of 'behavior patterns appropriate for each of the three different tracks' (MOE, 2007b), and in the eyes of the management (i.e. Leadership Track), Ishmael's (i.e. Teaching Track) 'behavior' in this regard did not seem appropriate.

* * *

Hope Tan. Hope's RO had been very supportive. She would ask Hope if she needed help for her school work and would give Hope her time. Whenever Hope needed any support, the RO would give. Hope felt lucky to have her as the RO. Hope learnt to turn work down during this period. She preferred to try something new in her third six months, and not take up the same project as last year's. Since Franjipani was pushing for the use of ICT, Hope decided she wanted to align herself with the school's goals by trying out projects related to this area. She wrote and submitted a project paper on ICT. It was for a national competition. She did as she was told to do; she did not protest, nor did she make an issue of it even though it took up much of her time from planning lessons and marking.

* * *

Hope exhibited clear signs of 'internalized adjustment', a social strategy 'in which the individual complies with the constraints and believes the constraints of the situation are for the best' (Lacey, 1977, p.72). There was no cognitive dissonance for

Hope because she genuinely believed that aligning her effort to the school's goal work out best for herself and her career. It was a belief she had already held during teacher training when she professed the need for strategies to be realistically useful in the school. It looked as if this belief was a centrally held belief, not susceptible to any change.

* * *

Hope spent most of her teaching on drill and practice exercises because the school had a number of elective modular programmes that took up quite a bit of time from the national curriculum. Even though these programmes were supposed to help the pupils in their lessons, many teachers felt that it took time away from their teaching. Hope did feel she had shortchanged her pupils by focusing on the drill and practice exercises in the worksheets and assessment books. But as she was pressed for time, it was 'no choice³⁸ lah'. This was compounded by the fact that many of the programmes were piloted with her class as it was the best class, so much of the time was taken up by these programmes. Thus, to ensure that her class was adequately prepared for the examinations, Hope prepared extra practice papers on her own for her class. She searched for practice papers from other schools and from her colleagues. She felt responsible that her pupils should be prepared for the year-end examinations.

In spite of the extra programmes and additional worksheets for her class, Hope made certain she had her personal time: 'I still make time to go out every weekend of course. I'm not going to suffer just because the school is overloading me.' She was determined not to miss going out on weekends with her husband. She believed her

³⁸ 'lah': a suffix used in Singapore to place emphasis on the word / phrase before.

personal life took precedence over her school work. Work-life harmony was important to her; she was not going to let school work consume her life. Hope was able to 'let go'.

* * *

Hope is the post professional par excellence. She did not 'set aside personal beliefs and live an existence of calculation' (Ball, 2003, p.215); it appeared that she believed and lived an existence of calculation. She had gained entry into 'the ever expanding ranks of executors of quality' (p.218). She seemed to have been socially transformed to be the post professional, and the transformation had begun the moment she engaged in the performativity discourse with her fiancé and his friends, prior to her joining the teaching profession.

There was no change to Hope's identity, since her entry into the school system. Her D- and A- identities were already aligned to the I-identity which the school ascribed to her. Thus, Hope, compared to the others, had the greatest ease in adjusting to the school system.

* * *

Harriet Lee. In her third six months, Harriet had five projects for Science. Mdm. Oh had enlisted Harriet's help during the mid-year June holidays to work on these five ongoing projects. In addition to the five projects, Harriet was given three additional periods to conduct after-school remedial lessons. Harriet welcomed the projects and the extra lessons; she felt that if she could show improvement for the year-end examinations, she 'should be set for a good ranking' that year. But Harriet

also realized that there were a lot of ³⁹wayang projects' going on in the school. It was symptomatic of the politicking going on as each department or groups of teachers or individual teacher tried to outshine one another so that their ranking, relative to the rest of the school staff, at the end of the year would be good. Harriet acknowledged the existence of this politicking: 'There's a shit lot of politics in this school.' She felt that it was best to just bury herself in her work and talk less with colleagues she was not close to. Even if these colleagues thought that she was anti-social, Harriet still felt it was the safer option. Harriet admitted that this was a sad and 'very cold' decision, but if she wanted to stay long in this teaching service, she had to resort to this.

* * *

Harriet appeared to have succumbed to the powerful performativity discourse at this juncture. She knew what she needed to do so that she would 'set for a good ranking' – being in charge of various school programmes, and showing improvement in her class' examination results. Clearly, she defined her achievement through these external measurable targets, and as such, those were her 'psychic rewards' (Lortie, 1975) she would work towards obtaining. This was what Lortie (1975) posited: 'The way teachers see achievement will influence the level of psychic rewards they achieve in their daily work' (p.106).

She understood the micropolitics in school as that which others participated and which she must at all costs avoid. But I wonder if she had contributed to the micropolitics by not being part of the teacher group. Perhaps it was an accidental

³⁹ Wayang: a term in the Malay language to mean *theatre*. In Singapore, when *wayang* is used as an adjective, it means that something is done for show.

perception created by her close working relationship with Mdm. Oh, but choosing not to socialize with her colleagues would have reinforced that perception.

* * *

In spite of what she said she would do at the end of last semester, Harriet still went out of her way to search for teaching resources to help her pupils understand the concepts that she taught. She did not entirely give up the way she was taught to teach during teacher training. She continued with the use of worksheets and she also continued to utilize student-centred teaching approaches for all her subjects. Mrs. Gan continued to disparage Harriet's efforts at teaching EL. Even though she was EL HoD and it was her responsibility to provide support and aid for her EL teachers, she did not do so for Harriet. She did not provide Harriet with suggestions on how to improve her teaching nor did she arrange for a mentor to guide Harriet along. Harriet was very discouraged and things came to the fore when the vice-principal took Mrs. Gan's side by commenting that Harriet's EL lessons were all 'flashy' with no substance. Harriet was very affected by this comment because she respected the vice-principal a lot. She felt that the comments were an assault on her character as a person. She knew what she had prepared for her lessons were for her pupils' benefits and not merely for show. She was quite shocked and upset by the entire situation. When she recounted the incident, she sounded very down. Her entire body language showed that she was very distressed by it. Harriet was normally cheery during the interviews even if there were a lot of work during that period of interview, but for the interview when she recounted this, she was not her normal self.

As a result of this incident, Harriet was determined to produce the results that meant so much to the school: 'It is all drill and practice for me next year. It's all about

results and adding value since numbers are used to evaluate us.’ It was also at this juncture that she knew she would leave the teaching service once she found an opportunity. Harriet felt tired both physically and mentally. She did not feel like a BT at all, with all the work and expectations thrown at her. It was getting unbearable for her. Mdm. Oh wanted her to do another project under a new source of school funding at the end of the third six months. Harriet confessed that she might not have minded in the past, but not at this juncture; she was too tired.

* * *

Harriet was unlike Hope; Harriet employed ‘strategic compromise’, where she ‘provisionally accept(ed) certain elements in (her) situation, partially modifying (her) interests and then seeking to secure (her) partially redefined ends’ (Sikes et al, 1985, p.236). There was initial strategic compliance in that she utilised the worksheets as her primary curriculum and pedagogy. But Harriet had strong beliefs about constructivist teaching, so she could not accept the worksheet pedagogy as the de facto one. She brought back what she had learnt at teacher training, and supplemented it with the worksheet pedagogy. However, this decision to intersperse both forms of pedagogy was reversed after the critical incident where she felt her character was impugned. She came to realize that her ability as a teacher was measured only by the quantifiable measurements obtained through examination scores. As a result, she decided ‘to adapt to the necessities and vicissitudes of policy’ (Ball, 2004b, p.17).

Harriet chose to be a post professional due to a mixture of push-and-pull factors. One was to gain psychic rewards and the other was to prove that she was wrongly assessed. But these constant pressures from the management and her colleagues

started to take its toll on Harriet's self-identity. Her D-identity was not fully aligned with her A-identity or I-identity. Her discourse revealed her beliefs in constructivist teaching, but the I-identity ascribed to her required her to utilize a didactic teacher-directed form of classroom instruction. Her A-identity was restricted to that defined by Mdm. Oh, and that was always defined by the extra-curricular tasks and projects given. This lack of a unitary identity could have led to Harriet feeling emotionally drained and psychologically tired. Her clusters of beliefs and different identities were pulling in different directions.

* * *

6.3 Another Interlude: Insights

Over the span of a full year (January - December 2009), under constant performativity pressures from the schools, all four BTs employed the worksheet curriculum and pedagogy to a large extent. This performativity discourse seems to enact itself as a technology of subjugation. It subjugated the classroom practices of the four BTs to that of the worksheet pedagogy, a pedagogy not taught at teacher training. In fact, it is a pedagogy that is widely panned by the teacher educators themselves (Sullivan, 1007; Cheah, 2004). The pervasive influence of this discourse transformed or perhaps re-formed their identities. Hope was already 're-formed' as a post professional in her outlook and beliefs prior to joining the school system. Her closely aligned D-, A- and I-identities bore her well in this journey of teacherhood in her first two critical periods, the TP and the first 18 months (Sikes *et al*, 1985). In fact, she was the only one who did not encounter a crisis of identity nor face any conflict of beliefs. The habitus which existed in her fiancé's group served to aid her in her transition to the school

system with a similar habitus. She was socialized into the school easily with no loss of ideals. Her ideals matched that of the school system.

Nathaniel initially had great difficulty accepting this change in his classroom practice. There was cognitive dissonance and he questioned the need for such practices. Alas, his questions, which were actually a means to find reassurance so as to reduce his dissonance, were taken to be insubordinate. Over time, in order to survive and keep his head above the waters of performativity, he grew to accept the utility and efficacy of the worksheet pedagogy. Due to the amount of effort invested in this change of behaviour, his beliefs followed suit (Griffin, 1997); his dissonance was thus reduced.

Harriet was seduced by the performativity discourse very early on. 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). She gladly took on all the challenges of planning, coordinating and monitoring different extra-curricular projects and tasks for the Science HoD; she did beyond what was expected of a BT. She even went beyond what was expected of experienced teachers. This left her isolated from her colleagues, and thus it perpetuated a situation where everyone sought to outdo one another individually. But in terms of classroom practices, Harriet was more fortunate in that she could enact her constructivist beliefs because her HoD employed those same teaching approaches, or so it seemed. She 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; Lasky, 2005; Lloyd, 2007). Harriet did not do so and she realized that her teaching ability was directly correlated with the examination scores

of her pupils. It was through this experience that she too made the decision to adopt the worksheet pedagogy. But due to her strong D-identity, which was aligned to her beliefs in constructivist approaches, she chose a strategy of strategic compromise. But that again was called into question when her results and teaching were disparaged by members of the management at the end of the year. The post professional roots were spreading in Harriet's psyche and she may embrace this 'post professionalism' fully in time to come, if she continued in such a performativity-driven school culture.

Ishmael was one who faced constant crises in his role as a teacher. His centrally held beliefs of inculcating values and teaching in a constructivist mode constantly rebelled against his reduced worksheet curriculum. He was caught in a bind psychologically and thus naturally turned to questioning such practices. He might have a 'paradigmatic orientation to change which fails to acknowledge the constraining power of the institutional context and related norms of teacher behaviour' (Skelton, 1990, p.390). There was little or no adjustment of his ideals. Just as Nathaniel had experienced, Ishmael was accused of insubordination to some extent, and felt dejected. But unlike Nathaniel or Harriet, Ishmael could not accept the fact that he was still adopting the worksheet pedagogy, even though it was for his survival in coping with the large number of worksheets and the examination results. The situation created a huge cognitive dissonance in him, a dissonance that was not easily reduced, a dissonance that might call him to leave the profession if he continued in such a performativity-driven school culture.

A few common themes appear to have cut across the four BTs' narratives. These commonalities might provide an answer as to why the encounters that the BTs faced

occurred and why there were such responses from them. This leads me to the next layer of analysis – what Polkinghorne (1995) terms as the ‘analysis of narratives’.

Chapter 7

Analytic Inquiry 3 – A Thematic Retelling

*Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?*

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*,
Act 2, Scene 1

7.1 Introduction

In Chapters Five and Six, the narratives of the four beginning teachers (BTs) were told through Chase (2008)'s first two analytic lens, where the first focuses on the narrator's point of view with his/her accompanying emotions, thoughts and interpretations, and where the second highlights the particular version of self, reality and experience. After embarking on a series of journeys with the four BTs in the previous chapter, one might query – so what? So what if I know their stories? So what if I know what happened to them, where and when it happened to them, and how they responded to the encounters? The logical question that follows would be *why* – why did these encounters occur and why were there such responses? This leads me to the next layer of analysis – what Polkinghorne (1995) terms as the 'analysis of narratives'. This is the type of analysis whereby researchers 'collect stories as data and analyze them with paradigmatic processes', and which results in 'descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters or settings' (p.12). This effectively moves the analysis from stories to 'common elements'; from

the ‘unique story’ to the ‘universal story’ (Atkinson, 1998, p.63). As such, I term this as my second layer of analysis, or the thematic analysis of narratives.

This pluralism is accepted as a strength in narrative research (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Phoenix, Smith & Sparkes, 2010). In fact, by examining the data from both the narrative and the paradigmatic levels, it allows the researcher to ‘explore different kinds of order in them, and construct different versions of the social world’ (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.14). This will aid in the revealing and constructing of the complexity and diversity in the participants’ narratives. In turn, this lends itself to a richer and deeper understanding of the beginning teacher’s journey of teacherhood. 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 four broad thematic categories. The themes for this study can be found in Table 7.1. (A more detailed description of the selection and review of the codes and themes can be found in Chapter 3)

Theme 1	Socialisation of pedagogic practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worksheet curriculum / pedagogy • Time factor • Strategic compliance / compromise • Socialisation
Theme 2	Re-construction towards performativity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching to the test • Performativity • Shaken confidence • Idealism / accountability pressures
Theme 3	Re-formation of identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive dissonance • Identity issues
Theme 4	Micropolitics of teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School politics

Table 7.1: Analytical themes

With the naming of the analytical themes, I shall now turn to the second layer of analysis – the narrative thematic analysis – of the four beginning teachers' stories. Although each of these four thematic categories seems discrete, they are to a large extent intertwined. Through the use of these themes and by viewing it through Chase's (2008) third analytic lens of seeking patterns across narratives, I seek to explore and present how the four BTs' narratives were 'both enabled and constrained by the range of social resources and circumstances' (Chase, 2008, p.65) in order to guide, first and foremost, the future primary school teachers, and then those who are involved in their training and induction.

7.2 Theme 1: Socialisation of pedagogic practice

Even though the four participants were posted to different schools in different parts of the country, their socialisation experiences in the varied contexts from the outset was remarkably similar. School expectations were similar in many aspects of their job roles and responsibilities. Whilst there were huge similarities in the ways the schools exacted socialisation influences, the way the participants responded varied, particularly for Hope. Fang (1996) mentioned that contextual factors exert 'powerful influences on teachers' beliefs and, in effect, affect their classroom practice' (p.53). The narratives of the four beginning teachers attest to this.

Beliefs in the beginning. In the beginning, before and during the teaching practice, and to some extent, their first six months, the four beginning teachers ascribe to their teaching beliefs of engaging their pupils through interesting and fun lessons that are fundamentally different from that prescribed by many schools:

I suddenly realised I'm not sure how to conduct an English lesson so I asked the CT cos we met briefly and she said just follow the text book. I was rather disturbed cos that's not what we did in TTI. It was always fun lesson plans. (Hope, email, 2008, February 19)

I also wish that my pupils can enjoy learning in greater measure without the stresses that come with the system. (Nathaniel, email, 2008, September 12)

I think we can do better; I really think we can do better. But how am I going to bridge what they (the pupils) know from doing the worksheets to what they write...I'll be thinking of how I can get them (the pupils) to link and be more fluent. These things you can't teach with worksheets. (Ishmael, interview, 2008, March 15)

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

Research (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Martin *et al*, 2000; Hativa *et al*, 2001; Sahin *et al*, 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 (Munby, 1982; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fang, 1996; Keys, 2005; Marsh, 2006). This seems to be the case for all participants.

Practice over the 18 months. The first 18 months has been identified as one of the critical periods of a beginning teacher's career (Sikes *et al*, 1985). This stressful period can provoke 'shattered images' of teaching (Cole & Knowles, 1993) or induce 'reality shock' (Grossman, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Reynolds, 1992) for the beginning teachers. This 'shattered images' or 'reality shock' is an outcome of a confrontation between the beginning teachers' personal philosophical beliefs about teaching and the schools' reality; or rather, there seems to be a misalignment between the two – a praxis shock. Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002a) define 'praxis shock' as 'the teachers'

confrontation with the realities and responsibilities 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 the four participants; they were confronted with 'the realities and responsibilities' of school life that challenged and put 'their beliefs and ideas about teaching' to the test. In fact, the challenge was so great that they 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 pupils for the examination (i.e. teaching to the test).

