

“It Feels Like a Performance When I Teach Online”: Autoethnography of Tensions in Teacher Identity

**“Se siente como una actuación cuando enseño en línea”:
análisis autoetnográfico de las tensiones en la identidad docente**

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This autoethnographic study examined the tensions affecting the identity of a teacher in charge of an online English academic writing module during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflections written over one academic year were examined using performativity as an analytical lens. The analysis identified three types of tensions: performing for proximity, performing to meet the institution's and student's expectations, and continuously changing performances. These tensions highlight the teacher's performativity when using technology, which ultimately configured his teacher identity. From these tensions, the paradox of technology may be observed. Specifically, tools supposedly productive for an online class may not necessarily be well received by students and may burden the teacher.

Keywords: autoethnography, COVID-19, English language teaching, performativity, teacher identity, teaching online

Este estudio autoetnográfico examinó las tensiones que afectaron la identidad de un profesor de inglés mientras impartía un módulo virtual de escritura académica durante la pandemia de COVID-19. Con base en la performatividad, se examinaron las reflexiones escritas del participante recopiladas durante un año académico. Así, surgieron tres tipos de tensión: actuar por proximidad, actuar para cumplir con las expectativas de la institución y de los estudiantes y tener que cambiar continuamente de acto. Estas tensiones resaltaron la performatividad del participante en el uso de la tecnología —que finalmente configuró su identidad docente— y permitieron observar que las herramientas supuestamente productivas para una clase virtual pueden no ser necesariamente bien recibidas por los estudiantes y pueden terminar siendo una carga para el profesor.

Palabras clave: autoetnografía, COVID-19, enseñanza del inglés, enseñanza en línea, identidad docente, performatividad

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Introduction

Being able to teach online is something many teachers feel they should be familiar with but may have never gotten around to (Phillips et al., 2021). When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, there was an urgent need to equip teachers of all educational levels with skills, knowledge, and resources to cope with an online learning environment (Hofer et al., 2021). Yet, efforts may have been hampered due to the back-and-forth shifts between online and in-person classroom teaching, leading to teacher frustration and burnout (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). This may have contributed to a poor sense of ownership over online teaching, as teachers struggle and resort to just getting by (Kupers et al., 2022). Aside from the unpredictable circumstances caused by the pandemic, teachers are also confronted with other online teaching expectations, such as adapting specific tools or creating tasks or activities requiring high-level technical skills (Marshall et al., 2020). Dealing with the pandemic and working with institutionalized expectations are potent factors that can chip away at a teacher's sense of self, rendering their teaching practice a performance that instigates tensions in their professional identity (Nazari & Seyri, 2021).

In the examination of teacher identity, it is important to understand tension as it provides insights into how agency may be enacted, how teachers are given space to address or troubleshoot issues, or even how teachers may be able to recognize issues although they may not take further actions to solve them (Loo et al., 2017). Often tensions are glossed over as merely a logistical or situational challenge to be addressed and resolved as it occurs (Buchanan, 2015); however, a closer examination of tension can be enriching as it may instruct teachers on the pedagogical actions they take and the reasons behind them (Day et al., 2006). Interested in tensions affecting teacher identity, this study used autoethnography to examine online teaching through the lens of performativity. This study's findings will be valuable to teachers and teacher educators as they

grapple with rapid and sudden changes affecting their immediate context and the broader educational realm.

Literature Review

Teacher Identity and Teaching as Performativity

Rooted in the teaching profession is the teacher's professional identity. Teacher identity, or the teachers' sense of self, provides a foundation for how teachers may conduct themselves. Sachs (2005) mentions that teacher identity helps

teachers to construct their own ideas of “how to be,” “how to act” and “how to understand” their work and place in society. [Teacher identity] is not something fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (p. 15)

This is exemplified by Canagarajah (2012) in his discussion of how his professional identity was shaped by his personal background and the different but relevant professional communities he interacted with. In his discussion, Canagarajah illustrated how he—as a South Asian immigrant to the United States of America—had to reckon with different perspectives and prejudices he encountered in different aspects of his profession. All of these, while challenging, provided the foundation from which he could develop his identity.

