

## ABSTRACT

“No Easy Thing”: A Portraiture of the Dynamics of Teacher-Pupil Interactions  
in a Standard 4 Primary Classroom in Trinidad.

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This study uses the ethnographic methodology of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot’s Portraiture to explore the dynamics of teacher-pupil interactions in one Standard 4 classroom in Trinidad. The emergent themes of curriculum, power, resistance, and community, describe the teacher-pupil interactions involved in teaching and learning, managing and disciplining, and coping and relating. Context, Voice, Relationships, Emergent Themes, and the Aesthetic Whole are the essential features of portraiture which engage the research process, and render the product (the portraiture). Through the voices of pupils and their teacher, classroom interactions are explored against the rich back drop of the school community and the contemporary and historical events which have influenced the island’s education system.

Curriculum emerged as a need to perpetuate and legitimize cultural traditions which are symbolized by the high status secondary entrance examinations. The study deconstructs the teacher belief system which perpetuates and rationalizes curriculum as tradition.

Classroom discipline emerged as a function of teacher authority and power, shaped by the institutional constraints of schooling, the life history which the teacher brings to the classroom, and the post colonial legacies of the island’s education. Resistance articulates students’ desire for voice: to create spaces of personal power even within the confines of an autocratic classroom. Community as the desire for positive emotional transactions resonates in dissonant but significant acts of teacher and pupils to be agents, and step outside of the roles defined by the autocratic and didactic traditions of classroom life.

The implications of the data for improving the quality of classroom life are explored as mechanisms for building and challenging tradition.