This practice started right from the beginning during the teaching practicum for Hope and Ishmael:

I also need to cover the textbook *for their mid-year examination*, and if I don't then my CTs will be unhappy right? Anyway, my boyfriend said most teachers are teacher-centred. So what's the big deal?
(Hope, email, 2008, March 27; emphasis added)

Worksheets is a practice you cannot avoid. We have grammar and phrasal-practice papers every two weeks. We've got, yeah, a lot of worksheets. Worksheets is hell (sic) ... but the consensus is that teachers need a crutch; the worksheets are actually exam-oriented; they crafted all the worksheets like exam. At the same time it provides some form of accountability. The formal work has been done already. My CT's telling me no need to plan lessons already. Don't do any more lesson plans. Now it is just worksheet all the way. Teacher Training Institute (TTI) gives you a set of skills, that you may or may not use, but I think in the classroom, when you really stare reality in the eyes, you learn. I'm shocked at the amount of worksheets you have to do.
(Ishmael, interview, 2008, April 26; emphasis added)

Perhaps, with only ten weeks of teaching practicum, the impact of this set of dominant worksheet emphasis and practice may not be that far-reaching. However, the influence of the schools and its accompanying worksheet cultures went beyond the practicum. This was experienced by three participants, Hope, Nathaniel and Ishmael, in their first six months (July – December 2008) as a teacher:

There were worksheets at the end of every topic or unit. They have short term memory so *using worksheets can be a way of helping them remember and consolidate the main ideas that I tried to teach*. They can have fun in the lessons but to help them remember concepts and for higher order thinking questions, *worksheets are still necessary*. *Worksheets allow them to put pen to paper and helps them to learn to write/phrase their answers*. (Hope, email, 2008, December 27; emphasis added)

I had to prepare and *plan the worksheets for an Arts trip!* (Nathaniel, email, 2008, August 2; emphasis added)

Bad. Quite I feel quite sorry for my kids, really, I mean it's not the best lesson I can deliver, everyday, and *most of the time we're just going to through the worksheets*. Very bad. And what's more, even myself, I can't rationalize why we are using activity books and the textbooks when the examination content comes from the worksheets. Scrap the activity books, scrap the, I mean, let's do something different. Why must- it's as though we need to do the activity books to justify to the parents that their child is actually studying. Is there? *I'm teaching through the worksheets and that's very bad*. ... we will design our worksheets based on that ... I think the schools are doing it wrongly. I don't think we understand what ⁴⁰Teach Less Learn More means. (Ishmael, interview, 2008, August 30; emphasis added)

Hope and Ishmael seem to be adopting the ubiquitous worksheet practice in their own teaching. Hope seems to have approved that practice as a mark of being an effective teacher. Ishmael however seems reluctant about accepting the practice and feels 'bad' about his using it so prevalently. Even Nathaniel had to develop worksheets for his Arts-based educational trip organised for an entire level. This is akin to what Kuzmic (1994) posits:

Without some basic understanding of the organisational life of schools, ... beginning teachers may be ill-equipped to deal with the problems and difficulties they encounter or develop the political tactics and teaching strategies needed to resist ... and challenge the pressures to conform, many of

⁴⁰ TLLM or Teach Less Learn More: a Ministry of Education policy; it is about 'teaching better, to engage our learners and prepare them for life, rather than teaching more, for tests and examinations.' It aims to 'improve the quality of interaction (emphasis original) between teachers and learners, so that our learners can be more engaged in learning and better achieve the desired outcomes of education.' (<http://www3.moe.edu.sg/bluesky/tllm.htm>)

which stem from the institutional characteristics of schools as bureaucratic organisations. (p.24)

The school system is slowly transferring its culture, its dispositions and its understanding of what it means to be a member of that school to the beginning teachers. It is slowly but surely socialising the beginning teachers into its accepted norm of behaviour, of its definition of professionalism. This process tightened its grip on the four participants in their first full calendar year (January 2009 – December 2009):

I need to account to the English department. They really want me to push the class. They insist on so many things; I don't know what to do. So every day it is homework, comprehension and homework. I really want to teach them strategies but it's very difficult. I find that I haven't been focussing on teaching with all these things. *The teaching aspect is not there. It's like rushing through.*

(Hope, interview, 2009, April 25; emphasis added)

I will try to maximise the time by doing worksheets and stuff. Yah, ⁴¹STELLAR and additional worksheets as well. Yah because we have additional worksheets incorporated together with the STELLAR worksheets. It's already a challenge completing all the worksheets. And yet training them for the exams - SA 1, CA 2 and SA 2. Quite challenging. Yah, so in addition, I will like look out for oral practices and reading passages for the children to practise. Yah, and compositions as well; composition practices.

(Nathaniel, interview, 2009, October 10)

This year I made it a conscious effort; I'm going to reach school by 6.30. Ya, because sometimes you queue up for printer, isograph, and yeah, so I made myself go earlier. Whatever I want to print, I come to school to print. And because it's term 3, *term 3 the worksheets come in thick and fast. It's very bad. Very bad. ... And the worksheets, it's decontextualised grammar. But it's examinations you got to teach them.* So a lot of times worksheets go back, homework come back, next day we'll mark together. *But I wish my English lessons more fun.* (Ishmael, interview, 2009, January 10; emphasis added)

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

⁴¹ STELLAR: An acronym for the national literacy programme- *STrategies for English Language Learning And Reading.*

the way to go. I intend to come during the hols to create all the worksheets I need for my P3 science class.

(Harriet, phone text message, 2009, May 27; emphasis added)

In that first calendar year (January 2009 – December 2009), the participants' seventh to 18th month, the worksheet culture seemed to have seeped into all the participants' practices. Habitus seemed to have occurred; the participants over the 18 months were structured into generating and organizing 'practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). It was not a conscious decision to start teaching via the worksheet curriculum, but the 'homogeneity of conditions of existence' caused 'practice to be objectively harmonized without any calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or, a fortiori, explicit co-ordination' (pp. 58 – 59).

Even though there was 'homogeneity of conditions of existence', and the participants' practices were seemingly 'harmonized', there may be a certain element of consciousness in deciding to adopt the worksheet practice. 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, 2002a, p.111). This success can be found in being viewed by their colleagues as competent and hardworking professionals, and especially '(i)f pupils do well on their tests, this is motivating and reassuring to the beginning teacher' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p.112). Thus, highly visible artefacts 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 (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a).

This directly corresponds with what Wanous (1980) described as the four-stage socialisation process, where the neophyte, in this case, the beginning teachers, first confront and accept organizational reality, then achieves role clarity, before locating oneself in the organizational context, and finally detecting signposts of successful socialisation. The beginning teachers seemed to have detected the signposts of successful socialisation through the conforming of the worksheet culture. But whether they have accepted this socialisation process is another matter. This is quite evident in the way they responded to the worksheet culture; even though they are all using the worksheets as a major part of their pedagogical practice, not all seem to deem it fully acceptable. Conceivably, this is where Green's belief system could prove to be of help. There may be different clusters of beliefs where one cluster of beliefs hold that it is important to engage learners in a fun way, and another cluster hold that in order to survive and be perceived as an effective teacher, the way about it would be to utilise the worksheets that are used by the colleagues. Thus, there would be a lack of congruence between the one's beliefs and one's practice. However, if the beginning teacher's belief in the importance of engagement is a central belief, then he/she would have great difficulty fully accepting the worksheet curriculum even though it has proven to be successful for its purposes.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, implicit in both the centrality and clustering of beliefs is the importance of context. The relative centrality of beliefs varies according to the context. And one important contextual factor in this first 18 months is that of time.

Factor of time. For the participants, not only do they have to make a transition from being a student to a teacher, they also have to juggle the demands of the heavy teaching workload with the number of projects and amount of committee work thrown onto their plates. With the exception of Harriet, whose school clearly followed the guideline of a reduced teaching workload, without the need for her to adhere to a worksheet curriculum in her first six months, all the others either carried a full teaching workload, or had to enact a worksheet curriculum, or both. Perhaps this could be one of the reasons why Harriet did not feel the dissonant impact of the socialisation until much later. For the other three, the full teaching workload and the amount of marking that resulted due to the worksheet culture set up a context that ironically pushed them to adopt the worksheet curriculum:

Because whenever there is a free day, it means time I can mark in the morning. I just get them to refer to textbook which is very boring. Then the other thing is er limited amount of time in class because they have elective modular programme. So even if I wanted to carry out activities, I don't really have the time for.

(Hope, interview, August 22, 2009)

I think the most frustrating thing I face is time constraint. Due to this factor, I find that the quality of lessons are compromised at times, it's challenging to find time to reflect on my teaching & make significant improvements, it's more of trying to 'keep afloat'.

(Nathaniel, email, 2008, September 12)

I can't finish marking. I have no time to go through them, so I won't mark the MCQ. We go through in class. For joining sentences, I will mark them but very time-consuming. Suffering. Very bad. Force myself to go out. Colleagues who tell me you have to force yourself to go out. Stay in office all day not

good for you in the long run; you suffer. Even if I have to bring back work, I'll leave by 5:30 everyday. No later than that, because it's quite bad when I first started, I was literally the last teacher to go home every day. It was quite bad. I was motivated sometimes I'd look at a pile of work- some of the more experienced teachers tell me you can never finish. Set yourself a target to meet. Then stop there. Pace yourself. I'm just wondering why is there a need to grade everything and mark. We have health educational exams. Why? What is the purpose of health education? We want our children to grow up healthy? Does it mean they know all the key terms, all the food types, they'll be healthy? (Ishmael, interview, 2008, August 30)

As observed by Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002a), beginning teachers 'want to do a good job' and thus 'heavily invest time and energy in their work' (p.111). Time is of utmost importance to teachers, especially for beginning teachers. This lack of time is a common theme in many teacher studies (Apple, 1996; Apple & Junck, 1996; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Gitlin, 2001; Ballet, Kelchtermans & Loughran, 2006). It is no exception for the participants. By adopting the worksheet curriculum, the beginning teachers gain recognition that they are effective and efficient as teachers, because they are able to 'cover' the syllabus, so that they have the time to revise before each assessment, and also produce the test results required of them by the school and the parents. Yet, in doing so, they themselves create a situation where time is of the essence. And the most efficient means of delivering content when placed in such a context is by using the worksheet pedagogy:

Time constraints, having to cover the activity book and worksheets don't allow me to use the strategies learnt at TTI.

(Hope, email, 2009, December 31; emphasis added)

When I am finished I was effectively left with 15 minutes, so it can't be helped and I think these things add up and the easiest way to teach English in these kind of settings, it's just worksheets.

(Ishmael, interview, 2008, March 15; emphasis added)

This (using worksheets) happens when time is a constraint and the syllabus for all subjects have to be completed. It also happens when I do not have the time to prepare for the lessons ahead.

(Nathaniel, email, 2010, January 2; emphasis added)

This seems to mirror what Ishmael astutely said in the beginning of his teaching practicum:

Yesterday my friend was saying, don't change the system but don't let the system change you because once you become part of the system it's the end of you as a personality. But it's not very good because when you go for the school practicum, essentially that's when your education begins. That's where your CT and supervisors will influence the way you teach and if you get posted back to the school, this is, this will be the way you teach. So whatever stuff you learnt in TTI, if it doesn't apply in school, bye bye.
(Ishmael, interview, 2008, March 1)

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). The authors 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 the four BTs. All four, Hope, Ishmael, Nathaniel and Harriet, had espoused constructivist beliefs in the beginning of the study. But when they started teaching, these constructivist teaching beliefs were put on hold.

Hope willingly put them aside right from the beginning because she knew what was expected by the school system. She enacted the worksheet pedagogy as it was the most efficient method of teaching, and it was the one that could produce the examination results by which she would be assessed on in the appraisal system. She imbibed the cultural norms and perpetuated it in her own classroom practices.

Nathaniel tried to enact his constructivist teaching beliefs but due to the pressures of time and performativity, he had to put these beliefs aside in order to survive. But he

did not give up these beliefs without a fight. He 'fought' by expressing his queries during meetings, but was taken to task for 'questioning authority'. As a result, over time, Nathaniel chose to comply with the school norms silently. By the end of his 18 months, he accepted the practice of the worksheet pedagogy, and even explained how he contributed to it on his own. His practice was socialized.

Ishmael seemed to have given up his beliefs in constructivist teaching in the beginning. He utilized the worksheets extensively even though he complained of the amount of marking he had to do as a result. It was only after a critical incident involving his pupils that he recalled his initial decision to become a teacher – to teach the values he himself had been taught by his own teachers. This created cognitive dissonance for him and led him to constantly question the school's pedagogical practice. This led him to a confrontation with the school management which led him to comply with the school's practice. Even though he complied, he did so unwillingly; he adopted 'strategic compliance' (Lacey, 1977). But he was constantly dogged by his dissonance throughout the latter part of his 18 months.

Harriet was socialized into the use of the worksheet pedagogy only in her second year. By then, due to the pressure on her to produce sterling academic results for her classes, she accepted the norm of using worksheets. She did not do so willingly, but out of necessity for her own survival and appraisal. She adopted the strategy of strategic compromise (Sikes *et al*, 1985), whereby she utilized both the worksheet pedagogy and her constructivist teaching approaches.

It seems that ‘whatever stuff’ that was learnt at the teacher training institute was bade ‘bye bye’, because that which was learnt did not really help them to be accountable in a performativity –driven school environment. Thus, I now turn to the second theme – the reconstruction of oneself to a performativity-driven professional.

7.3 Theme 2: Re-construction towards performativity

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). In the four schools, this seems to be what happened. The four beginning teachers started following the worksheet curriculum within the span of the first 18 months. As this situation potentially sets up a dilemma between the beginning teachers’ ‘own judgement about “good practice” and students’ “needs” on the one hand’, and ‘the rigours of performance on the other’ (Ball, 2004, p.146), it is interesting to see what had happened to the four participants:

It’s just that, in reality, *teachers do need to produce results.*
(Hope, email, 2008, February 27; emphasis added)

I also feel that the way I teach is very exam oriented rather than in depth understanding for the pupils. Yes. I lose my focus on the understanding part quite often because I look at the ‘exam type’ questions to determine how to direct the pupils.
(Hope, email, 2009, 31 Dec, 2009; emphasis added)

SA 1, CA 2 and SA 2. It’s already a challenge completing all the worksheets. And yet training them for exams. Quite challenging. Yah, in addition, I will look out for oral practices, and reading passages. Yah, compositions as well. Composition practices. *It’s okay as long as they score well. As long as they do well yah.*
(Nathaniel, interview, 2009, October 10; emphasis added)

I find myself less a teacher *more a tutor because I’m so curriculum centric.*
(Ishmael, interview, 2008, August 30; emphasis added)

Most of us would fall back onto the worksheets, *for these are ‘examinable’.*
(Ishmael, email, 2008, August 14; emphasis added)

Crazy! Must write proposal for iPods (using iPods to teach science) by tonight for Wed (23rd July 2008) superintendent's meeting! P(incipal) 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.
(Harriet, phone text message, 2008, July 21)

I have got a few major projects:

- 1) Assist Mdm. Oh in the decoration of the literature room. Guess I have to decorate the room with pictures of students and teachers in action.
 - 2) Science garden project extension.
 - 3) Self-imposed. Virtual tour of literature room. The rest, I will save it for December citing time and priorities, *must save some rabbits for next year to pull out of hat.* hee hee
 - 4) YMCA Plain English Speaking Awards
 - 5) Ideas-In-Action wrap up. *Must get featured in the papers to secure good ranking.* hahaha
 - 6) Geometer sketchpad sharing for upper primary teachers
- (Harriet, phone text message, July 7; emphasis added)

Clearly, from the participants' responses to the work that they had to do, some assigned and some volunteered, they have re-constructed themselves 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). Beginning teachers are appraised at the end of the calendar year on their class results and on the projects that they contribute to, as described in Chapter Two. Thus, the need to perform in these situations seemed to have rendered the need to uphold their personal teaching beliefs ineffectual. Even though the four participants have been in the teaching service for a relative short span of time, they were each given projects to manage on their own in their first year. Is this what one terms as 'developing' the new teacher? Perhaps.

According to Ball (2007), performativity is both 'a culture and a mode of regulation' (p.27). Individual subjects within an organisation 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 organisation' 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.

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 pupils obtain in inter-school competitions, and even the amount of work they have put in to prepare their pupils for the examinations or the competitions, i.e. the number of worksheets or practice papers given and marked, and the number of training hours or sessions. This intensification of being publicly compared and assessed leads to a constant need to produce 'artefacts' of recognition. And all four BTs were put through this intensification process.

Right from the beginning, during the teaching practice, the BTs were required to prepare the pupils for the mid-year examinations, especially in the weeks prior to it. They were 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, all four BTs were pressured to focus on the test preparation, either during teaching practice or during their first 18 months of teaching. Various studies (Smith, 1991; Craig, 2004; Hammerness, 2004; Imig & Imig, 2006) have shown the effect high-stakes test pressures have on teachers' classroom instruction. Regardless of their beliefs or identities, Hope, Ishmael, Harriet and Nathaniel all succumbed to the pressure of the high-stakes testing; they taught using the worksheets as the worksheets were the most efficient method of preparing their pupils for the high-stakes tests. They were measured by the results produced by their own pupils, and thus they felt compelled to produce this performance indicator through the worksheet pedagogy. This is acknowledged by Deng & Gopinathan (2003) who analysed the challenges of teacher training in Singapore:

The classroom practices prevailing in Singapore schools, in general, tend to be examination-oriented ... Teachers see their role primarily as transmitting knowledge and skills to students through didactic telling and some limited doing, while students are expected to absorb knowledge and skills through passive listening, watching, drilling, and practising. (pp. 61-62)

They too agree that the primary reason for this examination-oriented pedagogy is due to the 'prevalence of high-stakes examinations of pupils under their charge' (p.62).

Other than producing academic results, all four BTs had to engage in extra-curricular projects and work that were taken as measures of their performances. Hope had to enlist the help of her fiancé to complete the school project that was assigned her. Even

though it was supposed to be the pupils' work, in the end, she and her fiancé had to complete it and send it for the competition. After all, failure to complete the project that was meant for exhibition and competition was not an option in such a performativity discourse. She understood the requirements of this discourse, and so volunteered to work on projects that were aligned to the school's goals. This move revealed her intention and desire to successfully engage in this performativity-driven discourse.