Given the different factors involved, teacher identity is thus a multi-faceted concept. It is not only shaped by communities where one belongs or with whom a person interacts but also by various factors such as emotions and agency of the self, as well as the broader pedagogical discourses regarding the profession and the teaching field (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This further renders teacher identity as a concept that is multi-layered and dynamic; it is prone to slight shifts as teachers find themselves in novel or unfamiliar circumstances (Canagarajah, 2012; Sahling & De Carvalho, 2021; Varghese et al., 2005).

A teacher’s identity may be shaped by several performative expectations found in the teacher’s work or teaching setting. There are formal performative expectations, such as institutional requirements for a teacher’s pedagogical practices (Canagarajah, 2012), or even informal expectations, such as the self-reflection or self-assessment of how a teacher performs in a novel or unfamiliar setting (Sahling & De Carvalho, 2021). In such situations, teachers craft their practice or beliefs based on the expected performance and streamline them according to their classroom setting (Vick & Martinez, 2011). Furthermore, performativity places teachers in a situation where they are constantly compared with others, which may promote competition instead of collegiality (Holloway & Brass, 2018). This leads to the expectation that teachers should and will readily accept having to be competitive by showcasing various pedagogical performances.

Meanwhile, those resistant to competition are considered unsuitable for teaching (Lambert & Gray, 2021). The expectation for performativity is not only driven by stakeholders at the educational institution but also by those with an influence over policies and the general public (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Ball (2003) elaborates on three types of performative technologies. The first is market technology, which aims to create a competitive work environment for teachers and the institutions they represent. Next is management technology, which refers to a structure that oversees teachers and teaching behavior. There are certain ideals promoted by management technology, such as teachers’ willingness to sacrifice and being self-disciplined for the betterment of the institution. The third technology is the measurement of performance, where indices are presented to teachers as goals to achieve. These indices are reiterated pervasively to present them as “natural.”

Moreover, with the 21st-century focus on efficiency, pedagogical deliverables, and milestones have been integrated into educational systems to track and assess teachers’ performance (Perryman & Culvert,

2020). With these various technologies of performances to address, a teacher’s sense of identity is affected significantly. Hence, when the performances expected of teachers do not align with their vision of themselves, various tensions may arise (Ball, 2003; Gray & Seiki, 2020).

Online Teaching as Performance: Tensions on Identity

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching happened at all educational levels. Many teaching and learning software programs were introduced to support the online classroom, yet these tools are not without issues (see Davis et al., 2019). Studies have shown that teaching online is not determinant only of the individual teacher’s skills, knowledge, or readiness; it is shaped by many factors, including institutional support and students’ readiness (Hofer et al., 2021). This dynamic situation, where multiple variables are involved, is conceptualized by Koehler and Mishra (2009) through a framework called technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK). This framework recognizes the dynamic interaction between knowledge bases considered core for teachers of any educational level. The integration of these core bases is subject to various variables, such as the subject taught, the student’s familiarity with technology, or the intended academic outcomes or expected learning experiences. This interaction is essential, given that integrating technology requires not only knowledge of the technological tools used but also the pedagogical processes that can be used along with those tools.

Tensions will likely arise when teachers are expected to integrate technology into teaching, especially in urgent situations like the global pandemic. These expectations, in the form of powerful discourses, may conflict with a teacher’s classroom practices, especially when teachers try to reconcile and realign potentially divergent views about how learning should

be facilitated. It should be noted that new and seasoned teachers have individual professional beliefs regarding teaching and learning processes (Sullivan et al., 2021). Furthermore, tensions are not only due to divergent views but could also result from practical or logistical issues (Cohen, 2008; Diehl, 2019; Sydnor, 2017).

When teachers face challenges, including in online teaching environments, their responses may be shaped by how they perceive themselves. This perception—their identity—will contribute to their decision-making process (Enyedy et al., 2006). In addition, there will be times when teachers are faced with urgent needs to adapt and change materials or teaching practices, such as the current need to respond to the pandemic (Diehl, 2019). This may affect their sense of identity, which may include questioning their professional worth given the lack of knowledge and skill in information computer technology (Choi et al., 2021); feeling unprepared to manage an online learning environment (VanLone et al., 2022); or feeling lost because they lacked a point of reference due to limited or no experience in online teaching (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

