

**TITLE:**

**ACTS OF FABRICATION IN THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OF  
TEACHERS' WORK**

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**ABSTRACT**

*'Performativity*, it is argued, is a new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in an 'advanced liberal' way. It requires individual [teachers] to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation. The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence. For some, this is an opportunity to make a success of themselves, for others it portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance. It is also suggested that performativity produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of *fabrications*'. (Ball, 2003, p. 215)

# **Acts of fabrication in the performance management of teachers' work**

**Dr Sham Naidu**

## **Introduction**

Within the context of 'performance management of teachers' work', Ball (2001a) informs us that fabrications are representations or versions of a person (teacher) or the organisation (school). These representations or versions are superficial or make-believe. Owing to the complex, multifaceted and diverse nature of schools, fabrications will differ from teacher to teacher, from school to school. Furthermore, he maintains that fabrications are privileged by certain individuals in the school situation and 'are informed by the priorities, constraints and climate set by the policy environment' (Ball, 2001a, p. 216). This is understandable if one has to consider the hierarchical structures existent in schools. It could be argued that the principal, assistant principal/s and members of the management team are privileged because of their position in this structure. They can, and some do, use their position to benefit their own versions of what is required by the rhetoric of policy expecting little or no resistance from their subordinates: namely, teachers under their charge. However, Ball (2001b, p. 4) does concede that these acts of fabrications 'are not made in a political vacuum'. They are resultant of schools becoming part of the 'audit society'; thus schools have no option but to transform in order to become 'auditable'.

## **Defining 'fabrications'**

Paraphrasing Foucault, Ball defines fabrications as:

versions of an organisation (or person) which does not exist—they are not 'outside the truth' but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts—they are produced purposely in order 'to be accountable'. Truthfulness is not the point—the point is their effectiveness, in the market or for the inspection, as well as the work they do 'on' and 'in' the organisation—their transformational impact. (2001a, pp. 216–217)

This definition implies that schools have become organisations to be ‘calculated’, ‘audited’ and ‘measured’ through disciplinary tactics of accountability. All these processes have led to increases in performativity mechanisms designed to make official judgements of the organisation or person. Schools and teachers are now forced to take cognisance of the way they represent themselves. Thus, in order to present a favourable gaze of quality and accountability, they fabricate.

For Butler (1990), the above acts of fabrications are paradoxical in nature. However, before the writer elaborate on these paradoxes, he (the writer) would like to illustrate Butler’s views on the issue of fabrications. Butler (1990) maintains that:

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed are performative, in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (cited in Ball, 2001a, p. 217)

Butler (1990, p. 136) explains the paradoxical nature of fabrications by arguing that, on the one hand, teachers are forced to express identities that are merely fabrications of their true selves, thus enabling them to escape the gaze of inspection. They engage in what she calls ‘impression management’—a fabrication enacted to create an image of performativity. But on the other hand, teachers are also required to ‘submit to the rigours of performativity’ and the ‘disciplines of competition—resistance and capitulation’. These processes are responsible for initiating acts of fabrication motivated by the need to present the school as a ‘player’ in the education marketplace, where the school can be ‘viewed, evaluated and compared’ (Ball, 1998, p. 196). However, there is a price to be paid for this. Teachers are faced with the moral dilemma of replacing authentic and committed teaching practices with acts of fabrication. In other words, teachers have to reform their identities and create their own value consensus; and create a system of value-based rational rules whilst being guided by their conscience. More importantly, these ‘acts of fabrications and the fabrications themselves act and reflect back upon the practices they stand for’ (Ball, 2001a, p. 217). Teachers have to sustain and live

up to these fabrications. The fabrications become a yardstick for the measurement of individual practices in which teachers become conscious of the new image that they have to portray. Evidence of this is visible in the manner in which teachers record and report on their practices. Only things deemed necessary are included in the latter.