Harriet was attracted to the performativity discourse right from the start. She was competitive by nature, and so was always game to help out in all the projects suggested by Mdm. Oh. In fact, she thrived in the projects as she felt she was contributing to their success. She was especially pleased that she was favourably looked upon by the school management, save one. She knew her ideas and initiatives were welcomed by the management, and that these moves contributed to her performing well in the appraisal system.

Ishmael was very aware that as a scholar, he was expected to perform better than the other teachers. He took it in stride and accepted the need to use the worksheet pedagogy in order to produce the results required of him. He put in extra training sessions for the Tennis club he was in charge of, so that his pupils would be prepared for the competition. But due to his beliefs about teaching, he suffered cognitive dissonance as a result of succumbing to this discourse of performativity.

Nathaniel was one who did not want to engage with the performativity discourse. He spoke out against it right from the start, but as pressures mounted on him to perform,

he succumbed to it and accepted the need to prepare his pupils for the high-stakes examination and produce the required academic results. He even justified his contribution to the increasing number of worksheets for his class.

Much like what Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002a) put across, '(a)ll these artefacts', referring to the effective and extensive use of worksheets, pupils' academic results and managing school projects, 'thus get a symbolic importance in beginning teachers' self-presentation and their quest for professional recognition' (p.112). Their pupils' success in tests implies that they have the ability to teach well; however, the opposite is also true, '(b)ad test results often lead to self-doubts and external criticism'

(Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p.112):

So I think overall this year, other than that so called friction with the management. I think *the other thing I'm not too happy, worried, depressed is the results of my children*. Quite a number of them are band 1 in P2 and they are not achieving that, in fact they dropped to band 3. *That's kind of got me worried and er self doubt creeps in and ask myself okay what have I done?* (Harriet, interview, 2009, September 26; emphasis added)

Term 4 has been rather stressful and I feel quite bad that I've been neglecting my P2 Maths class a tad...*I just got back my class SA2 composition results and it's pretty bad, feel kinda upset*. (Nathaniel, email, 2008, October 22; emphasis added)

Feeling strangely drained and jaded, even though it's going to be a short term. *Not looking forward to the exams, what with all that related results and parental appraisal of us*. (Ishmael, email, 2009, September 22; emphasis added)

Okay I'm too idealistic. *Let's just throw it out of the window and just focus on exams*. Yah, it's quite bad. But the minute school starts, it's all result driven. *And I'm driven by their results*. I see, because I have their mid-year scores. That's the first thing I look at when I get their results yah. *So I'm very result driven*. Not very good thing right. Shouldn't be that case. (Hope, email, 2008, November 28; emphasis added)

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. But with this re-construction of self towards performativity, due to the contextual and socialising pressures of the appraisal, would not the individual have cognitive dissonance as a result of conforming to the dominant pedagogic practice that is fundamentally conflicting in nature? What then of one’s identity as a teacher? Has it been completely replaced by that of the ‘post professional’? To this, I shall now turn in my next theme.

7.4 Theme 3: Re-formation of identity

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. Since the teacher identity is what each participant makes of himself /herself, I shall look at each of the BTs in turn. And I shall be using three of Gee’s (2001) four perspectives on identities – Institution-identity, Discourse-identity, and Affinity-identity; the ones that are determined through social interactions and discourse. Gee (2001) mention that these strands of identity ‘may very well all be present and woven together’ when the individual acts and reacts with a given situation (p.101). The narratives of the four BTs reveal how the school as an institution creates ‘positions and outcomes’ for the four BTs (p.120). The school ascribes a certain identity for its BTs – the I-identity. The Beginning Teacher is a position that is derived from the institutional identity. The BT is expected to abide by certain norms of the school practices and culture, to abide by the school’s policies of testing, to enact test-driven

pedagogical practices, and to ensure that performativity targets (i.e. completion of an allocated number of worksheets, achievement of certain standards in the pupils' test results, implementation of a certain number of school projects, participation in external competitions) are met. The BT is 'invited' to take on this I-identity. S/he has a choice of either resisting or 'actively inhabiting' it. Nonetheless, as Gee (2001) points out, 'it is a "position" that institutional forces have prepared' for the BT and which 'they "invite" him (/her) to inhabit' (p.118).

Hope willingly accepted the ascribed I-identity. She enacted the test-driven pedagogical approach without complaint or cognitive dissonance. In fact, she espoused the utility and efficacy of such an approach very early on. Hope started out by wondering if she needs to have a belief system so that she can be 'good' teacher:

Unless I have a belief and I know what are the values I want to impart to the kids, I'll never be a good teacher cos I won't have a system I can stick to. I'm also worried about what will happen to me if I can't deliver the work assigned to me by my RO? I mean there'll surely be work other than planning lessons. What if I'm clueless about the work? What if I can't deliver? Will they fire me? (Hope, email, 2008, January 1)

However, she immediately expresses the idea that it is essential for her to abide by the rules of the school so that she can 'deliver' as a teacher. As her then boyfriend, and now husband, has been a teacher and Head of Department for 15 years, he has shared with her the expectations and intricacies of school life. Hope is well aware of how school functions since she has inside information of the Singapore school system from her husband's teacher / Head of Department perspective. It seems that with this insight, she is very clear of what she needs to do in such a system.

Harriet most willingly accepted the I-identity initially. She chose to apply to Jacaranda Primary School because she knew the principal, Mrs. Chan, from her contract teaching stint. She felt that the principal was a visionary leader, so she wanted to work with such a person. She had heard of stories of principals who were 'nasty' and 'result-oriented'. She did not want to risk working for such leaders, so she applied to work with this principal when she was still a student at TTI:

You know sometimes you are given the opportunity to do something, you should seize the opportunity. And if I'm going to have to work really hard in a school, I might as well choose the one that I enjoy. So I think that is one of the reasons why I chose this school.
(Harriet, interview, 2008, March 1)

She poured her energy and time in helping out with many of the school's projects and competitions. She knew that these projects would aid her in obtaining a 'good' year-end appraisal. She knew that obtaining good academic results from her classes was what she would be assessed on and she was prepared to utilise the worksheet pedagogy in order to achieve it. Even though she planned to enact such a practice in her second year, she resisted it as well. There was cognitive dissonance as it was antithetical to her teaching beliefs. She also revealed how much the projects were taking a toll on her; furthermore, they were not complementary to her goals as a teacher:

This is crazy! With all this admin work, where do I have the time to do any planning for creative and innovative teaching? ⁴²Sian man! If anything, I got another 34 months to go.
(Harriet, email, 2008, August 14)

Tired by the day, physically and mentally. I don't feel like a BT at all with all the work and expectations thrown on me. Getting ridiculous and unbearable. Sigh...
(Harriet, phone text message, 2009, August 26)

⁴² Sian: a Singapore vernacular term to mean 'boring', with the connotation of frustration.

Harriet started to resist the I-identity in her second year after she realised she would be penalised for not producing the academic results for her class:

Next year I would just be a normal teacher since I can only ‘⁴³wayang’. Sigh... I really don’t know what to do anymore. Do also get it. Don’t do also get it. Why would Mr Kee (the Vice-principal) remark that I am all wayang and no teaching and learning substance when it comes to ICT for teaching and learning? What am I missing?
(Harriet, phone text message, 2009, October 30)

Nathaniel, the other hand, resisted the ascribed I-identity right from the start. He came into teaching filled with idealism. He had a wonderful time learning at the Teacher Training Institute and wanted to use what he had learnt in his own classes:

First thing when I have my own class, it would be to use the strategies that I’ve learnt from my tutors in TTI. Because I find that they are really quite useful in helping to build that interest to read. And I think maybe to just follow what my mum did; to start off by reading to the children. Yah because I think everyone loves to hear stories. Especially children; they love to hear stories. I remember during my contract teaching time, there were times when I read to them. Yah and they just loved to be read to. Yah, they do love to just hear from the teacher. Yah, so I think that maybe I could start off with that one, reading to the children yah. I think these teachers just inspire you because like you can see the passion they have for the subject. And they make lessons so fun and interesting. Yah, so it’s more of like hoping to emulate them in these areas. Yah, the passion and hoping to make my lessons fun, engaging and meaningful for my students.
(Nathaniel, interview, 2008, March 1)

However, the situation in school was not amenable to his ideas of teaching; to such an extent that he felt unmotivated as a teacher:

Then you know I think there’s much more work to do, be done. Yah so everything is like I feel like I could hardly manage. And I don’t feel very motivated to do my work. I feel quite unmotivated now. I mean like I’m not even doing any, much of things that I would like to do yah. Things like – feel quite frustrated.

⁴³ Wayang: a term in the Malay language to mean *theatre*. In Singapore, when *wayang* is used as an adjective, it means that something is done for show.

I mean I wish that I could transfer (to another school) but I mean it's not going to happen as yet. I guess it's very idealistic to think that I can find a school I can focus more in teaching rather than like getting awards and stuff. So I was just thinking how to live with the system and yet still manage to get the best out of the constraint.

(Nathaniel, interview, 2009, February 7)

Angsana Primary has a culture that prided itself for its achievements in the academics and sports, and for its use of Information & Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching. Hence it has a strong performativity culture. Right from the teaching practicum, he was constantly exposed to the discourse of the traditional 'drill-and-practice' approach and the accompanying use of worksheets to teach and reinforce conceptual understanding. This was not what he envisaged teaching to be and it created a dissonant experience for him. As a beginning teacher, it is difficult to reject this dominant performativity discourse; he ran the risk of being labeled as an outlier if he were to insist on enacting a different practice. And perhaps it was because of this resistance to the ascribed I-identity, he was taken to task by his school management. This was what happened when he suggested doing things differently for the Arts programme when he was tasked to take over that portfolio:

I guess they (his colleagues) are not as outspoken as me. So I think my HOD is now making a comparison between me and the girl who just left. The girl who just left; actually my HOD wanted her to be like art coordinator. And she is very nice. And she is not as outspoken as me. She takes things, like whatever comes her way, she just takes it quietly upon her shoulder. Then she just does everything which I feel may not necessarily be wise because then you are like sacrificing your own personal time. So that's why I feel really without a life now. So I think that sorry, I'm not like her. I can't help it when she makes comparison. Yah. How? So very unhappy you know.

(Nathaniel, interview, 2009, February 7)

Over time, due to the 'wearing down' effect of being the sole voice of resistance, Nathaniel succumbed to the school's policies and practices near the end of the 18 months. He accepted the use of the worksheet pedagogy and in fact took the initiative

to search for more worksheets so as to prepare his class for the examination. His resistance was worn down by the institutional forces.

Ishmael initially seemed to accept the I-identity. He grew tired as a result of trying to produce the performativity artefacts (i.e. using and marking the allocated worksheets). But when he realised he was imbibing this in his own practice, he was troubled; he tried to make a difference to his practices and that of the school's:

It's either I'm the problem, or I don't fit the system. I'm feeling disconnected with my work at times. It concerned doing things that I didn't and couldn't believe in - going through the motions. My RO remarked that I'm already jaded and merely after one year. And I don't frankly give a damn.

I definitely need to adjust my expectations about teaching.

My unconventional methods got me in a bit of a spot last week, but frankly I don't really care. But it got me thinking about how I envision teaching, and how teaching is actually conducted. *I'm a little disappointed honestly; frustrated I guess would be a better word* because the character aspect of education, I felt, was underplayed.

(Ishmael, instant messaging, 2009, July 27; emphasis added)

Things came to a fore when he realised he was not able to teach the values he had wanted to when he took up the call to teach. It created a huge cognitive dissonance for him. When he was called in for a chat by his RO, he realised that his decision to take a different approach towards teaching and his approach towards making a difference in school by suggesting certain changes to existing practices was not taken well by the school management:

Had a frank talk about expectations on me and what I need to do.

She told me that *not everyone is open to new ideas or criticism.*

Now I just want to teach, fulfil my bond obligations, and take it from there.

(Ishmael, instant messaging, 2009, August 31; emphasis added)

His resistance in his questioning of the school's policies was not positively viewed and thus was reprimanded. His cognitive dissonance was not reduced and he could not accept the ascribed I-identity.

The four BTs were also assigned a D-identity by the school through the discourse and dialogues held within the school environments. The ascribed D-identity stresses certain features that the BTs were invited to internalize. The ascribed D-identity is similar to the I-identity. All the four BTs were 'invited' to become socialized as reformed post professionals, so as to transform this ascription into an achieved D-identity (Gee, 2001). This was the case for Hope but not for the other three BTs. Both Nathaniel and Ishmael strove to resist this ascribed D-identity through their talk and interaction with their colleagues and school management during meetings. They sought to create a space for an alternative D-identity; that of being advocates of pupil-centred constructivist teaching and learning. However, this space which they tried to carve out in their discourse was rejected, repudiated and promptly taken back. Their D-identities were in direct opposition to the ascribed one. Harriet's ascribed D-identity was rendered an achieved one in the beginning, as she chose to actively inhabit the role – she genuinely believed in producing the performativity artefacts that was required in the projects she was assigned to do. However, over time, her cognitive dissonance, due to conflicting beliefs with regard to the school's emphasis on producing academic results through the use of the worksheet pedagogy, led to a resistance of the ascribed D-identity.

The four BTs' affinity with certain groups provided them a certain perspective, and this perspective had some influence on their teacher identity within the school. Hope's

strong affinity with her husband's teacher friends created an A-identity that was closely aligned to both her I- and D- identities. Her identity seems to be closely related to that of her husband's and his friends whom she regularly hangs out with. She seems to have a strong A-identity, where her affinity group comprises of her husband and his group of teacher friends who have also taught for around 15-odd years. Gee (2001) defined an affinity group as one that must share '*allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices* that provide each of the group's members the requisite experiences' (p.105; emphasis Gee's). Hope shares an allegiance to the group and has free access to their experiences of teaching. An affinity group is '*something that one must actively choose to join*' (p.106; emphasis added). This in turn implies that she actively chose / constructed this A-identity. In fact, perhaps it is because of her strong A-identity, she is very quick to adopt the worksheet curriculum:

Yah, definitely. *I think I short change the children. Less time to get things ready. I don't prepare as much as I did last year. I just get them to refer to textbook which is very boring. Grammar is very important. So is basic vocab. You just want to do it. And then this class is very good with drill and practice because they are always very good with drilling. I just want to concentrate and do it well. I don't like to do so many things and not do anything well you know. And everything gets messed up.*
(Hope, interview, 2009, August 22)

As her then boyfriend and his group of friends have taught for a long time using the traditional 'drill-and-practice' way, they do not see the necessity of changing this effective mode of instruction:

Anyway, my boyfriend said most teachers are teacher-centred. So what's the big deal?
(Hope, email, 2008, March 27; emphasis added)

Thus, adopting the worksheet curriculum is not a grave concern for Hope. High engagement with fun learning is clearly not a central belief, but merely a peripheral

cluster of belief that was important during the context of teacher training, but less so in the context of a performativity-driven school environment.

Hope also has a clear sense of her time, or rather what portion of her time she is willing to give to her work; her A-identity is not affiliated to any group in her school, and so her beliefs are not as easily influenced by the school as the others:

Those sitting around me are all relief teachers and CTs, contract teachers. Hmm. So um and all very young. So we get along quite well lah. But I really don't have much time to talk and mix because mostly it's just like rushing in school, mark mark mark. Then time for lunch, time for lessons. So you don't really get to sit around and talk. Yah. Anyway I don't really sit around and chit chat you see all the time, so I don't really mind.
(Hope, interview, 2009, April 25)

I still make time to go out every weekend of cos. I'm not going to suffer just because school is overloading me. heh. ⁴⁴Marina Square / City Hall is a weekly affair. Won't miss it.
(Hope, email, 2009, July 7)

It also helped Hope that she came into teaching with a high level of pragmatism rather than idealism:

What led me to this career path? I'm not sure either... there wasn't a strong factor. *Mainly the working hours, the routine and stability. I didn't envisage anything, thankfully. I came with the understanding that things aren't always rosy.*
(Hope, email, 2009, December 31)

Her teacher identity is both ascribed and achieved since her I-, D- and A-identities were all aligned.

⁴⁴ Marina Square / City Hall: These are two central and popular shopping areas in downtown Singapore.

Harriet's affinity with Mdm. Oh formed the basis of her A-identity in school. It was aligned to the I- and D-identities in the beginning. The lure of being a successful post professional was very strong. The incident when she was accused of merely putting on a show in her use of ICT had quite an impact on Harriet. Initially, her A-identity was aligned with the I-identity and the school's intent push towards using 'innovative' ways of teaching; it was a marketing tool for the school (Ball, 2004a). Her A-identity as a classroom teacher was actually different from that of the other teachers. The other teachers utilised the worksheet curriculum, but Harriet did not. She continued to use manipulatives and incorporated outdoor learning for many of her lessons. This was due to the impact that Mdm. Oh, her CT, had on her. Harriet felt that Mdm. Oh was a good role model for her. However, due to the negative remarks made by the Vice-principal and which Mdm. Oh did not deny, Harriet felt betrayed:

It is an affront to my integrity; it's an attack on my integrity, my character. (Harriet, interview, 2009, November 7)

In response to this affront to her character, Harriet decided to adopt the worksheet curriculum, and in so doing, she cut off her A-identity with Mdm. Oh:

I can't help but feel that way. *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. (Harriet, phone text message, 2009, November 1; emphasis added)

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)

But when she needed to utilise a worksheet pedagogy in order to obtain a positive appraisal, it triggered cognitive dissonance and led to a splintering of her D- and A-identities from her ascribed I-identity.