Method

The study's objective was to examine teacher identity through the lens of performativity, with attention given to tensions experienced by a teacher. Data collection and analysis were conducted through autoethnography. This methodology is suitable as it is “a transnational, plurilingual, multicultural/intercultural discipline, conceptually located in a globalizing/globalized context of uneven, postcolonial power relations” (Stanley, 2019, p. 13). Furthermore, autoethnography is critical, providing a space where the voices of the marginalized may be heard (Sahling & De Carvalho, 2021). To this end, Stanley (2019) argues that autoethnography “exists to allow for non-hegemonic (usually subaltern) ways of knowing and meaning-making to exist within the academy” (p. 16; see also Canagarajah, 2012; Loo, 2017). The primary

goal of autoethnography is “the interrogation of the socio-cultural processes of identity construction that have led the researcher to [a particular] point in their identity formation” (Hickey & Austin, 2007, p. 371). In particular, autoethnography examines the situatedness of an individual within the sociopolitical and cultural context of a particular time. Its consciousness-raising intent also compels an individual to be reflective and, in so doing, confront critical issues that may not be typically raised in a conventional or conservative educational setting (Hickey & Austin, 2007). A focus on teachers' roles—what they do—fits in with the technologies for accountability, as there can be more explicit identification and evaluation of actions taken. On the other hand, identity recognizes a fluid sense of self, which leads to beliefs and practices that may conflict with each other and are susceptible to change due to various factors (Mockler, 2011).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data used in this autoethnographic study were collected from reflective journal entries written by the researcher/teacher—the author of this paper, Daron, who was teaching an English academic writing module to graduate students, both master's and doctoral. These reflections were written over two semesters of an academic year, from August 2020 to May 2021. By the end of this period, there were 38 reflective pieces, totaling 3,142 words. This reflective exercise was part of a larger project examining challenges faced by another colleague and me in becoming coordinators and teachers of new courses. However, this study focuses on my reflections on using technology to teach my classes online. Writing over two semesters allowed for various issues to be accounted for and for them to build upon each other (see Sahling & De Carvalho, 2021). The analysis was performed through iterative reading, drawing connections between reflective entries, and being critically self-reflexive. This step aimed to tease emergent patterns and keep the focus

on the ethnographer’s self. Emergent patterns were also discussed in light of relevant studies on teacher identity, such as those by Canagarajah (2012) and Sahling and De Carvalho (2021), and studies on tensions arising from teaching online, such as that by Choi et al. (2021), Littlejohn et al. (2021), and VanLone et al. (2022). This was done to map out the classroom experiences with the broader context and reflect the tenets of individual autoethnography, where glimpses of the larger social and cultural context of the autoethnographer are shown (O’Keeffe & Skerritt, 2021).

Study Context and Participant

The context of this study is an English academic writing module at a comprehensive state university in Singapore. At this university, students are expected to take several skills-based core modules, such as scholarly communication. The writing module where this study took place is one such module. The core modules are meant to equip students with academic literacy skills to help them in their other discipline-specific modules.

This module met twice weekly for a two-hour tutorial for 13 weeks each semester. As the coordinator, I taught three sections of the same module. These sections met consecutively in a day. By the end of the day, I would have taught six hours non-stop. International students attended this module, most of them from China.

Due to the pandemic, the module had to be shifted online around February 2020, and as of May 2022, it was still being taught online. At the time of this study, I had worked at this institution for slightly over six years (and recently relocated back to Malaysia). Throughout these years, I mainly taught academic writing to graduate students from different disciplinary backgrounds. I believe in providing practical and relevant writing instruction to my students; hence, there would be many opportunities for students to share their observations or even materials in my lessons. These are then discussed with the students,

which allowed me to understand students’ disciplinary conventions. This is done to encourage an extent of independence among students in developing their academic writing skills (Loo, 2020, 2021).

Given the abrupt shift to online teaching, official instructions were progressively provided as time passed. Most of these instructions, however, were concerned with the management of courses (e.g., attendance-taking, organizing and managing online assessments). The teaching staff was also encouraged to use tools paid for by the institution (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Office 365, and the in-house learning management system, which provided assessment tools and a video database for teaching staff to upload their content). Thus, instead of structures or descriptors about how online teaching should be achieved being provided from the top, or the administrative or management level, the study context saw performance being shaped by market technology (Ball, 2003), that is, teaching shaped by officially sanctioned tools provided by the institution.