It must be remembered that all these acts of fabrication are engaged in solely for the purpose of keeping the ‘accountability gaze’ in place. By carefully adhering to the use of systems and procedures, as stipulated in *Performance management guidelines*, teachers can guarantee their professionalism in the school. This professionalism supposedly demonstrates that they are engaging in self-regulating processes; are capable teachers; have become ‘more efficient, more productive, more relevant’; are user-friendly; are an integral part of the ‘knowledge economy’; and have the potential to better themselves (Ball, 2001a, p. 217). For Ball, these acts are in reality ‘an investment in plasticity’ (2001a, p. 217). Perhaps, one comforting feature to arise from this rather sad situation is that schools have now become ‘opaque’. This is indeed contradictory because performativity should make schools more transparent and not opaque. However, teachers are now representing themselves and their schools in ways that are much more deliberate and sophisticated than expected. In other words, they are representing themselves in acts that may be construed as *acts of fabrication*.

### **Teachers’ accounts of fabrications**

In this discussion, the writer present teachers’ accounts of how they engage in acts of fabrication in which ‘commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance’ (Ball, 2001a, p. 215). In this instance, teachers are forced to choose between their own judgements about what constitutes good teaching practice in meeting the needs of students on the one hand, and complying with the ‘rigours of performance’ (Ball, 2001a, p. 215) on the other. This

requires teachers to engage in acts of fabrication in order to satisfy the requirements of ‘the quality gaze’ that they are constantly working under.

The accounts of fabrication presented here are by no means indicative that teachers are ‘cheats’, engaging in dishonest teaching practices. Rather, as Ball (2001a, p. 216) advises, these acts should be viewed as ‘selections among various possible representations—or versions—of the organisation or person’. Because schools are complex, multifaceted and diverse environments, it is to be expected that some teachers will purposely fabricate or be less than authentic in order ‘to be accountable’. Ball (2001a, p. 217) maintains that in this situation ‘truthfulness is not the point—the point is their effectiveness, in the market or for the inspection, as well as the work they do “on” and “in” the organisation—their transformational impact’.

Coupled with this is the fact that *Performance management guidelines* are open to a variety of interpretations in the absence of clear directives. Given this, it may be expected that certain teachers will ‘subvert formal procedures and processes to their self-interests even where formal operating procedures exist, but exist without safeguards to prevent their being subverted to the agendas of [individual] teachers’ (Credlin, 1999, p. 3). This phenomenon was also evident in the study conducted in Western Australia by Down, Hogan and Chadbourne (1997), who illustrated three examples of teacher resistance to performance management as such:

- Firstly, some teachers ‘played the game’. They engaged in activities they deemed pleasing to satisfy superiors or administration staff in charge of performance management.
- Secondly, some teachers adopted a strategy of passive resistance. In this case, teachers refused to attend performance management interviews.
- Thirdly, some teachers decided to simply ignore performance management (p. 19).

Research in South Australia, indicated that the teachers' responses to the issue of 'fabrications' varied according to individual perceptions of the performance management process. Some teachers stated that they saw no need to fabricate because little or no time was spent in implementing the policy. Others felt that they were compelled to present the case of what they were doing in a pleasant light to their coordinators in order to comply with policy requirements.

Most teachers revealed that they exploited the personal development plan (one of the key elements of *Performance management guidelines*) to their advantage. The personal development plan is that part of the planning that relates directly to a staff member's personal development needs. The personal development plan may be incorporated as a part of an overall performance plan. The paramount purpose of this plan is to support and extend the growth and development of staff members. It incorporates training and development activities to be undertaken to enhance skills and knowledge (*Performance management guidelines*, 2000, p. 17). It is compulsory for South Australian teachers to engage in thirty-seven and a half hours of training and development activities per annum. Teachers who breach this condition are forced to report to their schools at the end of the year in order to compensate for any loss of time with regard to training and development activities. A teacher explains:

*I guess I do take the least resistance because I guess I rather do something else than be in school for a week doing nothing. I mean . . . the stories about teachers going into schools in the last week and there are no kids and doing nothing. Is it some form of punishment? Or if it is, it is very ineffective.*

Thus, in order to avoid this 'punitive' measure, teachers engaged in acts of fabrication to subvert the performance management policy solely for the purpose of attaining thirty- seven and a half hours of training and development per year, and not to be 'detained' for failing to do so. The following accounts reflect the diverse range of strategies employed by teachers to manipulate the performance management policy and the reasons for engaging in such practices.