Initially Ishmael developed a strong affinity for Tembusu Primary because he quite liked the school when he was posted there. He had a supportive CT and felt that the school had a good 'hardwork ethic'; he chose to be affiliated with the colleagues and friends in that school. Ishmael had an especially strong A-identity with the group of BTs in his school. But as the school utilises a worksheet curriculum, this A-identity thus created a cognitive dissonance for him:

I'm teaching through the worksheets and that's very bad. I find myself teaching exam techniques, like, 'Look at this question', 'Where's the key word?' 'underline, highlight', 'draw the arrow to show the link', 'what does it tell you about this space?' *So I'm very sorry* the children are not getting the best from me.

(Ishmael, interview, 2008, August 30; emphasis added)

Ishmael knew of the existence of this situation right from the beginning:

New ones, I guess, because they are relatively newer, they have not been assimilated into the matrix yet. Because the problem is once you're within a given system, you get socialized, you think in a certain way, do certain practices. That's the problem with the more senior teachers, because this is the way they've always taught; this is the way they have been taught, so they don't see a problem in the past twenty years.

(Ishmael, interview, 2008, March 1)

It seems that the A-identity, which he chose, and the D- and I-identities, which were ascribed, did not fit with his ideas of and beliefs for teaching, and this created such a dissonance for him that he was not sure if he would continue teaching after his bond ended:

I think for many new teachers or young graduates when you enter service, there will always be illusions about the service. The experience will teach you otherwise, like you have to adjust your expectations of yourself and your

students, adjust to the perspective to the students. They do not have the knowledge that you have and you got to make compromises here and there sometimes in terms of colleagues, quality of work and so on. It's always a juggling act; you can only handle one thing at a time. So if you only handle one thing at a time, what are the others that have got to give? You learn to prioritize, learn to adjust, learn to delegate. There are many unspoken rules about teaching in Singapore.

(Ishmael, interview, 2009, December 16)

However, over time, due to his resistance of the school's worksheet practices and the ascribed I- and D-identities, this A-identity faded into the background. It was no longer a big feature in his identity as a teacher.

Nathaniel's A-identity was initially with his church group. He saw teaching as a calling, but due to the amount of time and energy taken up by adhering to the school's policies, he gave up his involvement in the church ministry. It also did not help that the efforts he put into his work was not recognised by his management:

Sometimes no matter how much hard work you put in, sometimes it may not be recognised. I guess at the end of the day I just remind myself the reason why I step into teaching. Yah and then all these things will not be, will be less important. Quite discouraging but ... but I think it's also learning how to let go. Not to be affected by things around you.

(Nathaniel, interview, 2009, October 10)

Nathaniel tried to not let it affect him, but it did. Over time, he grew to have affinity with a few friends in school, and due to this group of friends being compliant of the school's policies, his A-identity eventually became aligned to the ascribed I- and D-identities at the end of the 18 months.

Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop (2004) argue that 'professional identity is not something teachers have, but something they use in order to make sense of themselves as teachers' (p.123). Similarly, Sachs (2005) suggests that '...teacher identity is not

something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather, it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience' (p.15). As shown by the four participants' experiences, each of them chose an identity to make sense of their place in the schools they are in. Yet, except for Hope, none of them fully accepted the identity ascribed to them through the organisation; in fact, dissonance was aroused within the initial 18 months. Developing 'a socially recognised identity as a proper teacher' establishes 'a highly valued working condition for any beginning teacher' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p.111). Thus, it is no wonder that all four wanted to create a space for themselves to function as such a teacher, but that space is circumscribed by the school's culture. The space that is allowed 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 their ability and value to the school. As such, their actions which 'were perceived, interpreted and judged by others' to determine 'the image others built from them' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p.111) has to be fully considered before being carried out. And this consideration of the teaching context is what I will turn to next – the micropolitics of teaching.

7.5 Theme 4: Micropolitics of teaching

There are certain ways of approaching work within a school context; there are established norms for dealing with feedback in relation to school systems and procedures, and there are certain accepted practices that are agreed upon by the school management and staff:

They (the principal, the teacher-colleagues) all have certain normative ideas about good teaching and how they are to be achieved in practice. The school

as an organisation lives by certain traditions and habits, or more or less subtle power relations between (groups of) school members, with different interests. (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p.107)

These are at most times left unspoken and assumed. Thus, for a beginning teacher, who is not aware of such a context, the school might seem like a minefield. This context is what is commonly referred to as the micropolitical reality of schools (Ball, 1987; Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Blase, 1997; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b; Kelchtermans, 2005). As defined by Blase (1991), *micropolitics* refers to:

the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political 'significance' in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. (p.11)

A number of studies over the years have shown how the micropolitics of teaching have bounded the beginning teachers' sense of idealism. Rust's (1994) study of two first year teachers revealed how the micropolitics of teaching within the school led them both to experience 'tremendous loneliness and insecurity', to distrust their colleagues, and to grow 'disillusioned with the system' and 'depressed and insecure about their own performance and abilities' (p.215). This study also demonstrated that even though the new teachers were prepared for the 'front stage behaviors' of teaching, which are the 'observable teaching behaviors' that all students would have

'witnessed and internalized ... over a lifetime of classroom observation' (p.216), they were not prepared for the 'backstage behaviors of teaching', the work that goes on behind the scenes: the planning and decision-making to prepare the pupils for the examinations, the preparation for the teachers' own appraisal, the networking and the consideration of political strategies needed to ensure one's survival in the school.

Kuzmic's (1994) study of a 'potentially empowered' beginning teacher revealed similar consequences. The expectations of the school led the beginning teacher to ensure that she had covered all the necessary books and workbooks so that 'her students would be prepared for the first grade' (p.22). The contextual demands made on her restrained the image she held of herself as a teacher who could 'individualize instruction to fit the needs and abilities of her students' (p.19) to such an extent that she reverted to more traditional ways of whole class instruction and management.

Kuzmic (1994) too concluded that beginning teachers only have 'partial understanding of how schools as bureaucratic organizations function', and hence are not able to 'deal with the problems and difficulties they encounter or develop the political tactics and teaching strategies needed to resist' (p.24).

More recently, Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002a) conducted a study on 14 beginning teachers in Flemish primary schools. They too found the influence of micropolitics to be preponderant in the induction of beginning teachers. However they searched for a deeper understanding of the micropolitical reality in the schools, and found that the issues of professional identity and social recognition had a large part to play in the beginning teachers' survival. The beginning teachers searched for affirmation of their work, and hence the acceptance and acknowledgement of their ability as teachers by

others were of great importance. The beginning teachers also had to cope with the feelings of vulnerability – they were ‘highly aware that their actions were perceived, interpreted and judged by others and that these perceptions and judgements determined the images others built from them’ (p.111); hence, they constantly sought a positive self-esteem to bolster their internal uncertainties, and to protect themselves from negative criticism due to their relative inexperience. Thus, to protect themselves and to survive, the beginning teachers need to have the necessary micropolitical literacy and utilise the micropolitical skills.

Other studies (Goodman, 1988; Schempp *et al*, 1993; Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Blasé, 1997; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) have similarly shown how micropolitics that exist within the schools can have a mammoth effect on the socialisation of the teachers. As Blasé (1991) puts across aptly:

Micropolitics is about power and how people use it to influence others and protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends. It is about what people in social settings think about and have strong feelings about, but what is so often unspoken and not so easily observed. (p.1)

I shall now look at whether each of the participants considered and how they responded to the micropolitical situation in each of their schools:

Nathaniel. Nathaniel seemingly had such micropolitical encounters right from the start, during his teaching practicum:

Things have been difficult and rough...during the two observations I had, the classes were quite uncooperative and the worse thing, for the 2nd one, the class couldn't really understand what I was teaching even though I explained the mathematical concepts clearly, but thank God, my supervisor agreed with me that it was difficult and his feedback about me in my assessment form is generally okay.

However, my main CT and another teacher (I am teaching her class Maths) have been unreasonable and asserting their authority unnecessarily, it's so unprofessional among other things...it has been a hard time man and I really didn't enjoy my practicum at all. Sorry...I think I sound quite negative...
(Nathaniel, email, 2008, April 26)

The CTs were not supportive nor were they helpful in guiding him in his planning and teaching. They merely wanted him to rush through the curriculum, so that they can start their classes' examination revision:

Time was just very tight. Yah, and my English CT is like – you know I was already very fast. Do you know I was one of the fastest? And she thinks that I am behind time. Don't spend any more time. I feel that she is subtly hinting to me to hurry up. Yah when actually I was quite fast. I think she wanted me to finish everything.

(Nathaniel, interview, 2008, June 7)

In addition to that encounter, he had encounters with a senior colleague whom he was supposed to work closely with:

Maybe also having problems working with another teacher who is in the same department. My colleague who left, she is like a buffer between two of us. Then I just find it very hard to work with him. So now that she is gone, it's just both of us in the committee. Yah, so I'm not really looking forward to it. Then there's so much more work to do, be done in the committee. Yah so everything is like – like I feel like I could hardly manage. And I don't feel very motivated to do it.

Because I am from the aesthetics, so the previous coordinator actually suggested that I should be the next art coordinator. Yah I'm okay with everything whether I'm coordinator or not. Anyway I still have to do all these stuff because I'm the only other teacher who is art trained. Like sort of art training at TTI. And I was passionate about art. So with my colleague gone, it's just a mother tongue teacher left. Yah and – but the thing is he doesn't teach art at all. He just teaches Chinese. But of course he does help out with a bit. But there are many things that he just shirks away from. Because he say, like, his English is not as good as mine. So in the end no one is doing all the art programme worksheets. And stuff like that, among a lot of other things. So it's been quite difficult actually; maybe that's why a lot of frustration.

(Nathaniel, interview, 2009, February 7)

The colleague seemed to use the excuse that he was not good in English and hence not able to contribute much to the creation of the Arts programme worksheets. Thus, he left Nathaniel to create all the worksheets for the entire school, and coordinate all the Arts-based programmes on his own. And Nathaniel was barely in his seventh month of being a teacher.

Nathaniel seemingly adopted a position of critical compliance (Goodman, 1988) with regard to many of the school's programmes, policies and pedagogical approaches. Critical compliance allows beginning teachers to appear as if they 'accepted the status quo by teaching their lessons in the traditional manner' (p.32). Yet, as they are doing so, they are also critical of the mode of instruction or status quo in the school. As Nathaniel was an ex-student of mine, I have had the experience of him asking for reasons behind certain explanations which he could not quite understand or agree with. But through all his questionings, he was always very polite and respectful. However, this questioning stance did not seem to be accepted by the school:

I realise that I am outspoken. I think I'm very outspoken. I think it sort of gained the attention of our management. I feel I'm just a very outspoken person, like I speak my mind. So I realise that is not a very good character in school. Yah, because recently she (a colleague), told me, she tried to tell me tactfully, that I cut people off which is not really the case. I just like stating my own opinions. It's not that I'm not open to other people's opinions. But I just speak out when I like. But I told her that I'm going to learn and I'm going to. I just like asking for rationale behind it all.

Last year, I had an observation with my HOD. So at the end of it, my RO was saying that I should brush up on my spoken English. It was during an art lesson, not an English one. So I was asking her 'Can you please give me an example so that I can learn?' You know just by saying this simple statement, it made her unhappy.

And then my HOD says that I am questioning authority. I could tell that she was very unhappy after I asked. Maybe it was at the tone, but I really stated it in a very nice tone. Like you know those genuine questions. My RO also told me my HOD wasn't happy when I asked her these questions.

So maybe I should just keep quiet. Maybe I should keep quiet for the other issues as well. I was talking to my good friend who is in the same school. And then she was saying 'yah maybe you should try to be less outspoken.' (Nathaniel, interview, 2009, February 7)

Clearly, Nathaniel's way of asking for reasons and giving feedback was not well received. Perhaps his experience in the finance sector and his involvement in church groups reinforce his idea of being upfront and honest, and not keeping things hidden. However, this did not bear him well in the school setting. Nathaniel needed support from his colleagues, but the support he got was not what he really sought:

Then I just feel very not supported as well. Like I can tell my other colleagues and they will listen. But I guess at the end of the day when it comes to practical support, it's still lacking. Yah. I was so frustrated. I just need to get back on my feet. Such an irony right? It's just the start of the year. It's not even like at the middle of the year. (Nathaniel, interview, 2009, February 7)

Blase & Anderson (1995) pointed out that empathy 'linked teachers to other adults and created opportunities to express true feelings in a setting dominated by routine, rules and professional protocol' (p.72). As a beginning teacher who has been in the service for slightly more than seven months, and who has been handed over the entire school's Arts programmes portfolio, Nathaniel felt that he needed concrete help since the only member of the Arts committee was not doing his part. The management did not provide him with much help either. Nathaniel's relationship with the management seemed to be in conflict. Initially they wanted to groom him to be a leader in the school, but he was not keen. In fact, through all the interactions I have had with Nathaniel, it was quite clear he enjoyed being in the classroom and wanted to be just an ordinary teacher. But this wish seemed not to align with the school's plan for him. Nathaniel's critical compliance was not a strategy that worked well, since his criticisms were not accepted nor welcomed.

Ishmael. Ishmael was in a similar situation as Nathaniel. He too seemingly adopted a critical compliant stance. He complied with the worksheet curriculum in his school, but he was critical of it, and at times, openly. He was well aware of the political structure in schools right from the beginning; he wanted to make a change, to make a difference:

Anything you want to do, you need support. You can't do it alone. Problem is staffroom; you can't hide and word gets around. Teaching, there is a hierarchy; it's like a food chain, so if you are a contract teacher or a practicum teacher, you're like the algae, at the bottom. ... But at the same time teaching, just like in medicine and law, teaching has the moral dimension. For teachers who take on the moral dimension, it's hard. There are two ways – one, you try to fight the system, do what you can within the classroom, and you try to stave off any challenge and negativity from the outside. Second way, you say screw it! I can't change the system; I'm out of here. So it depends. And the fact that every year many teachers leave suggests that there are teachers who say I give up I can't change the system. ...
(Ishmael, interview, 2008, March 1)

In fact, perhaps due to the fact that Ishmael was an MOE teaching-scholar, he was very much welcomed in the school, and he was given chances that others did not get, and this created a situation where the principal had to address the issue in the open:

There was this one email before my ex P left. Because my ex P has this little red box thing and basically it's like any feedback you just drop it in and she'll address it while remaining anonymous. And one of the emails, one of the very last one she dealt with it before she left, she was saying, this letter was saying ok, among other things, why is it that beginning teachers are given good classes? Is it because the school is showing favouritism? What happens to the rest of the more experienced teachers? Then the P came back in response and said well yes and no. You want to encourage beginning teachers to want to remain in upper levels, because upper level teachers always complain that no one wants to take their jobs, nobody wants to be there. So if you give them a good start, if they like it, they might stay there.
(Ishmael, interview, 2009, January 10)

Ishmael also felt that he and his group of friends, all beginning teachers, were 'shaking things up', and it was for the better:

Me: Do the older teachers feel that you're ostracizing them?
Ishmael: I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised. Cos I think we're quite loud; we're like the 'young Turks', starting, want to start a new revolution. A lot of new stuff are coming from us, a lot of new programmes, and if I'm them, I'd be like, what the hell are these young Turks, what are they trying to do? I don't know but on the most part I think the young teachers are like a breath of fresh air. You need some new blood to shake up the system a bit. Of course there would be some who will be like 'Why you rock the boat?'
(Ishmael, interview, 2009, January 10)

When a critical incident happened, it caused Ishmael to reflect on his approach in teaching and how it has been driven by the performativity discourse dominant in the school; it seemed as if he had given up his ideals. He started being overtly critical and questioning the school's policies and programmes:

I've been told I'm too unconventional and too many questions for a BT. I think the middle management feels threatened by me, and the too-polite way they handle me. Think I ask too many questions about existing procedures I guess
(Ishmael, instant messaging, 2009, August 12)

(RO had a) frank talk about expectations on me and what I need to do. I haven't been a good subordinate to be honest; too many questions about school policies. Think my RO is trying to protect me a lot already, but told me that too much attention as a BT is not good. Plus she's finding it hard to defend me at ⁴⁵steering comm. level. She just told me not everyone is open to new ideas or criticism, and that I do not have all the information required to make fair judgment.
(Ishmael, instant messaging, 2009, August 31)

Like Nathaniel, Ishmael's critical compliance was not received well.

⁴⁵ Steering Committee (also known as Management / Executive Committee): the committee that manages the operational running of the school; it usually includes the Principal, Vice-principal, the middle management (i.e. Heads of department) and sometimes the lower-middle management (i.e. Level / Subject Heads).