In the larger social context of the participant, there was already established discourse regarding the role of technology in preparing university students to be future-ready graduates (Low et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2017) through national-level efforts such as SkillsFuture and Smart Nation Singapore (Gleason, 2018). These efforts emphasize the need for workers from all sectors to be capable of adapting to various innovations and technologies (Ng & Wong, 2020). The arrival of the pandemic, however, had “ostensibly further intensified the economisation of post-secondary education and training where providers have been forced, with the physical closure of their premises, to migrate to online platforms” (Watermeyer et al., 2021, p. 862). In the study context, there were events promoting technology-based pedagogy, such as blended learning, and the view that the pandemic has catalyzed to initiate an evolution of how teaching activities are conducted by the university (“Delivering quality education through blended learning and international exposure,” 2021).

Findings

From the examination of my reflections, three types of tensions became apparent. These three are by no means exhaustive, but they demonstrate pertinent tensions arising from a mismatch between perceptions of the self with the expectations and circumstances of the teaching and learning environment (Canagarajah, 2012; Choi et al., 2021; Littlejohn et al., 2021). In this section, these three tensions are discussed. Excerpts of relevant reflections are also provided. These excerpts are labeled according to the semester (Sem 1 or Sem 2), followed by the week (W1 to W13) and the tutorial number (T1 or T2).

Tensions From Performing for Proximity

This tension reflected the mismatch between performances that aimed to draw students closer to the lesson and the student's reactions or participation toward these efforts. This is seen in my reflections on several incidents, such as students' lack of participation despite the creation of open activities and the realization that proximity may be intrusive. The former was reflected upon in the third week of the first semester, where I noticed that students were not any more participative, despite the creation of an online space where they could freely contribute language use encountered beyond their class, and for which they were not evaluated (Loo, 2021).

Besides creating proximity through facilitating learning spaces, I also wanted to enhance proximity through feedback provision. Due to the perceived distance from my students, I decided to be more explicit with my feedback. However, this resulted in tension in my teaching practice, as it was my belief that feedback should not be extensive; instead, feedback should be brief but sufficient to prompt students to act. This is done so that students will work through errors or resolve issues in their writing independently.

It's very easy for online lessons to be one-sided, where it is just me doing a lot of the talking. I've noticed that this

has been the case for my first two groups that I meet on Tuesdays and Fridays. To get the students more engaged, I had created an Excel spreadsheet where they can upload vocabulary items that they encounter in their readings for other modules. So far, only one student has been consistently contributing, and this gives me about 5–10 minutes to discuss these words at the start of a lesson. In these discussions, I walk through the students what I think these words mean (like a think-aloud process). This hopefully helps them become more cognizant of their own meta-language, and then I compare what words mean with what the dictionary says. This has been quite fruitful in getting people to respond. (Sem 1, W3-T1)

Given that we are online, I do find myself to be more transparent with my feedback. Even though I am of the belief that a teacher should not be giving feedback for every single issue, given the unique circumstances we are in, I thought I should be more open with the comments/revisions I gave and did in students' work. (Sem 1, W8-T2)

Even though the shift online allowed students to attend classes remotely, this learning environment required them to reveal an aspect of their lives that would typically remain private. Just as I had hoped for some visibility in the students' experience with language use beyond their classroom, the issue of visibility of the students during the lesson also became a cause for tension. I initially expected students to be visible but became aware that this expectation may intrude into the student's personal space, given that many of them were joining the online lessons from their homes or private spaces. This concern resounded with a recent court case in the USA, where there was a successful suit against an institution for infringing upon a student's privacy in its online assessment methods (Bowman, 2022).

While we are in a classroom setting, everyone is still on their own—far away from each other. To allow others a glimpse into what is on their computer screen almost feels intrusive...there needs to be preparation as to what can be seen by others, and what should be hidden away. This

is quite the contrary to self-disclosure that is promoted. What this really looks like is the filtering of information, that is, manipulating personal data to circumvent any “problematic” attributes. (Sem 1, W6-T1)

This tension may have arisen given that I had hoped that an open space where students were not evaluated would encourage participation (for more information about this activity, see Loo, 2021). My intention to account for students’ language use beyond the class also demonstrated my perception of proximity, where students would think of English language learning opportunities even when not in my class.