Another teacher recounted a number of reactions to the whole process of teacher evaluation. He drew these conclusions as someone who has been both an ‘observer’ and an ‘observed’ or, in his own words, ‘judged’ or the ‘accused’. He had this to say:

*Some teachers embrace it [performance management] because they see or saw it as a progressive way to get some validation of their true value and worth. In some cases the person being checked on has far greater ideas about the craft of teaching than those who are assessing them and the value is questionable. [They] go along with it so as not to rock the boat. Sometimes they are older teachers who have little time left or often teachers who see their roles as limited to the classroom and are not interested in school politics, or they, in my experience, are teachers with young families or have sporting or cultural commitments outside the school. These will often find ways to minimise their exposure to the evaluation process.*

*The third group are actually confident in their own teaching ability, see themselves as competent and actually spend more time inventing ways around the evaluation process.*

In describing the strategies that he personally employed in subverting the performance management policy, a high school teacher made the following comments:

*In terms of supervision, you keep a record of training and development. Now what you do is read an article . . . I say that’s going to take me two hours . . . by the time I have read a twelve page article and done the summary I might have ten of them so I claim twenty hours.*

*The other example is that you will do things like . . . I do a presentation to the staff or do something like that. I would have given that presentation two or three times to different people, but I will say that it took me four to five hours to prepare that . . . it might have taken you a bit longer to do the first but after you have done it a couple of times it’s a matter of going through it quickly and doing a bit of photocopying whatever, but you claim those sort of hours.*

*You just exaggerate by simply, wherever you can . . . you know . . . like the amount of time things take.*

*You have to attend a session and very often there are readings that go with it. However you don’t bother reading but you reflect that you have actually done the reading.*

*The other issue is that people attend things that otherwise they wouldn't even bother to go in order to claim the hours. I know there are people here that have gone and done things run by the Electoral Commission . . . [going to the] museum and those sorts of things. They are not things they have to attend or they would normally go to and they really don't have a lot of value. They do it because they really want the time and I will do anything to comply so it's just . . . it's not about developing really good practice. It's about trying to get . . . you know, the hours.*

*Making up of records of journals, articles which you have read and claim training and development hours.*

*Attending activities for which training and development recognition is given [hours] for which a small percentage is professional and the others are social, for example, one-hour meeting and a two-hour dinner. You claim three hours.*

*Overestimating the time it took for training and development time, for example, double it. Instead of two hours, claim for four hours.*

*Renaming activities so that they can count, for example, some sports coaching renamed as training and development preparation so that it can be counted for the thirty-seven and a half hours.*

A coordinator in the English department admitted that she found the policy ‘*very black and white . . . I bend the rules a bit*’. However, she did not elaborate on the manner in which she bent the rules in order to accommodate those she supervised. She also admitted that some teachers resisted the performance management policy—‘*resist as in classically “bucking” most things that are put down that they need to follow*’. In order to overcome this issue of resistance, she adopted a very candid approach to teacher evaluation characterised by open and clear discussions on the areas requiring attention. She was of the opinion that her approach eliminated the need for teachers to ‘pretend’.

A primary school teacher, on the other hand, expressed concern that teachers were now forced to ‘*port*’ the performance management process. She had this to say: ‘*I think you can easily port the system. I think anyone can make it sound great if they want to. They could put on a front when need*



*be. You can pay lip-service'. She attributed this behaviour by some teachers to the Department of Education's, insistence that all teachers complete thirty-seven-and-a-half-hours of professional training and development a year. This view is evident in the following statement: 'Another thing is that it's all caught up in the thirty-seven and a half hours and people are more concerned about building up their thirty-seven and a half hours to get that week of at the end of the year'. She went on to elaborate on the fallacy of this insistence by citing the example where some teachers only attended professional training and development courses because they were compelled to do so. She had this to say:*

*You can go off and do different courses that they say you can do. But what do you do with it then? Do you bring that course back and use it in the classroom? I have seen so many people go off and do a course here and a course there. But that's where it stops and if you don't take what you can get from that course and use it, it's valueless.*