Harriet. Harriet came to school with great enthusiasm and energy. She impressed the Principal and the Science HoD with her ideas and her skills at using ICT. Harriet also was the only other BT who had an 80% teaching workload, as recommended by the MOE. Thus, she had more time to plan her lesson and help out with many school projects, especially those of Mdm. Oh's. Harriet initially seemed to have adopted the tactic of *resistant alteration* (Goodman, 1988). This is a tactic whereby teachers 'not only looked for ways to break the instructional routine of drill work but also made decisions concerning content taught in their lessons' (p.33). Harriet utilised her industrial know how and interest to help with her lessons, but it did not seem to go down too well with the Head of EL, Mrs. Gan; Mrs. Gan only wanted results and she felt that the approach Harriet took was not conducive to producing the academic results she wanted. This created a sort of tense situation for Harriet:

Is it correct for a teacher to give away another teacher's mobile number without asking for permission? Damn angry! Mrs Gan just gave away my number to a parent. That's so wrong! Sigh.
Power corrupts. Don't want to imagine if she ever becomes a VP. Sigh.
(Harriet, phone text message, 2008, August 9)

Both Mrs. Gan and the ICT head did not like Harriet's preoccupation with using technology in her classroom. To such an extent, that they raised their concerns about Harriet during the school's management meetings, which Mdm. Oh revealed:

Mrs Gan (EL head) killed half my interest in EL within half a year, and I suspect she'll kill the other half in the next half. ... How can she blame others for failing when as a head she did not monitor and act to prevent it?'
Mdm. Oh told me that the Mrs Gan said I was a failure in teaching EL last year; how can she say such a thing? What did she do to help me with my practicum? She provided no help at all, and expect me to teach well? She was not a good role model!
(Harriet, phone text message, 2009, January 29)

Things got worse over 2009. Colleagues who were not comfortable with Harriet's enthusiasm or willingness to share started pointing out things that were not properly done by Harriet to Mrs. Gan, the ICT head, and Mdm. Oh. And this was in turn revealed to Harriet by Mdm. Oh, and this naturally affected Harriet:

After one full year in teaching, I think the part that sucks is dealing with paperwork and having to deal with teachers. Dealing with colleagues, I think the best thing to do is, you know, I think the best thing to do is just bury yourself in the work and talk less with people that you don't know. Even if people think you are anti-social, it's a much safer option. Like if you look at the Mother Tongue teachers, they are always busy marking. And they hardly get into any much politics. 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 (an ⁴⁶adjunct teacher), he just sits at the corner and does his marking.

As long as you treat everyone as just work colleagues and not friends, you wouldn't feel that bad, if things don't go your way. But it's kind of sad and boring if you treat everyone as colleagues. It's very cold and not personal. Ya, but I guess if you want to stay long in this service, you have to do that. (Harriet, interview, 2009, July 25)

I guess I was naïve to think that in the education space, everyone should be upright, righteous, doing the right thing for the students' education. However, it being a civil service, it is just a job and most teachers are just there to make a living and look out for yourself first than your students. *The politics are just as bad as the private sector* and rewards far worse than the private sector. There are enough incompetent people that are in position of powers and leadership and that freaks me out when I think of the future of Singapore. (Harriet, email, 2009, December 31; emphasis added)

It was during that year of 2009 when Harriet was assaulted with the micropolitics in school that she decided she was going to adopt the school's way of teaching:

Worksheet works. It produces results. All those pedagogies are good for fun n 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.

(Harriet, phone text message, 2009, May 27)

⁴⁶ The Adjunct Teachers Programme (AJTP) was introduced in October 2004 with the aim of attracting former trained teachers to rejoin the teaching profession. (Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/careers/teach/applying/adjunct/>)

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

Her *resistant alteration* became *critical compliance*; even though it seemed that Harriet's compliance was overt, but it did not 'reflect an "internal adjustment" of (her) beliefs to comply with the (school's) expectations' (Goodman, 1988, p.31). Harriet's compliance was also very critical. She let her feelings about the approaches adopted in school known, and at times very openly. Although Harriet's initial micropolitical tactic was resistant alteration, in the end it became the same as Nathaniel's and Ishmael's. Just like them, the tactic did not seem to help her, especially when the critical aspect was so open.

Hope. Hope displayed *overt compliance* (Goodman, 1988), right from the start, and all through the period of study. She seemed to have 'put (her) own beliefs "on hold" and simply tried to integrate (herself) into (her) classroom routines' (p.31). Perhaps her dominant A-identity as a result of her affinity with her then-boyfriend-now-husband's teacher friends helped her. She knew the realities of school life and knew what was required for her to survive in peace, so that she could have her personal time outside school. She thus adopted the strategy of silence (Schempp *et al*, 1993), or what Lacey (1977) termed as strategic compliance.

From the study of the four beginning teachers, it seemed to show that in order for the beginning teachers to survive, especially in their first 18 months, they needed to demonstrate that they acknowledged, understood and took on the cultural norms of the school. Importantly, they must not violate these norms or appear to be overly

critical of these norms. Thus, it would seem that the *dagger* (i.e. the cultural norm) must be seized and embraced; the *dagger* must be used. As Ball (1987) posits in this influential book on micropolitics:

I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organizations, to be arenas of struggle; to be riven with actual and potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse. I take it to be essential that if we are to understand the nature of schools as organizations, we must achieve some understanding of these conflicts. (p.19)

With this, in mind, I now turn to the concluding inquiry: What does this mean for us as teacher educators? What does this mean for schools?

Chapter 8: The Concluding Inquiry

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10, verses 38-42
The Bible (King James Version)

8.1 Prologue – The Story of Mary and Martha

In the biblical story of Mary and Martha, Martha was given to the norms of society – to ensure that the home is clean when a guest visits; that the guest is served with drinks and some food; that the guest is given the best that the home has to offer. All these will require encumbrances of one sort or another, to such an extent, in this story, that Martha could not stay by Jesus' side and listen to his teachings. Ideally, as is meant to be conveyed in this story, Martha should have put aside the cares and troubles of the world and attend to what is most important – the teachings of Jesus. However, the question to be posed is – is this possible?

Much like Mary and Martha, the beginning teachers sought first to attend to that which is of paramount importance to them – the engagement and learning of their pupils. However, in the various school settings, did they have that opportunity or luxury, to just attend to that which is most important? In the school where the performativity culture reigns supreme, or at least, exerts a huge influence, the beginning teachers' class results, achievements in school projects, and work

expectations all combine to wield a formidable force of socializing the beginning teachers' practices. Although they may want to be a Mary, the forces that be in the school dictate that they be otherwise – a Martha.

In this concluding chapter, I summarize and reflect on the major findings drawn from the previous three analysis chapters. Then I draw out and reflect on their implications at four levels – the teacher training programme, the teacher educator, the institute-school, and the ministry. Recommendations for future research as a result of these implications will also be made, before I reflect on the limitations and contributions of this research study. Finally, I wonder what lies ahead for the four beginning teachers.

8.2 Revelation of the Study

I came to this study in 2006 because the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, during his Teacher's Day Rally Speech (MOE, 2006) announced that the Ministry of Education would be actively recruiting to reach a target of 30, 000 teachers by 2010. In the midst of this study, when the Ministry was able to recruit that number, the then Minister for Education, Dr. Ng Eng Hen, announced that:

Going forward, we will grow the teaching force further to 33,000 trained education officers by 2015. Schools can look forward to having more teachers. For a start, a typical school at the Primary, Secondary and Junior College levels will receive at least 2 to 4 more teachers respectively by 2015. (MOE, 2010d)

As a beginning teacher, in the late 1990s, I was not fully prepared for my work as a school teacher. I felt I was inadequately prepared for the life as a teacher both inside the classroom and outside the classroom. I learnt to become a teacher over time

through the various experiences, positive and negative, encountered. As a Co-operating Teacher to student teachers during their teaching practicum, I often hear of complaints being made by the student teachers that they did not learn what was practical for the classroom during their training stint at the Teacher Training Institute. I also heard from the middle management that these new teachers needed to learn to be a 'real' teacher. Hence, I wonder what it means to be a 'real' teacher, and what training is required to prepare these neophytes to be 'real' teachers. It led me to inquire about these new teachers when I was seconded to the Teacher Training Institute – would they be able to become teachers as a result of the training received, or in spite of the training received? Would they hold onto their idealisms, and the progressive and constructive teaching approaches they have learnt at the Teacher Training Institute after they have completed their teacher training? Or, would they, their teacher identities, and their pedagogical approaches be socialised into the school system? And if so, how? Therein lie my primary and secondary research questions and interest: *Are beginning teachers' identities and their pedagogical approaches socialized by school systems? If so, in what ways?*

This is my interest because of my experiences as a teacher in schools that are, or in schools with principals who are, driven by performativity. Due to the high-stakes national examinations at the end of primary education, as well as the recognition given to schools that obtain awards at the annual Ministry of Education's Workplan Seminar, schools tend to place a high emphasis on results, be it academic or otherwise. This emphasis creates and perpetuates a high performativity culture, and with it, certain norms and practices. It is these very norms and practices that lead many teachers to discount what was learned at the Teacher Training Institute. It is this very

perception that creates a theory-practice divide between the schools and the Teacher Training Institute. This study is of value because knowing why and how beginning teachers' identities and pedagogical approaches are socialised in a performativity-driven school system can help to bridge this unnecessary divide.

This study's goal was to describe and reconstruct the thoughts and decisions of the four beginning teachers as they negotiated their journey of becoming a teacher.

Through the description, reconstruction and analysis of their thoughts and decisions in this journey, four themes were revealed: *Socialisation of pedagogic practice*, *Reconstruction towards performativity*, *Re-formation of identity*, and *Micropolitics of teaching*. Individual schools may differ in certain ways, but by and large, they can be very similar (Goodlad, 1984; Bullough, 1989). This is acutely so in a small island nation like Singapore, where the Ministry of Education builds all its schools, funds all its schools, hires and allocates all teachers to the schools, sets the national examinations, dictates the criteria with which each individual school, principal, middle management school leader, and teacher is to be assessed and appraised, and acts as the final authority for the awarding of school achievement awards. There is hence a tight control and management in such an educational system. This is very much like what Bullough (1989) posits:

It is this sameness that sets schools apart from other types of institutions,

The sameness of schools brings with it a set of problems with which all teachers must grapple and in some fashion resolve. (p.4)

The problems which 'all teachers must grapple and resolve' are revealed by the themes drawn from prior research and from the data. The four BTs faced acute pressure from the schools to enact a particular form of pedagogy. This *socialisation of*

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. This appraisal of the teachers is derived from the *performativity* discourse enacted through the MOE's EPMS and SEM appraisal tool 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 were not willing to conform to this ascribed role to be a post professional, by the very fact that the *micropolitical* authority of the middle management leaders was brought to bear on them, they had little choice but to conform to the schools' practices and accept the school's policies, albeit reluctantly.

The narrative thread that cuts across the four beginning teachers' narratives in this study is that of survival, much like earlier studies of teacher development (Ryan, 1986; Huberman, 1989; Moir, 1990; Moir & Stobbe, 1995; Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

However, there seems to be another one that cuts across the four. And this narrative thread seems to restrain and constrict what the beginning teachers wanted to try out in their pedagogical approaches; it seems to have erected a boundary around their pedagogical beliefs; it seems to act as a binding thread. It seems that the micropolitics in each of the four beginning teachers' schools have greatly impacted and influenced their pedagogical decisions and approaches. It was not just the pedagogical decisions

and approaches that were affected, their identity choices, and professional reconstruction were as well. It was done to survive; it was the micropolitics of survival.

A graphic overview of the relationship between the themes is provided in Figure 8.1.

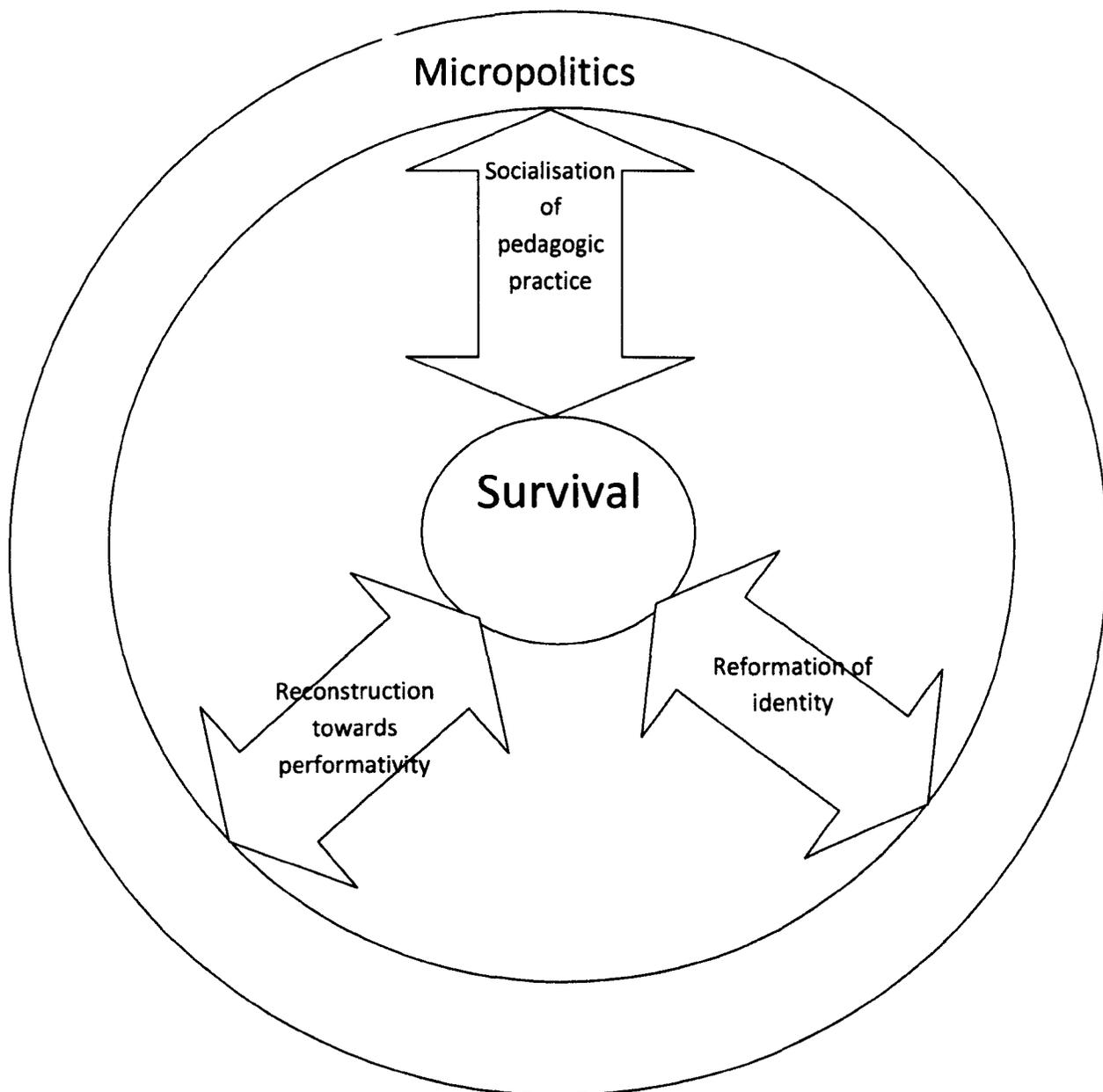


Figure 8.1: Overview of thematic analysis

The four themes, grounded in both the participants' data and prior literature, provide an insight of the impact the performativity-driven school system has on the pedagogical beliefs and practices of the participants; essentially, it serves to answer the research questions of why and how the participants and their identities were socialized by the schools, and what constrains or enables their approach to teaching. The hub of the wheel represents the theme of survival – a theme that is experienced by all beginning teachers (Ryan, 1986; Huberman, 1989; Moir, 1990; Moir & Stobbe, 1995; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). It also serves as an organizing thread. The three themes of *Reconstruction towards performativity*, *Reconstruction of identity*, and *Socialisation of pedagogic practice* are represented by the spokes of the wheel. They exist in tension, much like spokes are under tension holding the rim to the hub. There is constant tension as the beginning teachers seek to reform their identities as teachers, to reconstruct themselves and to enact pedagogical practices aligned to the school's norms and expectations. The theme of micropolitics is represented by that of the rim; it constrains and yet it also influences each decision and behaviour such that the beginning teacher can survive. It seems to function like a binding theme, a meta-theme.

Micropolitics of survival. It is the micropolitics of survival that drove Hope to make the decision to reform herself as a post professional, adopting the worksheet curriculum and pedagogy willingly and knowingly. Her familiarity with the expectations of school norms, through the alignment of her A- and D-identities with the ascribed I-identity, served her well (Gee, 2001). She knew what she must do to survive, and so she accepted it, did what she could, and made sure she has time for

herself and her own personal life outside of school. She kept her teacher identity separate from her personal N-identity.

It is the micropolitics of survival that created a tension in Ishmael's, Nathaniel's and Harriet's teacher identities. Their A- and D-identities during preservice conflicted with their ascribed I-identities during the first 18 months of in-service. Even though they had to survive, they could not accept their ascribed identities, and hence each made known their dissatisfaction with the way things were currently being done in school. They did not have the micropolitical literacy or skills that Hope had, and so in that span of 18 months, they were at the receiving end of disapproval from their school management. The situation, whereby they taught in a way that was inimical to their original teaching beliefs, and whereby they were neither affirmed nor accepted by the school management, created a dissonance that led them to feel vulnerable, and question their choice to be a teacher.

Could such a situation have been prevented? Could something have been done by the Teacher Training Institute? Could the beginning teachers have been prepared for such a situation? These are the questions I shall attempt to answer next.

8.3 Recommendations for Policy, Practice & Research

As a teacher-educator, it is startling to learn that the one who manages to survive and cope well in school is the one who readily accepts the socialisation of the school and willingly relinquishes the pedagogical approaches and ideas learnt during teacher training. If that were the case, then this current model of teacher training needs to be re-considered. It is no longer the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) that

teacher educators in Teacher Training Institute have to fear, but the *micropolitics of survival* that seeks to socialise, reform and reconstruct the beginning teacher into a post professional (Ball, 2004a). Borrowing the metaphor from Stephen Ball (2003), what can and should the Teacher Training Institute do to prevent the beginning teacher's soul from being possessed by the *micropolitics of survival*?