Tensions in Expectations for Learning Environment

Tension also arose from the mismatch in expectations for the learning environment. As seen earlier, I assumed that students would be more willing to participate, especially in activities that were not evaluated. This expectation was also extended to some classroom practices I thought were familiar to the students. For instance, before the shift online, I was used to facilitating classroom discussions by building on students’ responses. This was not the case online, as I had to initiate discussions and appoint students to respond. This may be due to the lack of proximity and visibility between students. Since classes were held on Zoom, students were probably only watching the screen I shared, which may lead to minimal engagement with classmates. This made it difficult for me to ascertain students’ participation, let alone encourage them to take part in discussions or other activities.

Online teaching went relatively well. I think having the experience of teaching online the past semester and for a two-week period during the break prepared me (and helped me refine my online persona and classroom management skills). Being online, in some ways, also made me very cognizant of what I had to do during my class period. I am more wary of the learning objectives and tasks that I had to complete. Even though there

were opportunities for discussion, they were decided by me, and not necessarily when opportunities presented themselves. This is quite different from my experience in a physical classroom, where an activity or a lesson may be shaped by the immediate response from the students. This sense of control over what happens in my class is also made apparent through my students’ visibility (visually available, raising questions). In my first group, none of the students turned their webcams on for the most part; they were only visually available when I had asked them to do so for a group activity. For the second and third group, however, students were very willing to be present visually, without me having to implore them to show themselves. (Sem 1, W2-T1)

The change in the learning environment impacted me, given that I was used to evaluating how I did based on my students’ engagement. This did not necessarily align with my view of this course, which I thought should provide opportunities for student-led inquiry, and my view of the graduate students, whom I thought should take charge of an extent of the learning processes.

The shift online also instigated the use of new assessment tools. In this course, the assessment was traditionally completed in class, where students had to write an essay on a Word file within a time limit and email their completed essay to me. Each class had about 10 to 15 students, and I could monitor the whole class by walking around and checking each student’s computer screen. Nonetheless, assessment became more complicated with students being online and on their own. This was compounded by the institution’s trialing of an online examination tool that allowed examiners to monitor students as they took the test (through the students’ webcam and built-in microphone). Using this tool was not intuitive, and it was during this period that I realized that an online learning environment required more than the conventional classroom knowledge typically

associated with a traditional, in-person class (e.g., Littlejohn et al., 2021). Now, students had to be familiar with features that they did not have to think of before. For instance, during the assessment, I had to explain to students how to check the capacity of their computer or laptop's hard disk drive. This was one of the many necessary steps, given that the assessment tool will not work unless the student's computer or laptop has sufficient storage space. Moreover, when there was no sufficient space, I had to request students to make space. Similar to the concern about intruding into students' private space, I did not feel comfortable making such a request, especially since the software was being trialed for institutional procurement and would not be used in the course beyond this particular assessment.

Doing the assessment online with new features was revealing in that it showed what students had and did not have and how we problem-solved through these situations. It also showed the strength of students' communication. There were students who were more nervous as they could not really express the problems they encountered on their side, and there were those who had higher language proficiency and could explain to us coherently what their problems were—with help being rendered more quickly. (Sem 1, W6-T2)

Recognizing that utilizing novel tools may not necessarily support the students' learning experience, I reverted to providing students with the “usual” teaching and learning practices in the second semester. Nevertheless, even though this made the activities more familiar, I still wondered if students preferred how the class should be conducted.

I decided to work from home. I gave the students the usual experience: a couple of breakout room sessions to discuss, and also getting students to write on the “whiteboard.” This makes me wonder if I am doing the right thing because the sequence of the online lesson feels too similar to an in-person classroom.

Shouldn't teaching online be slightly or overtly different? I don't want to be seen as uninformed and blindly considering teaching online as exactly the same as teaching in-person. (Sem 2, W9-T1)

Tensions From Changing the “Performance”

Another tension was the exhaustion that I experienced from performing in the online lessons. Over two semesters, there were various instances where I reflected on the changes made to my teaching practice or the learning environment to avoid being tired from performing to students in a class setting (Sem 1, W5-T1) and in one-on-one settings (Sem 1, W8-T1). However, changes were also made to ensure that I was understood by my students, such as that seen in efforts to make physical gestures visible and understandable to the students (Sem 1, W13-T1). These reflections highlighted the tension in wanting to conserve energy and look after my physical well-being, with the need to be “interesting” and comprehensible to the students. The concern for validation perhaps stems from an incumbent evaluation technology within the institutional context, where the academic and teaching staff are evaluated based on their teaching and classroom practice and performance.