[Jack's] views as an assistant principal and an experienced administrator also reveal teachers as being prone to engaging in acts of fabrication in order to 'appear accountable'. He admitted that *'there's always the halo effect. Persons are going to present the case of what they are really doing in a pleasant light to their line manager'*. He also acknowledged that those coordinators under his charge were *'going to show what they have done in a favourable light and to some extent you know they are not going to highlight what their weaknesses are. That makes fabrication something of a build-up of the best possible scenario'*. [Jack] saw these acts of fabrication as a 'coping device' employed by teachers in order to remain in the teaching profession. He was of the opinion that some teachers fabricated because *'naturally, we are all scared of losing our jobs, our positions'*. It is for this reason he maintains that performance management should not be perceived as a negative process as deemed by many teachers. Rather, he advocates that performance management should strive to *'improve performance, rather than seeing what the person has or has not done. As soon as it becomes seen as a negative thing, I think the more they will fabricate what they have actually done'*.

Another teacher's account of the manner in which some principals have dismissed the issue of time allocation in respect to professional training and development at their schools seriously questions the pedagogic underpinning of performance management. She admitted that *'[I had] been fairly lucky. I decided to learn Indonesian and [the principal] said that he would count that as my hours because it is a school with lots of Indonesian students. So that took care of a lot of them [hours]'*. Some principals also used the time spent at staff meetings as a means of crediting teachers with professional training and developmental hours. She had this to say of her ex-principal: *'[Brett] tended to make meetings at school in the evenings and we then talked about different things like computers, developing things, different things we did and he would talk about that for four hours so we would finish school at nine. We would count that'*. She was also candid in explaining her current situation with regard to professional development:

*I am on a principal's panel. I said to [the principal], 'Can the time I spent during the holidays going through the panel stuff count?' He said, 'Yes'. That's not really training and development. Although when I spoke to the district superintendent, he said, 'Well, it will develop your skills in going on a panel so it counts'. But I mean it is just a way of abusing the system. I did training to be on a panel. Well, that's not really training and development as far as my job goes. But that's counted.*

In justifying the reason why teachers fabricate, she was adamant that teachers *'justify what we do because we want to think that we are doing the right thing all the time so we are able to justify a lot of things we do. So I guess that in a way it is a fabrication because we might be doing it for one reason but the department wants us to be doing it for another'*. Stemming from this discussion, she also pointed out that she had *'not used professional readings and things. I know some principal/s just write off . . . ten hours as professional readings . . . I mean people were writing off gym memberships as training and development because they were going to a gym and they were saying that they were getting skills to use for school sport'*.

Yet another female teacher also provided some enlightenment about other acts of fabrication employed by teachers in the performance management process. She elaborated on four ways she and her colleagues ‘work around the policy’. She stated:

*If you really rort the system, rorting is not changing your own mind-set and learning, it's coasting the stuff you've got.*

*Well, let me quote an example of the person I used to work for who was a very busy man and was taking a class. I was backfilling him on days when he was doing other things. I was really impressed with his program. I found that even though it was an immaculate program, every week it was identical. There hadn't been any changes in it.*

*You must remember that most schools are pretty hardworking. The people just do their own thing. They look after each other. One of my friends . . . we went to see a show. She is a reception teacher. I made up a nice certificate. Wrote that ‘so and so’ has attended a two-hour show. I signed it and she put it in her training and development book. Let's face it. Who checks these certificates? Nobody.*

*One course that I went to—the people were doing administering—I got it mixed up with another one. They sent me a certificate and a feedback sheet asking what I got out of the course. I said, ‘Excuse me, I think we are talking about the wrong course’. So they sent me another certificate anyway, so there I was with an extra bonus two hours. And I really felt like selling it.*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is obvious that teachers view *performance management* with suspicion and engage in acts to fabrication—‘perverse forms of response/resistance to and accommodation of performativity’ (Ball, 2001a, pp. 201-213)—in order to operate, shape the work of teaching and influence the nature of teaching. Hence, teachers who are subject to new managerialist modes of control based on marketisation, corporatisation and globalisation will fabricate *performance management* in order to resist these strategies of control and power.

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