Recommendations for policy and practice. As a result of this study and my personal experiences in school as a teacher, Head of Department, and Teacher Educator, I propose four levels of recommendations: the teacher training programme level, the teacher-educator level, the (Teacher Training) Institute-school level, and the Ministry level.

Micropolitical literacy. 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’, ‘the networking that is necessary to develop a support system in the school and in the profession’, and ‘the political sensibilities that are essential for survival and change in schools’ (p.216). This is the job of the teacher, and that 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). The knowledge of micropolitics can help beginning teachers ameliorate the effects of the reality shock (Veenman, 1984; Weinstein, 1988); after all, since micropolitics is ‘a fundamental dimension of life in schools, one that is

central to work processes' (Blasé, 1997, p.962), knowing how it works will allow beginning teachers to 'understand and use power and authority in the interest of student learning' (p.964). They would thus be more prepared for the realities of the schools and the complexities associated with the roles of teachers (Cole & Knowles, 1993).

Thirty-five years ago, Kohl (1976) had already suggested that attention need be given to preparing preservice teachers for the 'politics of teaching' (pp.119-163). Studies over the years (Goodman, 1988; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Kuzmic, 1994; Rust, 1994; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996; Blasé, 1997; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2000; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a) have also suggested the importance of incorporating micropolitical literacy as part of preservice teacher training. Blasé (1997) suggests that a foundations course on micropolitical knowledge be introduced during the first year of teacher training, and subsequently incorporated into the teaching methods courses. Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002a) suggest that reflection assignments focusing on micropolitics could be incorporated during the teaching practice periods. Kuzmic (1994) similarly suggests that micropolitical literacy be incorporated within existing teaching methods courses and during the teaching practices, rather than creating a new course per se. By linking micropolitical realities to the actual pedagogical approaches, it provides a more explicit link for the preservice teachers and hence a better understanding of how the approaches can be adapted to suit the needs of the schools. Cole and Knowles (1993) point out that if the teacher training programmes merely focus on 'the technical aspects of teaching or maintain a narrow view of what teaching and being a teacher entails' (p.470), then there is a strong likelihood that such teachers will continue with the status quo as set by the schools. Thus, in order

that the beginning teacher might take up the mantle of ‘teaching against the grain’ (Cochran-Smith, 1991), having micropolitical knowledge and skills is the first step. Hence, since the performativity culture in the Singapore school system does not show any sign of leaving (E.T.J. Tan, 2005; Tan & Ng, 2007; Ng, 2008; C. Tan, 2008), instead of ignoring it, the Teacher Training Institute should engage with it during teaching methods courses, and teach preservice teachers how to adapt constructive pedagogical approaches so as to incorporate it within the dominant worksheet curriculum. 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 Zeichner (2005) points out:

the task of teacher education must also include the development of the novice teacher’s ability to exercise his or her own judgement about when to use particular practices and how to adapt them to the specific circumstances in which they are teaching. ...Methods instructors at the university should discuss how and when teachers would choose to do certain things and how they can adapt them to particular circumstances. ...These courses need to address how teachers can implement these practices and exercise their judgement in contexts where there are often pressures to suppress teachers’ decision-making prerogatives and to dictate instruction. (p.118)

But to be able to highlight this micropolitical situation and guide the preservice teachers to adapt the various pedagogical approaches assumes that the teacher educators have the relevant experience in similar circumstances in the primary classroom and school. This is not the case at Teacher Training Institute.

Authority of experience. An area of concern I do feel is the fact that none of the primary English Language (EL) teacher educators were primary trained, none had actually taught in a primary school, and none had 'lived' in a primary school setting where the performativity culture reign supreme. In the period of 2007-2008, when the four participants were in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education preservice training, none of the six tutors were primary trained, or had actual primary school teaching experience. This leads me to ask: how can the tutors then understand the realities of the primary classroom, and the complexities of the micropolitical situation in the primary school? What was taught is literally from the course book. I often wonder if this could be the primary reason why there is a theory-practice divide in Singapore's school system. Teachers in schools feel that what is taught in Teacher Training Institute is not practical. This perception has existed since I was a preservice teacher. The query is if the teacher educators of primary EL do not know what it is like to teach children of ages seven (Primary One) to 12 (Primary Six) in the primary school, do not know the pressures and the micropolitics in a primary school setting, how can they teach the preservice teachers the micropolitical literacy to survive? How do they know what is practical and feasible? How do they know what can be adapted and how it is to be adapted? How would they know the considerations that primary school principals and heads of departments have, and thus their expectations of primary school teachers?

Of the six tutors, three were former secondary school teachers, one was a former⁴⁷ Junior College teacher, and two had only tertiary-level local teaching experiences. How can the experience of teaching teenagers be relevant for those who need to teach young children from the ages of seven to 12? How do they know the concerns of primary teachers who are⁴⁸ generalists in Singapore and who have to look after many aspects of the pupils' lives while they are in school, when their experience was teaching only one or two subjects at a setting that focuses on specialization of teaching subjects? If the Teacher Training Institute wants to help its preservice teachers learn and live in the micropolitical reality of schools, then its teacher educators would need to have the relevant experience. Would a brain surgeon be the tasked to teach / guide / mentor interns in the field of heart surgery or orthopaedic surgery? Would a criminal lawyer be tasked to teach / guide / mentor an apprentice learning to become a corporate lawyer?

Indubitably, the heart surgeon and the criminal lawyer can teach the principles of surgery or the general precepts of the law, but the area of specialty must be taught by the specialist. Likewise, teacher educators with secondary and post-secondary experience can teach general principles of lesson planning and general principles of some pedagogical approaches. However, to teach future primary school teachers, the teacher-educator would need to have been a primary school teacher – one who has taught in the primary school, one who has taught primary school children of various

⁴⁷ Junior College: A two-year programme for students preparing to sit for the General Cambridge Examinations 'Advanced' levels; students are typically 17 – 19 years old.

⁴⁸ Generalists: Typically, primary school teachers can be assigned to teach any combination of the following subjects: English Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Physical Education, Music, and Arts & Craft; there is no specializing of teaching subjects, unlike secondary and post-secondary levels.

age levels, one who has lived and survived in the complex primary school settings with its different demands; essentially, one who is a primary school specialist. The shocking fact is that all the six teacher educators who taught in the programme of postgraduate diploma in primary EL education were not primary trained, were never assessed as a primary school teacher, nor had they 'lived' in a primary school setting.

Is the Teacher Training Institute able to teach the preservice teachers to teach in a school system that focuses on performativity? Is it able to teach them to adapt their pedagogical approaches that best fit with the school's worksheet or narrowed curriculum? Is it able to highlight the need to navigate through the quagmire of micropolitics? Thus, if the teacher educators have not even 'lived' in such a school context, were not subjected to the demands of young children's behaviour, requests and needs, were not subjected to the pressures of teaching four to five subjects, the pressure of planning for these subjects, and the pressure of delivering results for all these subjects, then it is certainly not likely that they are able to teach the future primary school teachers to adapt their pedagogy specifically for the young children, nor adapt to the demands made on the primary school teachers by the micropolitical reality and performativity discourse that exist in the primary schools. Even though former Secondary school and Junior College teachers might have been subjected to micropolitics and performativity pressures in their own settings, their experiences are vastly different from that enacted on primary school teachers.

The actual teaching experience is relevant for one to be a teacher; if it were not, then the preservice teachers would not be required to have actual practical experience in schools. If it were not important, they would not be assessed during their teaching

practices. If the level taught were not important, then these preservice teachers would not be sent to teach at the relevant levels of their training. This relevant teaching experience is similarly considered to be important by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In 2008, in the list of standards used to establish high quality teacher preparation, it states that it is 'unacceptable' for teacher educators not to 'have had contemporary professional experiences in school settings', and that teacher educators should be 'licensed in the fields that they teach or supervise' and should have 'contemporary professional experiences in school settings at the levels that they supervise' (NCATE, n.d.). Clift (2009) in his commentary in the Association of Teacher Educators' landmark book on teacher-educator standards also considers this to be of great importance for teacher training institutions: 'One of the first things institutions would need to do is ensure a fit between what the teacher educator is to teach and the prior experience and education she or he has had' (p.311). Darling-Hammond (2006) also posits that the requirements for teacher educators to have relevant K-12 teaching backgrounds contribute to making the teacher education programmes, highlighted in her book, *Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from exemplary Programs*, exemplary (pp.297-301). Murray & Male (2005), in their study of 28 teacher educators working in Initial Teacher Education courses in England, similarly feel that the relevant school experiences are useful for teacher educators to draw on in their teaching. Teacher educators are not the only ones who feel that relevant teaching experiences are important. In a study by Kanan & Baker (2002), all the 40 Palestinian novice teachers believe that the teacher mentor must have experience in the classroom. Likewise, in a study by Smith (2005), the novice teachers perceive the 'recent experience in teaching in schools as the most important characteristics of a good teacher educator' (p.190). Even though there is no published

study done in Singapore with regard to what the preservice and in-service teachers feel about the teacher educators' experience, survey evidence from the preservice teachers (n=65), beginning teachers (n=16) and experienced teachers (n=17) that I taught revealed that Singaporean teachers also feel the same way pertaining to relevant teaching experience, i.e. it is important that the teacher-educator (for the primary EL pedagogy courses) has actual teaching experience in the primary school system. A group of 17 in-service teachers, with an average of 15 years of teaching experience, even claimed that the reason why there is a divide between Teacher Training Institute and the schools is because the teacher educators who trained them did not have actual primary school experiences. Not only do teacher educators' associations feel there is utility in having relevant school teaching experiences, teachers themselves, understandably, feel so too. If one does not have the relevant actual experience, then how can one teach the micropolitics of survival? Whilst incorporating micropolitical literacy into teacher training courses and requiring a minimum level of experiential qualification, albeit, are important, it is also essential that the Teacher Training Institute engage with the schools.

Collaborative resonance with schools. Instead of letting the beginning teachers go into the schools alone, where they would face the micropolitics of survival alone, why not collaborate with the schools? Bullough (1989) strongly recommends that teacher education extend into the first year of teaching. Cochran-Smith (1991b) concurs and suggests that the teacher education institutes in the universities 'co-labor' with schools to create 'learning opportunities that are both different from and richer than the opportunities either the school or the university can provide alone' (p.109). Essentially, what this means is to provide broad-based linkages between what the

preservice teachers would learn in the universities and what they would learn during their teaching practices in the schools. The goal is to 'prolong and intensify the influences of university *and* school experiences' (Cochran-Smith, 1991a, p.283; emphasis original). Cochran-Smith's (1991a; 1991b) model of collaborative resonance include the following:

placement of student teachers in sites where school-wide reform and restructuring efforts are underway, or where small groups of teachers are engaged in reform inside larger, more traditional schools; action research and teacher research projects conducted cooperatively by student teachers and experienced teachers; alternative curriculum and methods courses that emphasize critical perspectives but also feature assignments critiqued in both university and school settings; cases of practice and problem situations constructed by experienced teachers as grist for discussion among student teachers; collaborative inquiry at school-site meetings and university-site seminars; and joint program planning and assessment by teachers and teacher educators. (p.283)

Cochran-Smith (1991b) admits that the greatest difficulty for the success of this model is 'recruiting experienced teachers who have had opportunities to use generative and collaborative strategies to construct and reconstruct their knowledge about teaching and to participate in thoughtful reading and inquiry about their work' (p.110). However, that is not the only problem. Firstly, it is not easy to find schools that encourage school-wide reforms, and even if there were, it is not feasible for the Teacher Training Institute to send all its preservice teachers there for teaching practice. Secondly, finding small groups of teachers 'engaged in reform inside larger, more

traditional schools' is not an easy task. This is a problem that Cochran-Smith (1991a) herself alludes to:

It is not surprising that teachers who work against the grain are sometimes at odds with their administrators and evaluators. They are not always the teachers selected as teachers of the year, nor the ones pointed out by their colleagues as the cream of the faculty, and they are not necessarily the ones whom school principals judge to be best suited for work with student teachers. (p.284)

Without suitable 'reforming' school sites and experienced teachers, the model of collaborative resonance as suggested by Cochran-Smith (1991a; 1991b) will not work. In its place, I would suggest a slight adaption of the model. Firstly, the Teacher Training Institute should play a part in the beginning teachers' induction. For the first 18 months, during the critical phase (Sikes *et al*, 1985), the teacher-educator could meet with each sub-cohort of beginning teachers and their school mentors to reflect on their work, to 'consider teaching and learning', to 'discuss common readings', and to co-plan lessons and seminar topics in the school-site, weekly for the first six months, and fortnightly in the subsequent 12 months. Every month, the entire cohort of beginning teachers could meet 'for a university-site seminar on teaching, learning, and learning to teach' (Cochran-Smith, 1991a, p.286). The teacher educators could also meet with the school mentors alone at the end of each school semester to 'assess and revise the program' (Cochran-Smith, 1991a, p.287). This is largely similar to what is suggested by Cochran-Smith (1991a; 1991b), except that it involves beginning teachers instead of preservice teachers.

What is different is the involvement of all schools and any teacher nominated as a mentor. Instead of merely utilizing reform-oriented teachers, as Cochran-Smith's (1991a; 1991b) model suggest, any experienced teacher assigned as mentor could be led to reflect using Korthagen's (2004) 5-step conceptual change model:

- (a) First, the (teacher) is encouraged to reflect on a concrete experience during teaching practice.
- (b) Next, the (teacher) is helped to become aware of the often-implicit beliefs playing a role in his or her perception of—and behavior in—this and other, similar situations.
- (c) Then, through examining the disadvantages of that belief together with the (teacher), dissatisfaction with the existing belief is created.
- (d) The (teacher) is then offered an alternative—scientifically sound—theory.
- (e) Finally, alternative behavior based on that theory is practiced. (p.89)

Thus, together with the beginning teachers, the teacher mentors could be encouraged to reflect on, articulate and examine his or her teaching beliefs. This is an exercise that they would not have had experience before, and through it, they might be more open and willing to try out the alternative teaching approach. Johnson (1997) contends that 'theory can and will transform practice, but only if teachers have multiple and varied opportunities to make sense of theory within the familiar context of their own teaching and learning experiences' (p.779). Thus, through this model, not only would the beginning teachers have the opportunities to 'make sense' of the approaches they have learnt during teacher training, their mentors would too. This model will thus allow teachers to 'examine the theoretical knowledge they master in their education programs within the familiar context of their own learning and teaching experiences', situate that knowledge 'within the social context where it is to be used' and make explicit 'the interconnectedness of that knowledge' (Johnson, 1997, p.781). By providing such opportunities whereby both beginning and mentor teachers are able to use 'that knowledge in situated and interpretative ways' (p.781), beginning

teachers would be less pressured to reform and reconstruct themselves into post professionals; they would have the time to translate their pedagogical beliefs into practice with the guidance of the teacher educators and the support of the school mentors – they would have time to be a teaching *professional*.

Support from Ministry of Education. To support this involvement of the Teacher Training Institute in the induction of beginning teachers, instead of letting schools decide the number of teaching hours for beginning teachers, with 80% of the standard teaching load as a guide (MOE, 2007a), the Ministry of Education should stipulate that number, and free up Fridays for the induction. In addition, the Ministry could also stipulate that beginning teachers not be appraised for the first six months, and perhaps be appraised jointly with the mentor and teacher educator for the subsequent 12 months, rather than be appraised by the school's middle management. This creates space for the beginning teachers to learn the micropolitics of survival, to reflect on one's beliefs and practice, and to ascertain one's identity as a professional teacher.

Recommendations for future research. There is very little qualitative research available about Singaporean teachers, much less about beginning teachers. Their experiences will lend insights into the factors that influence how pedagogical practices are actualized in the primary classroom. As demonstrated in this study, the four participants' narrative experiences have provided me a glimpse of what beginning teachers encounter and how they cope or try to cope with the socializing forces at work in performativity-driven school cultures. More research is needed to study the effects of such forces on a larger sample of beginning teachers. This will

help the Teacher Training Institute have a better idea of what happens to the beginning teachers after their preservice training. In addition, an extension of this study, adopting the same methodology, to the other two teacher preparation programmes, the four-year Bachelor of Arts (Education) and the two-year Diploma in Education (Primary), would aid the Teacher Training Institute to ascertain if the length and depth of the training makes a difference to the beginning teachers' classroom practices.

It would also be interesting to expand this study to compare beginning teachers who had teacher educators with no primary teaching experience and beginning teacher who had teacher educators with primary teaching experience. Teacher educators with no primary teaching experience often have little understanding or awareness of the primary school culture or the skills to handle young children. This can be alarming since all their students will eventually teach in the primary classroom. With no real help in adapting their pedagogical approaches or advice in maneuvering around the micropolitics of survival, the preservice teachers are in possible danger of being worn down to become post-professionals.

As Britzman (2003) accurately points out:

Student teachers do not set out to collude with authoritarian pedagogy. ... Just the opposite: they usually begin with intentions of enhancing student potential and find this intention thwarted by socially patterned school routines. ... student teachers often describe their involuntary collusion with authoritative pedagogy as '*learning what not to do*'. (p.236; emphasis added)

If during their preservice training, the beginning teachers are not taught or guided in the micropolitical ways of survival by someone who has already lived and survived in such contexts, then when their pedagogical beliefs are challenged in school, the easiest way becomes the best way.