I tried not to be too animated and found myself asking if I was “interesting” to the students. Is everything just a performance to the students? Why do I need to make myself likable to them? Should they not know for themselves the significance and value of the materials covered in this class? Having said this, I found myself being able to conserve my voice, which is something I had struggled with in the last four weeks...where I would end up with a tired and sore throat at the conclusion of the last class of the day. (Sem 1, W5-T1)

I found myself making a concerted effort to conserve my voice as the conferencing was one after the other. This was to conserve energy so that I was able to go through all the students in the day without being too exhausted. (Sem 1, W8-T1)

I’ve noticed myself being aware of the gestures I use in an online lesson. I try to fit as much of my upper body in the video, and make sure that my hands and their movements are visible to the students. (Sem 1, W13-T1)

Besides wanting to conserve my energy and voice, I thought that graduate students should be able to find value in their learning experiences. They should still be able to participate despite how interesting (or not) the class appears to be. This has been an assumption I held that was shaped by literature on this matter. In particular, studies have indicated that self-regulation is important for graduate students when developing their academic literacy skills. This is because the graduate students themselves could apply academic literacy skills and knowledge in various academic communication contexts (Blau et al., 2020; Zhao, 2016).

Changes to my performance continued in the second semester. It was then changed to my physical teaching practices and teaching materials. As discussed earlier, various online activities and tools were used to create proximity with my students and support the institution in acquiring potentially helpful software. However, efforts in introducing novel learning tools in the classroom may not be perceived positively. This has been reported in recent studies, where students may not be receptive to online synchronous classes and activities (Chung et al., 2020). Thus, it may be that I realized that the investment return for introducing different tools into the classroom might be low. Moreover, simplifying the teaching materials could further respond to my desire to care for my well-being.

In this lesson, I relied fully on students engaging with my PowerPoint and with my questions...there were instances of silence, and not knowing what to say. I invited them to contribute in the chat. This perhaps shows a mismatch between my and the students’ expectations of online tutorials...perhaps students just want to listen and see me on Zoom and nothing more? (Sem 2, W2-T2)

Again, by just relying on PPT and Zoom, I had the students annotate on my screen. I think it works if there is at least one student who is willing to contribute, otherwise, everyone will just remain in the comfort of their space (away from me) and just be a passive listener. (Sem 2, W3-T1)

The simplification of the teaching practice and materials saw a restriction of activities to a few tools. This probably lessened the cognitive demands for learning new software and allowed students to work on tools they were familiar with, such as Zoom and PPT. This change also saw a shift in my expectation towards my students; instead of expecting students to participate freely, I accepted that not many would participate or interact and that contributions from one or a handful of students would suffice.

Discussion

This autoethnographic study examined tensions affecting teacher identity within the performative constraints of technology use in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. As seen through the reflections, tensions arose primarily from the mismatch between the perceptions of my role as an English academic writing teacher of graduate students and the teaching and learning situation, including the students’ responses and perceptions towards the online teaching practices. Furthermore, I realized that certain pedagogical practices promoted for an English for academic purposes classroom were not supportive of the circumstances of the students, such as the value of integrating discussions and the provision of brief feedback that prompt students to take action (Chun, 2009; Loo & Sairattainain, 2021). Moreover, the efforts to create proximity despite having online remote lessons were not necessarily successful, as my students were not receptive. This may be due to the students’ cultural background and familiarity with English classes. Since almost all of them are from China, they

may be used to teaching English in a more teacher-centered or authoritative manner, where instructions come directly from the teacher. Proximity may be challenging to achieve, too, given that Chinese students have been reported to view English as inherently belonging to native speakers (Haidar & Fang, 2019). I also became cognizant of privacy issues stemming from using online tools.

