Navigating the Red Stamp:

An Exploration of the Way Inclusive Education is Conceptualized, Understood and

Implemented within Local Contexts in Vietnam

by

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Contents

Declaration

I declare that, this thesis entitled:

Navigating the Red Stamp: An Exploration of the Way Inclusive Education is Conceptualized, Understood and Implemented within Local Contexts in Vietnam is my own original work. It has not been submitted to any other institution of higher learning for the award of any degree or qualification.

Where I have used information from the published or unpublished work of other, I have acknowledged such sources, both in the text and in the list of references.

Signed: _(signature)_   (Marieke Stevens) Date: 09/03/2020

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List of Acronyms

BCE	Before Common Era
CCCU	Canterbury Christ Church University
CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
CPC	Communist Party Committee
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CSO	Civil society organisation
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
DoET	Department of Education and Training (provincial level)
DoFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
EFA	Education For All
GC4	General Comment No. 4 to Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
HNUE	Hanoi University of Education
IEP	Individual Education Plans
IERC	Inclusive Education Resource Centres
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
MoLISA	Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs
NCCD	National Coordination Council on Disability
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TDCSE	Training and Development Centre on Special Education
VFD	Vietnam Federation of Disabled People
VNEN	Vietnam New School Model (Vietnam Escuela Nueva)
WTO	World Trade Organisation

UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Abstract

This thesis examined how inclusive education reforms, which are pre-dominantly based on theory developed in the Global North, were conceptualised, understood and implemented at a local level, in two primary schools in Vietnam. It aimed to understand the implications of external frameworks and policies and guidelines from powerful international institutions on local educational practices. This study furthermore problematised the position of a foreign researcher undertaking research in Vietnam and aimed to identify strategies which might support navigating complex research contexts, whilst avoiding a singular Western perspective on data collection and analysis. The findings of a review of literature were used to establish a set of emerging key issues related to inclusive education and policy development in Vietnam, which informed the research questions and design.

A case study approach was used to explore the research questions. Data for this study was collected over a period of nearly five years. Between May 2015 and October 2016, the focus was on national level partnership building and collaboration with local authorities to obtain access to the case study schools. Between October 2016 and April 2018 regular visits to two primary schools were undertaken to gather data through interviews with teachers and classroom observations. Until December 2019 there were ongoing discussions with Vietnamese and foreign critical friends to reflect about emerging findings. The data was presented through a series of critical incidents which explored the key issues from different perspectives. Re-occurring key themes were further analysed and discussed.

The data suggested that globalisation processes introduced new ideas in the case study schools. The teachers re-interpreted these new concepts based on their specific contexts, existing knowledge and earlier experiences. This resulted in a blend of different discourses, with elements of a rights-based discourse but also drawing from a narrow, disability-focused model of inclusive education. It appeared that although the teachers worked within a very restrictive policy framework, they exercised some agency in developing hybrid practices which allowed them to navigate conflicting social, cultural and political expectations. This thesis argues that governments and international agencies need to build space and time in their programmes to allow education reforms to be developed locally, to provide clear policy support and agency for teachers to locally

enact national and international requirements and to respect teachers and local education leaders as competent partners in reform processes. It argues furthermore that international agency and NGO working in the field of education need to think further and make efforts to develop pedagogical frameworks in partnership with local policy makers, educational leaders and field workers, rather than adjusting imposed pedagogical frameworks developed elsewhere. This requires more time and effort to understand the specific contextual factors which shape educational thinking and practices in schools, to understand what actually happens in school and why, and to notice small differences and changes in practice, which make sense for local practitioners but are not always easy to notice from an outsider perspective.

A range of challenges emerged in this research journey, including the navigation of bureaucratic requirements which was time-consuming. The emergent nature of this research design became increasingly problematic because of the local socio-political context and the policy constraints in schools. These along with language and cultural misunderstandings, affected the extent to which trusting relationships could be established at a local level. A number of important strategies were identified to navigate these, including collaboration with critical friends and peer Vietnamese researchers.

Chapter One – Introduction

My thesis argues that there is a need to contextualize education reforms, which are pre-dominantly based on theory developed in the Global North[1], when implementing such reforms in different contexts. In order to understand these contextualisation processes better, this study explored how inclusive education was conceptualised, understood and implemented in two primary schools in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam. The study aimed on the one hand to explore in depth how specific social, cultural and political contextual factors mediated local enactment of national and international polices concerning inclusive education. On the other hand, the study explored what the impact of these external frameworks, policies and guidelines from powerful international institutes and NGOs is on local educational practice.

I visited two primary schools regularly over a period of one and a half years, from October 2016 to April 2018. I talked with teachers individually or in small focus groups and observed their lessons and the daily life at the schools. In addition, I worked closely with my interpreter, who became my main critical friend, for five and a half years, from May 2015 to December 2019. Conversations with her and a small group of other critical friends helped to explore and navigate challenges related to undertaking research as a foreign researcher in Vietnam and to develop a deeper understanding of what happened in the field.