8.4 Methodological Reflections

In this section, I reflect on the choices I made in the study of the four BTs, the contributions made to teacher education in Singapore, and I end with my personal hopes for the future of teacher education.

Limitations. Despite the provocative findings of this study, I must consider the limitations that constrained this study. One of the main limitations would be the sample size of the study. With only four participants, the transferability of the findings might be restricted, especially since they were teaching in government schools. As there are newly qualified teachers posted to ⁴⁹government-aided schools, which might have slightly more flexibility in determining school policies, their experiences might be different from the participants in this study. However, as the principals and school leaders are directly accountable to the Ministry of Education, the difference may not be that great.

The study would have benefitted from actual classroom observations of the participants' pedagogical approaches. That would have contributed to the

⁴⁹ Government-aided schools are schools that receive a portion of their funding from church or Chinese clan associations, and the rest of the funding from the Ministry of Education.

triangulation of data as mentioned in Chapter 3. In addition, it would have contributed to the narratives, lending to them a richer and ‘thicker’ description.

Contributions of Study. This study aims to depict the reality of school life for BTs, and to offer a narratives of BTs for teacher education.

Reality in Singapore. In 2007, the then Minister of State for Education, Lui Tuck Yew, during the Committee of Supply debate in Parliament, revealed that the ‘overall attrition rate due to retirement and resignation has remained steady at a low rate of 2.4% over the years’ (MOE, 2007a). Yet, a more recent article in the national press (Lim, 2011), stated that ‘(a)bout 90 per cent (of the mid-career recruits) remain after three years, compared to 85 per cent for fresh graduate recruits’ (p.A8). Can the attrition rates have gone up from 2.4% to 10% for mid-career recruits and up to 15% for fresh graduate teachers in just four years? If that truly were the case, then there must be a situation in the school system that is causing an increasing attrition rate among its teacher force.

In a recent article on Singapore’s development of its teacher force, published in *Phi Delta Kappan* (Stewart, 2010), it was stated that ‘master teachers mentor every new teacher for several years’ (p.85), ‘(t)eachers who do outstanding work receive a bonus from a school-bonus pool’ (p.86), and that ‘(a)fter three years of teaching, teachers are assessed annually to see whether they have the potential for three different career paths – master teacher, specialist in curriculum or research, or school leader...’ (p.86). As revealed by this study, this is not a true portrayal of the reality that exists in the school system. The four BTs were not mentored by any master teacher for a period of

three years; in fact, they were not even mentored much in their first 18 months. The 'outstanding work' as alluded to in the article, in reality, means the actual production of sterling examination results, use and completion of a substantial number of worksheets during the file-checking exercises, planning and implementation of various school projects, and achieving external rewards for the school. And, teachers are not assessed only 'after three years' to ascertain their potential for the 'three career paths'; they are assessed right from the beginning as neophytes in the school organisation. This is the reality that the teacher force in Singapore faces; not the idealistic portrayal as depicted in the article.

Narratives of beginning teachers. In 2009, a newly mandated literacy programme that stipulates the use of specific teaching strategies and scripted lesson plans, compulsory training workshops, and mandatory classroom visits for each of the strategies was implemented nation-wide. My experience with the programme (Loh, 2010) left me fearful that the beginning teachers will be caught in a Catch 22 situation of only being a post professional. It is hoped that these narratives provided in this study and future studies can be used by teacher educators and their preservice teachers as a platform for discussion and reflection into what they will encounter in schools. Lee Shulman (1986) lists exemplars of practice or malpractice as one of the types of knowledge about teaching. These exemplars are

normally case descriptions of teachers, classrooms, or schools. They do not claim empirical generalisability. They are presented as instances or exemplars, documenting how education was accomplished (or stymied) by a particular group of teachers and students in a particular place. (p.27)

Although these exemplars may not be fully generalisable, they are important because they can build pedagogical and micropolitical knowledge; in sharing, teachers learn more about their trade, about each other, and about themselves. This importance is aptly illustrated by Bullough & Baughman (1997):

... the stories that connect and speak to common teacher concerns invite engagement and reflection and perhaps even laughter. Such stories invite border crossing, and carry normative value by illustrating patterns of thought and themes characteristic of the profession and of teachers working within particular contexts. *Teachers see themselves in such stories, and in the seeing, make comparisons that stretch understanding and nudge along development.* (p.27; emphasis added)

Using various ⁵⁰academic research databases, when the search terms of 'Singapore' and 'beginning teachers' were entered, only one entry was found; when the search terms of 'Singapore' and pre-service teachers' were entered, only 22 entries were found. Yet, in none of these entries were there any longitudinal study of beginning teachers in their first critical period. In training future teachers, knowing what BTs will face when they are in schools should be and must be an essential part of teacher education. This essentially is the main contribution of this study.

Final reflections. In the midst of writing this study, I wonder if this study will make a difference to the future beginning teachers. The primary research interest and questions are: *Are beginning teachers' identities and their pedagogical approaches*

⁵⁰ Academic research databases used: Academic Search Premier, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, ERIC, MAS Ultra - School Edition, MLA Directory of Periodicals, MLA International Bibliography, PsycARTICLES, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycINFO

socialized by school systems? If so, in what ways? This study has shown that regardless of the size or the location of the schools, the schools will enact certain normative forces on the BTs. Essentially, the habitus of the school and the pressures exerted through the performativity discourse via the school colleagues and school management answer the secondary question of why and how they were socialised. Yet, I also wonder: Do the future teachers want to ‘teach against the grain’ or would they prefer to be post-professionals? Being a post-professional is the easier and more successful option in this performativity climate. But when I look at my preservice teachers, with their hunger to learn and their enthusiasm to try out the various teaching strategies that I showed them during our methods courses, I sincerely want and hope that things will change for the better; that they be given a real choice to be a professional teacher, and not a Hobson’s choice of being a post professional.

8.5 Epilogue

November 2011. Harriet, Hope, Ishmael and Nathaniel have been in the system for more than three years. Their three-year bond with the Ministry of Education ended on the 16th of June 2011. They could leave the teaching service after that without any financial penalty; all four were still in the teaching service.

Harriet. Harriet, the one with the greatest dissonance, felt betrayed by her mentor, Mdm. Oh. Harriet had found out that Mdm. Oh had been using her all along, and when Mdm. Oh found her a liability, Mdm. Oh threatened Harriet with a ⁵¹D

⁵¹ A ‘D’ grade is considered a low grade in the education service in Singapore. Even though it is defined as ‘Meeting Expectations’, a teacher who received such a grade would be counseled by the

grade for the annual ranking. Harriet felt 'played out' and 'made use of' by her; she decided she had enough of the 'masquerades'. As a result, Harriet grew extremely unhappy, and did not hide her frustrations in school. Harriet started seeing a psychiatrist in the middle of the year (2011); she was diagnosed with depression. The psychiatrist told her to leave the school system as there seems to be a clash of her beliefs and ideals with that of the school's, and transferring to another school will not help her because the clash is endemic in the system. Harriet is currently on the search for a new job outside the Ministry of Education. She has since sent out many applications, and might decide to give private tuition if she is not able to find a suitable job.

Hope. Hope is doing well in the system. She was happy with her class in 2011 because, even though it was the lowest ability class for the Primary 5 level, she only had 30 pupils. She was elated with the marking load; her personal time was still very much of great importance to her. Her focus is on her life outside school, and thus the school system does not seem to bother her. Pragmatism rules the day in her case.

Ishmael. Ishmael was posted to the headquarters early in the year due to the fact that he is a ministry scholar. He is a lot happier there, even though he is not teaching. He feels he is learning a great deal with regard to policy matters. He is not sure if he is going back to the school after his three-year stint; for the moment, he is glad to take a break and experience something different.

school management, not be allowed to transfer to another school, and not be given a performance bonus or an annual increment.

Nathaniel. Nathaniel was extremely happy after his bond was up. He applied to further his studies, and has since left school. He knows he will go back to school after he is done with his studies, but for the moment, he is just over-joyed at the chance of studying again.

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Appendices



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Appendix A

FAO Jason Loh

Head of School
Professor Peter Hannon

Department of Educational Studies
The Education Building
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Sheffield S10 2JA

23 June 2007

Telephone: +44 (0114) 222 8083
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Dear Jason

Phd Research Proposal:

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project. The reviewers have now considered this and have agreed that you can go ahead with your research project, with the following conditions:

.....*None*

This is subject to receipt of a signed hard copy of Part B (Declaration) of the School of Education Research Ethics application form which is available at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/education/ethics>. This hard copy is then held on file. This ensures that we comply with university requirements about signatures.

Yours sincerely

Chris Gaffney

Research Degrees Administrative Secretary

Participant Information Sheet (Revised)

1. **Research Project Title:**

An investigation of primary school beginning teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in Singapore.

2. **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. **What is the purpose of the project?**

This project is part of a PhD (Education) project which aims to find out what teaching beliefs pre-service and beginning teachers have, if and how they enact such beliefs in their classroom practices. The outcome of the project is to gain a better understanding of Singaporean teachers and whether the school culture might influence their personal teaching beliefs.

The project will be conducted over a period of two years (Nov. 2007 – Dec. 2009).

4. **Why have I been chosen?**

You were chosen because you are/were enrolled in one of the primary teaching programmes (Dip. Ed., BA/BSc-Ed, PGDE).

5. **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Refusal to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits, and without giving a reason.

6. **What will happen to me if I take part?**

Your participation in this research is limited to interviews and email correspondence. There will be about 5 interviews (Mar. 2008, June 2008, Dec. 2008, June 2009 & Dec. 2009) You may be asked to participate in extra interviews during the 1-week term breaks. Participation in the interviews will take up about 30 – 60 minutes of your time.

7. **What do I have to do?**

You will be asked to tell your story of significant events that happened to you as a student in the past, as a student teacher during Teaching Practice, as a beginning teacher in your first 18 months of school. This will be done within the 30 – 60 minutes. No change to your lifestyle is required.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There is no reasonably foreseeable discomfort, disadvantage and risk. If there is any unexpected discomfort, disadvantage and risk to you, which arises during the research, it will be brought immediately to your attention.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will allow us to gain a deeper insight into how the school system affects or influences teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices.

10. What if something goes wrong?

If you feel there is a need to complain about the conduct of this research, you can contact the researcher's supervisors, Dr. Jackie Marsh (j.a.marsh@sheffield.ac.uk) and Dr. David Hyatt (d.hyatt@sheffield.ac.uk), or the University's Registrar and Secretary (The University of Sheffield, *Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK*).

If something serious happened during or following your participation in the project (e.g. a reportable serious adverse event), please inform the researcher immediately (edq06jkl@sheffield.ac.uk / jasonjoseph_loh@yahoo.com).

11. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is disseminated will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Furthermore, as the researcher of this project, I am responsible for ensuring that, when collecting or using data, I am not contravening the legal or regulatory requirements in any part of the UK.

12. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research will be used for the submission and publication of the researcher's PhD thesis. The results will likely be published in the latter part of 2010. If you do so wish to obtain a copy of the results, you can get it from the University of Sheffield, School of Education's library, or alternatively, you can contact me.

The data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research. You can be assured that you will not be identified in any report/publication.

13. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is entirely self-funded. There is no third party involvement in this research.

14. Who has reviewed the project?

This project has been put through Sheffield University Research Ethics Committee/Departmental Ethics Review Procedure.

15. Contact for further information

If you desire further information, you can contact me at jasonjoseph_loh@yahoo.com or +65-91919862. Alternatively, you can contact the project's two supervisors at j.a.marsh@sheffield.ac.uk or d.hyatt@sheffield.ac.uk.

Thank you for your kind participation.

You will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and, if appropriate, a copy of the signed Participant Consent Form to keep.

Question prompts used in the narrative interviews

- 1) Tell me the story of your experience during the time you were a student in primary, secondary, Junior College and University. Were there any significant incidents that made an impact on you, or influenced your decision to be a teacher?
Take as much time as you would like. I am not going to interrupt you, but I will be recording your story. When you are finished, I will then ask you for a few more details based upon what you have shared with me.
- 2) Tell me the story of your experience during the teaching experience. Were there any significant incidents that happened then? Any incidents that made an impact on you in any way?
Take as much time as you would like. I am not going to interrupt you, but I will be recording your story. When you are finished, I will then ask you for a few more details based upon what you have shared with me.
- 3) Tell me the story of your experience during your first six months (i.e. from July to December 2008) as a teacher. Were there any significant incidents that happened during these few months that affected you in any way?
Take as much time as you would like. I am not going to interrupt you, but I will be recording your story. When you are finished, I will then ask you for a few more details based upon what you have shared with me.
- 4) Tell me the story of your experience during your first semester this year (i.e. from January to May 2009) as a teacher. Were there any significant incidents that happened during these few months that affected you in any way?
Take as much time as you would like. I am not going to interrupt you, but I will be recording your story. When you are finished, I will then ask you for a few more details based upon what you have shared with me.
- 5) Tell me the story of your experience during your second semester this year (i.e. from July to November 2009) as a teacher. Were there any significant incidents that happened during these few months that affected you in any way? Were there any incidents that impacted you as a teacher over these past 18 months?
Take as much time as you would like. I am not going to interrupt you, but I will be recording your story. When you are finished, I will then ask you for a few more details based upon what you have shared with me.

Member checking with participants

Nathaniel	Nathaniel just added some details to the description of his school and the incidents. He left the narratives as they were.
Hope	Hope had no changes to make to the narratives. Her comments are: <i>I just finished reading and it's lovely!</i> <i>I really enjoyed it. Thank you for sending it to me.</i> <i>I don't have anything to add or change. Let me know if I can help out in any other way. Don't worry about it. I'll do it when I'm free.</i>
Ishmael	Ishmael added some details to the description of his school and the incidents. His comments are: <i>Narrative reads like I'm reliving my live. It's funny how I read my story as a teacher, knowing what I know now. Believe I'll always be involved with education.</i>
Harriet	Harriet had nothing to add or change to the narratives. She merely had the following comments: <i>Thank you for documenting my stay at MOE. I read it this morning on the way to work. It was a bittersweet history of the last few years. I think my time at MOE has reached its end.</i> <i>The narratives look good but sadly true.</i>

Peer Validation 1

Jane Tan is a teaching fellow (research) at the Research Centre for Teacher Training Institute, Singapore. She has 10 years of teaching experience in the Singapore primary schools.

In reading the stories of Nathaniel Ho, Ishmael Dee, Hope Tan and Harriet Lee and attempting to validate them, I ask myself these questions:

- Could this have happened to me, in my department or school?
- What rings true and seems believable?
- What does not seem be realistic?

As I look at the notes I jotted in the margins of this chapter, I realized that many parts of these beginning teachers' (BT) narratives were scenarios I found familiar. In some cases, I actually have similar experiences as the BT. Perhaps it is more systematic to list the accounts found in this chapter that I identified with.

1. BTs given more than 80% of the teaching load in their very first year. (Nathaniel and Hope)

While schools are encouraged to give the BTs a lighter workload so that they may 'ease' into the job, this does not always happen. In my first year as a BT, I was given the most difficult Primary 5 class and a full 40 periods. No BT will protest for fear of giving a bad impression. I did not either.

2. BTs are given the best class of a particular level. (Ishmael and Hope)

Again, this is quite common. This often happens when the school has earmarked a particular BT because they feel he/she has great potential. Most BTs will be happy to take on this task. Teaching an above average class often meant having opportunities to use a myriad of teaching strategies and resources which makes the teaching and interaction more meaningful.

The downside to this however, is that it sometimes attracts the green eyed monster among colleagues (as in Ishmael's case). A more experienced but perhaps less capable teacher in the eyes of the principal might protest when a BT is given a high performing class. The Chinese has a saying '树大招风' – A big tree gathers more wind. When the BT is assigned to teach a class that is much coveted for, there is bound to be envy and gossip. Such politicking cannot be avoided. It is up to the BT to use his/her interpersonal skills to navigate out of a bad situation and come out unscathed.

3. BTs have endless marking to do due the 'worksheet culture' so prevalent in the local teaching scene. (All 4 teachers)
I absolute believe the four BTs had to mark during their weekends and even during their school holidays. There is never-ending marking for teachers because of the endless worksheets churned out by the school. The belief that more work, and drill and practice will lead to better examination performance is so entrenched in the Singapore school system that some teachers will feel handicapped if worksheets are ever banished.
4. Schools caught up in 'award chasing'. (Nathaniel and Harriet)
This is again symptomatic of the schools in Singapore. Performance and results are of utmost importance to the school leaders because schools are ranked. In the process, teachers work on ad hoc projects, and sometimes are assigned such tasks at the very last minute. (In Harriet's case, he had to submit a proposal in two days.) It is also not surprising for a teacher to be on several ad hoc projects at one time. Schools also like to 'target' the BTs for these projects because the belief is that BTs are new in the service, energetic and enthusiastic. In reality, this is a form of masked bullying. BTs almost never say 'no' because they are afraid to turn down these jobs for fear of leaving a bad impression at the early stages of their careers.
5. Encouraging BTs to take up leadership position in the early stages. (Hope and Ishmael)
This is another common practice. The promise of a leadership position often means extra work/projects for the BT. The school's justification to this is that if the BT can handle all the tasks given to him/her, he is cut out to be a leader. This baptism of fire is hellish for the BT but dished out nonchalantly by the school leaders.
6. Difficulties encountered during teaching practicum
The problems that the BTs encountered during their teaching practicum are highly believable. Being made a CT is not every teacher's dream. Many simply cannot be bothered to use different strategies in the classroom when the trainee teacher goes in to observe them. There is too much on the plate for most Singaporean teachers. The key is self-preservation, and not coaching.
In addition, Nathaniel's experience of his CT chasing him to complete the syllabus so that the CT has 'extra' time to conduct revision for the examination is also very real. CTs often see trainee teachers as teaching assistants instead of inexperienced teachers who need coaching and mentoring. It's very unfortunate.