Moreover, from the reflections, it appeared that students' familiarity with technological tools was a concern. Specific tools were also not necessarily supportive of the classes, as these tools were integrated because they were being trialed by the institution and not because they provided pedagogical support for the teaching and learning processes. Since these tools are being trialed, there may be pressure for them to be adopted. In this sense, the institution's tools are not entirely neutral, as there will be certain expectations for them to be used. What is observed here is Ball's (2003) discussion of market technology, where teachers are compelled to take on pedagogical approaches or tools sanctioned by those in power.

Perhaps due to the performativity expected based on market technology, changes became relatively frequent, which led to tensions. Through these, I could see my teacher identity manifesting through the agency that I enacted. This rendered the teaching and learning processes dynamic, given that the changes were regularly implemented as I made sense of my position as an English teacher and the circumstance I found myself in (Canagarajah, 2012; Varghese et al., 2005). Doing so was illustrative of my awareness that my performance as a teacher was being scrutinized, not only by my students but by the larger context, such as those to whom I report and the institution. In this sense, we may see that teachers' identity is not only shaped by their own personal and professional beliefs or perspectives but by circumstances comprising the teacher, students, the class setting, and the institution (Canagarajah, 2012; Sahling & De Carvalho, 2021).

These tensions reflected my teaching perspective, and I could also see how my physical well-being was affected. From a practical and pedagogical point of view, it is safe to say that working online or from home would not constitute less work; in fact, the possibility of less work due to the pandemic has been found to cause a greater somatic burden (see Collie, 2021), and perhaps a more significant burden on a teacher's sense of self.

While some may view continuous changes as a form of teacher productivity, a more critical outlook should be fostered. In particular, continuously making changes may be due to the deeply rooted and pervasive discourse of performativity, in that teachers are constantly expected to go through cycles of self-evaluation and changes. This reflects the discourse of being self-entrepreneurial, where teachers partake in various processes to improve practice to meet formal and informal institutional expectations, such as the technologies discussed by Ball (2003). This includes making contextual adjustments based on the teaching circumstances, whether working through reform in the curriculum while managing personal pedagogical beliefs (Noonan, 2019) or by meeting the various accountability technologies implemented to keep teachers in check (Holloway & Brass, 2018). It should be noted, however, that when changes are enacted, performativity does not lie only within the teacher. To a large extent, students also need to "keep up" with these changes, and only those with particular skills, knowledge, or experience can ensure the success of their teachers' pedagogical performances or the institution's.

The need to partake in constant changes constitutes a part of a teacher's identity, especially in today's teaching environment, where teachers compete with others based on good teaching practices. As such, teachers may inexplicably take on official or formal assessment structures in their personal and professional development. When such structures are ingrained within the teachers' natural teaching practices, competitiveness between teachers may intensify to the

point where the structures may need to be reconfigured to distinguish teachers’ performances (Sullivan et al., 2021), leading to a cyclical process where performance and competition are constantly being redefined.

Conclusion

The examination of performativity, as understood through tensions affecting teacher identity during an online module, indicated an extent of hyper-reflexivity by the researcher. Hyper-reflexivity is an essential component of teacher identity development, where there is a consistent questioning of the suitability of teaching or learning practices enacted by a teacher. This could entail what Pillow (2003) terms “reflexivities of discomfort,” where there is a conscious effort to destabilize and decenter the self to uncover individual assumptions and to offer a truthful and ethical representation of others. This provides more critical depth to examining teacher identity, where a teacher’s perspective is critically discussed in light of personal emotions or experiences, not just the teacher’s students or materials used in their teaching. Such personal reflexivity, using autoethnography, also allows the teacher’s voice to be heard without necessarily diluting through comparative means with other teachers’ voices, such as in conventional narrative inquiry studies.

Nonetheless, while insightful, this study is limited in terms of offering a singular perspective of the tensions experienced by shifting a class online. Perhaps a more nuanced discussion can be achieved by involving multiple subjectivities, i.e., inviting critical friends to participate in the reflection (see Loo & Sairattanain, 2021). Despite this limitation, I believe this study exemplifies the valuable potential of reflecting upon one’s reflections through autoethnography or other qualitative means. This approach not only better gauges the complexity of one’s teacher identity but also illustrates the extent and types of teacher agency taken and afforded in different challenging circumstances.

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