Having said all these, there are one or two situations which probably did happen to the BTs but might be rare occurrences.

7. Ishmael's perception that trainee teachers are "at the bottom of the food chain" is perhaps rather negative. Senior / experienced teachers are not always closed

mindful and insistent on trainee teachers adopting their practices. In my experience both as a trainee teacher and a BT, I have met many senior teachers who welcome the new teaching strategies I took to their schools and were willing to learn from me. I did not feel insignificant or powerless but was in a position to share and make a contribution.

8. Hope's 'detachment' and distancing herself from her colleagues so that she could finish her work in school and reserve her weekends for her husband is also rather unusual for a BT. This is more common for teachers who have taught in the service for many years and those who are mothers and wish to spend time with their own children. For most BTs, forming friendships with colleagues is part of survival in the workplace.

It is with some sadness as I read the end of the chapter and found out three out of the four teachers were not in a happier place at the end of 18 months of their teacher career. They had all started off with much aspirations, hopes and ideals. I wonder how many more BTs out there are feel this demoralized after 18 months of being a teacher. How many more are even contemplating leaving the service. Perhaps these four stories will let them know that they are not alone in their teaching journey.

Peer Validation 2

George Aw is currently the Vice-Dean and Head, English Programmes (School of Arts & Social Sciences) at the biggest private university in Singapore. He was formerly a teacher educator (2004-2011), at Teacher Training Institute.

Dear Fellow Researcher

I have been asked by Jason Loh to comment on the stories he has compiled of four beginning teachers (BTs), namely Nathaniel Ho, Ishmael Dee, Hope Tan, and Harriet Lee. (Names have been changed to protect the teachers' identities.)

As a former teacher trainer at the National Institute of Education, and as Head of English at a private university dedicated to working adults (where approximately 90% of students reading English are school teachers), I am well acquainted with the Singaporean teacher's lot, and can verify that the stories presented by Mr Loh are entirely typical and representative of the challenges faced by BTs in Singapore.

It is fair to say that three out of four BTs here report generally negative experiences; however, even Ishmael, the most positive of the four, appears overwhelmed by the emphasis on marking and particularly worksheets, which, apart from being symptomatic of Singapore's over-emphasis on tests and examinations, must surely be favoured by school management as a means of pleasing students' parents (who can be very demanding).

Other commonly reported problems include excessive amounts of administration work and a lack of support or unrealistic demands by more senior teachers. These are often cited by teachers as reasons for leaving the service. I know from experience that innovation is also stifled by schools – many BTs are simply too bogged down in administration and marking to think of better and more creative ways to teach. In any case, even if they come into the profession eager to try out new ideas learnt during their training, BTs often find they have to unlearn much of what they teach because their schools insist that their own practices be followed.

These stories give an accurate and detailed account of the struggles faced by BTs in Singapore, and there is no doubt that it represents a significant contribution to the field.

Audience validation 1

Faith Lim was a first year beginning teacher. She had only taught for six weeks before she was asked to comment on the narratives. She was amazed at how much similarity there was in her school experiences and the narratives. (Note: Faith was teaching in a different school from the four participants)

I find the stories of the 4 teachers are indeed very true and realistic. As a contract teacher, than a Trainee and than a short stint as a BT, I have met colleagues who share some (if not largely) similar encounters as what you have related.

This first thing that rings true for me and for a number of my fellow BTs is Ishmael's proclamations that when he steps into the class, he is rejuvenated. The pupils annoy us but we love them and spending time teaching them!

I could identify with Harriet. Most of us started TP with an aim to get a distinction. But often, our CTs are critical and spend little time going through our lessons plan. Their feedback usually centres on what we did wrong and when we asked for examples, we were told to go find/research other teaching strategies. Hence, my fellows Trainees and I had an online platform in which we shared lesson plans and ideas.

Being assigned a full teaching load (instead of 80%), with CCA and added responsibilities is very real. This is true for me and for my other NIE friends as BTs. We enter, taking over another teacher's workload, so the school's "excuse/reason" is that it is hard to reassign work/classes to the other teachers as they have their own teaching responsibilities, so we need to take on whatever is being done. So, we can get a full 38 periods and CCAs as well as remedial sessions. From stories that I have heard from colleagues, it is not rare for BTs to get assigned additional work (i.e coordinator roles like Art/NE), this is usually supported by the reason that we are young and fresh, hence full of ideas that can help to improve the current school system. Ironically, we are also often told to not comment/ask too many questions as we are still new and should just be seen and not heard. We should just do what we are asked to and more so we can get a better grade. What is happening to my friends are similar to what happened to Ishmael, Hope and Harriet.

For the 4 teachers, lack of time and piles of marking seem to be a huge issue. This is also true for many of us. We find it hard to complete syllabus especially when we want our lessons to be interesting at the same time (similar to Nathaniel). When it comes to marking, I think the pile is always never ending. During my stint as a BT, I was given piles of marking by my HOD to help mark, and I stayed later than some teachers just to help mark even though my role was just a Relief. On the other hand, my HOD was identical to Hope's in that she was very thankful for my help and often told me to "just leave it (the markings) for tomorrow."

Schools are very concerned over the SEM (School Excellence Model). This project involves the entire school and like Harriet's Science projects, the SEM can involve us undertaking even more 'convertibilities' (like writing proposals, creating new projects, etc)

As for politicking in school, I have not really encountered or heard anything. But this could be because I was just a Trainee and hence isolated from such "happenings" and my stint as a BT was merely 6 weeks. However, cases of Key Personnels (KPs) in school who tell us one thing and then go behind our back and say something else to other teachers (like Nathaniel) is quite common. I remember asking my CT if there was anything I could have done better after a normal lesson (not an observation) and he said no, but I heard from my friend's CT who said that he told her he did not like the strategies I used and felt it was not appropriate for his class. My friend also recounted a story where she did a National Day proposal for her RO who said it was okay but told the NE Coordinator that he felt it was no up to standard.

Audience validation 2

Anthony Goh was a beginning teacher in his 13th month (June 2010 – July 2011), when he was asked to comment on the narratives. He generally could identify and agree with what was found in the narratives. (Note: Anthony was teaching in a different school from the four participants)

Student-centered teaching can be very trying for teachers in school – highly idealistic – especially when we have a rigorous scheme of work to adhere to, piles of worksheets to complete and the lack of time (time lost due to school celebrations, teachers attending conferences, etc). Neighbourhood schools especially focus on teacher-centered approaches. Drill and practice is the be-all and end-all – because pupils are too weak (poor foundation) and it is very difficult to conduct activities when more than half the class cannot cope with the content / reading materials.

Teachers are preoccupied with admin duties and ad hoc projects which make good lesson planning difficult and very trying. In other words, teachers more than often resort to 'seemingly student-centered approaches' which in actual fact, touch and go.

The only time we (I included) do a proper student-centered lesson is during lesson observation.

The same happened to me as well during contract teaching, and even for now. We have to complete our syllabus in term 2 (by week 7 or 8) so that we have enough time for revision; and in term 4 (by week 5 or 6). While MOE and my school place emphasis on holistic development of the pupils, so long as there are SA exam and PSLE, drill and practice as well as rushing for syllabus (to give time for exam prep) will persist.

This echoes my contract teaching.

Worksheets, resources are treated as trade secrets. Sadly I have fallen into the trap of doing worksheets. In fact as a P5 Level Rep ... I created the EL worksheets for the whole level

(and it's a pretty thick stack, binded). We are still using the textbook – and I do concur with Ishmael that we should do away with the textbook, because I feel that the worksheets and packages we have are MORE than enough. And on top of that – we have a “green colour assessment book” (green is the colour of the cover) – very THICK students must buy, but we have no time to go through actually

Exactly. At Primary 5, we skipped many pages in the textbook; in fact I could cover only 4 units in a semester (out of 8), and that's because I have the worksheets to replace the textbook / workbook materials. Again, it's the worksheet curriculum that is more vital. yes... not all are willing to share. You lost your self worth once someone else get to know about your recipe/ingredients for success.

All schools would love to have awards

Yes, somehow I feel that the new teachers are given MORE work to do (in order to be “stretched”). Overall, I have the impression that BTs are simply “more convenient targets” that never (or seldom) say ‘NO’. Anyway, it seems like it's a cardinal sin to reject anyone in your first year of teaching. Be a YES-(wo)MAN or be condemned – forever.

Audience validation 3

Ally Tham is an ex-teacher. She taught for 8 years (June 2001 – October 2009), and was the school's Level Head and later Head of Department for Mathematics. (Note: Ally was teaching in a different school from the four participants)

The stories by the 4 teachers all sound too familiar to me. I could not help but feeling that it is happening to almost every normal teacher in the profession. It is of course by varying extent how each teacher is affected by this problem in the system. It is realistic and the stories invoked much feelings inside me. I am so glad that I had the freedom to choose to leave while I know of many others stay simply because they do not have other better choices. I am very sure it happens to my school, my friends' schools and in every school in Singapore.

It is in the system! First and foremost, it is well-known that there is huge emphasis on exam results in Singapore. School management and teachers need to prepare more worksheets for students to gear them for exam. The drill and practice more of teaching and learning is the tried-tested way. Due to time constraint, teachers just have to complete and ‘clear’ worksheets. Most teachers would start off with many ideas to teach their students and would want to make a difference in these young lives. Many would just burn out due to the amount of work pile onto them. It is a matter of them. There are some who want to stay long in the service would think of better ways so that they would not get burnt out. I know many have become indifferent as a result. They lost their passion, meaning of teaching, they choose to just ‘go through the motions’ to be ‘safe’ and for ‘survival’ and ‘sanity’. But these people may feel struggles within them as they are doing and living their job without real happiness. They feel they are doing a job contradicting to what they believe. As for those who have choices, they may just leave as a matter of time. It is so apt to say that one's identity is lost if you continue to do things that you disagree with for years. It is just all about a game of waiting. Whoever has the better options (due to better opportunities because of one's backgrounds, educational or cultural), would be able to

survive better in life. Many of those who call it quits are those who cannot continue to live in that manner, I meant can't deceive one's self. No matter how much feelings we have for children and how much passion we first have for teaching may not sustain us long if we are weighed down by these other aspects of teaching weeks after weeks, months and years after years.

However, I believe there are some who are able to retain their identity and still survive. This group of teachers who do what they believe in. They continue to do so even in the midst of being labeled as less popular or even 'odd' with the management. They have the 'moral courage' to stand firm and find their way through even they may be perceived by others as doing not too well.

As a trainee teacher, I had the time to plan my lessons well and carried out the strategies I learnt from Teacher Training Institute. I too had good mentors who displayed the qualities of a good teacher. I was inspired and wanted much to make a difference to the students in my care. I wanted to teach and explain concepts to the students so that they could understand. Like many trainees, I went all ways to make learning fun and interesting for my students. During my time, my CTs showed me effective lessons. Not boring like what Nathaniel experienced. However, I am aware that teachers are not able to conduct interesting lessons everyday.

As a beginning teacher, I was too posted back to the same contract school like the 4 teachers in the study. I was only assigned the coordinator role after the first 6-month. On doing the tasks or duties of being in-charge of a non-core subject, I was not able to spend that much time in my teaching. Lessons were still fairly interesting and marking was not as up-to-date as before but was still doing well. I feel that the 4 teachers were assigned many projects partly due to the fact that they did not mind. And they were seen as the ones with potential. Whenever we do not know the art of saying 'No', others will continue to load us with more and more. That's life, isn't it?

I was too like Ishmael, willing to help out whenever asked. Or even going to the extent of volunteering to do extra admin work. Whenever entrusted with extra projects, as a young and dynamic teacher, I saw it as opportunities to challenge myself and strived to perform over and above my own teaching duties. There were times I felt there was over emphasis on worksheets and lessons were spent going through worksheets. As time went by, I soon realized that much energy was on all other things except teaching itself. Whenever that happened, I would try to spend more time reflecting and preparing my lessons. And found myself sacrificing my personal leisure and family time (or zero leisure). It had to be that way if I wanted to complete my endless list of tasks. And time to cover the topics is not sufficient. This was made worse with the number of worksheets (to be checked), but 10 worksheets on 1 preposition in Nathaniel's school sounded shocking to me. But as a BT, I tried to teach my proper lessons during school hours, and I conducted extra classes to go through those worksheets. Like the teachers mentioned, I too wanted to last long in the service as I enjoyed teaching. If I were to continue working this way, I would soon be shriveled and dried up. In short, I was not happy.

As a mathematics head, I was well aware of what teachers are going through. I did make effort to try to ease teachers' department work by giving them suggestions and ideas. And offered my support in ways that I could. When checking their files, I also looked out for good work that the teachers were doing even if they fell short of the number of worksheets

stipulated. I went through much and I understood the constraints as teachers with 38 periods a week. But as a person responsible for the school's results, I had to make sure programmes were beneficial to the students, teachers were effective in the teaching in class, etc. It was not as if we had no class ourselves. It was during DDM (Diploma in Department Management) course that I had much time to reflect and read more extensively. I knew that I was going through the motions, without much sense of satisfaction. I didn't want to stay because I needed to, it should be because I wanted to. I ever thought if I could be someone more influential like being the principal, will I stand up and do what I believe in even if my school did not rank that high in terms of academic results? I thought it would be the same because I had to report to my boss as well. So I concluded that it is the system that I can't effect much change with me alone. Even if I could make some impact, I would have lost much of my personal and family time along the way. Perhaps 10 years? How many 10 years we have in life?

The stories shared are very realistic. It is so close to the hearts of many teachers. Unless there is a shift at the top, or the 'algae' will just continue to lose its moisture. In order for our economy to thrive and maintain a certain % of GDP, human capital is the only thing we have. People are our resources. It has evolved a society where results overriding the process. Other aspects of life such as the moral dimension and relationships or balance are all slowly losing their importance. Each man for himself. Not all understand that we should not neglect that the spiritual part of us, we would be futile in our efforts, like chasing the wind.

As I was reading the stories, I thought that Ishmael would leave teaching soon. As the real world was far from his expectations and beliefs. And being someone who was more mobile (prestigious scholarships), I thought there would be no lack of offer elsewhere. He realized that it was safer to be conventional. He would not be happy and contented just to be safe. It was a good thing that he was posted to HQ. At least there was a break from teaching and he could use the time to think through if teaching environment or realities were something that he could resign to. I doubt so. Unless he would settle to be conventional like the rest. Haha. Sad.

As for Nathaniel, the time spent on teaching left to be a mere 20%. And she was still teaching after the bond. She too gave up the church ministry which she was so involved in. And she also believed it was a calling for her to be a teacher. She would continue to want to teach and would try her best to finish art programmes that she had to do. She would find time to set extra worksheets for her students. That sounds like many of the teachers.

As for Hope Tan, it seemed to me that she had been exposed to the idea of teaching since her fiancé had been teaching for more than 10 years. She spent much time with him over weekends. She was the type that she would do 'as she was told'. Her focus was more on family or personal time as compared to work. This in that sense may be a good thing to her, though it may appear that she is less committed at her work place. And the influence our spouse is significant. It's like she might pick up more tips from her spouse.

As for Harriet who is more mature, she may be less idealistic and more adaptable. She was loaded with 5 main projects, 3 additional projects on top of her remedial classes. I really wonder if there is anyone who could do many things at a go with quality? Batman? Superman? Wonderwoman? Only God can! She then bury herself and talk less. That is all

so real. Will she be happy if the situation persists. Passion in teaching doesn't necessarily mean that one has to teach in school or state schools? We can be teachers in our own way. If the organization or the system we are in does not allow us to be who we are, then I believe we can be the maker of our own destiny.

Audience validation 4

Josh Koh is a principal of a full school (i.e. overseeing both the primary and secondary sections of the school). He has been in the teaching service since 1998, taking on several positions over the years – Head of Department (Primary School A), Curriculum Planning Officer (MOE HQ), Vice-Principal (Primary School B), and Principal (Full School C). (Note: The three schools that Josh was teaching / heading were different from the four participants)

I have read through the narratives. Very interesting. It's sad for the participants that each seem to have suffered bad experiences with MOE/the school. I think the experiences related are not far from some of those we have experienced ourselves though I think mine was not so bad. I have been blessed in that I had good bosses and had a relatively easy life as a teacher/HOD/MOE officer and VP.

That said the experiences shared don't seem far-fetched from what we have heard other teacher friends have gone through or what we have experienced ourselves - i.e. emphasis of competitions to establish (school) niche/branding, worksheets culture.

A chord that resonates in me is the desire to focus on being effective in the teaching/facilitating learning and building genuine relationships with the students.

Eventual conformity to the norms in a school environment (good or bad) is strong and I can fully understand what the participants have to manage e.g. pressure from peers, senior staff members and management. Sometimes the direction for a certain culture may have been started with the best of intent but as is with any matters dealing with the human heart/emotion, the original intent often gets skewed as each adds his or her own experiences and interpretation.

It was not just a pleasure reading the narratives, they knocked me somewhat about what I have been doing/saying in the current school. I should thank you for the opportunity to read the narratives. I wanna read them again in more detail so that I can pull some learning points and be more mindful how I am managing the processes in the school and relating with my colleagues. I am concerned that in my push to level things up, I may be moving towards a culture that was described in the narratives.