The title of this thesis 'Navigating the red stamp' referred to these challenges, which made this research journey at times very problematic. A lot of the encountered challenges were linked with working my way through the bureaucratic systems to gain and maintain 'red stamps' or official research permits. 'Navigating the red stamp' reflected also the specific challenges I faced in undertaking qualitative research in a one-party communist state, with at times far-reaching government control. As argued throughout this thesis, previous experience of teachers in the case

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[1] Throughout this thesis terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' are used. 'Global South' is used to refer to low or lower middle-income countries outside Europe and North America. The term has been used in academic literature since the 1990s to avoid contested terms such as 'third world' or 'developing' countries. The term is not perfect as there are economic and social difference between countries in the South. DADOS, N. & CONNELL, R. 2012. The Global South. *Contexts,* 11, 12-13. define the Global South as '… regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania … mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized'. The prefix 'global' refers to globalisation processes and histories of colonialism and continued economic and social inequality ibid.. The term 'Global North' then refers to high income countries mainly situated in Europe and North America, which historically tended to dominate global politics and economy.

study schools with high-stakes assessment and government monitoring, affected and challenged how far I was able to develop trusting relationships. These and other challenges are discussed in detail throughout this thesis, as they provided the main entry points for learning related to the research questions and for my personal growth as a researcher.

This thesis does not only tell the story of how two primary schools in Vietnam engaged with international education concepts. It also tells the story of my personal journey as a researcher, and how that journey became important to interpret what happened in the schools and to develop a more in-depth and nuanced understanding. At the start of this study, I was a rather inexperienced qualitative researcher and felt at times uncomfortable in my researcher role. I was anxious 'to do the right thing' and perhaps tried to hold on too mechanically to the research processes I set out at the start. Over time and with reflection with critical friends, I grew into my researcher role. This helped to be more flexible, allow emotions in the research process and engage with, what appeared at first as, conflicting data. This gradually changed how I approached data collection and how I interpreted field events. Whereas for example I focussed at the start on what was said, I learned later on to explore how and why things were said. This opened different perspectives and a more nuanced understanding. Becoming aware of my researcher role, how I acted inside the field and how this influenced the data collection and interpretation was an ongoing process. I chose to make this reflexive process visible throughout the thesis. The critical incidents, which present the data, for example are situated in time and show the complex process of evolving interpretations. This is important, as qualitative researchers are inevitably part of the social world they are studying (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, Cohen et al., 2007, Coffey, 1999). In writing 'the self' into the study, researchers increase authenticity of their accounts by disclosing how their selves influenced the study and interpretations (Coffey, 1999, Cohen et al., 2007). Coffey (1999, p. 1) argued furthermore that 'the self is not only inherent part of the qualitative field work, it is also constructed during field work and in writing remembering and representing field work'. Field work is therefore personal and the reflexive thread in this thesis aims to make this personal journey visible.

This chapter starts with a rationale for the selection of the research topic, followed by an account of how the research questions were developed. The chapter ends with an overview of the structure of this thesis.

Research Topic

A comprehensive framework of international policies, agreements and targets supports inclusion and education for all. These include broad policy documents aiming to ensure the right to education for all as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO, 1990), Dakar Framework on Education for All (UNESCO, 2000) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (UN, 2015). In addition, a number of international policy documents specifically support inclusion of children with disabilities in education, for example the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (UN, 1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006).

In 2015, I took part in a review of the evolution of global policies and strategies to improve access to education for children with disabilities (Grimes et al., 2015). One of the main findings was that time-bound international education targets such as the EFA goals have not always been realistic in their aims, nor have they acknowledged the complexity of the reform processes required to meet these targets. It has been argued that national governments in the Global South experience considerable pressure to meet these targets (Armstrong et al., 2010, Caddell, 2005, Gabel and Danforth, 2008b). Some policymakers therefore prefer to draw from education policies and approaches from the Global North instead of investing time and financial resources in developing context-specific programmes (Nguyen et al., 2012, Gabel and Danforth, 2008b). Inclusive education has been a promising concept for policymakers in aiming to meet Education for All and other international education targets (Kozleski et al., 2011).

There is a growing recognition in the research literature that conceptualisation of inclusive education is contextual. Therefore, transferring inclusive education models, pre-dominantly developed in the Global North, to other contexts is problematic (Goldstein, 2004, Forlin and Ming-Gon, 2008, Armstrong et al., 2010). However, there is less literature available on what a contextualised approach to inclusive education might look like (Armstrong et al., 2010, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). There is a need for a deeper understanding of the complex contextual

factors which influence how inclusive education is conceptualized and implemented in the Global South (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). This study aimed to contribute to the field by developing a more nuanced understanding of the complex realities which influence the everyday decisions teachers made in two primary schools in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam. The study was concerned with the tension between global trends in inclusive education and local responses when translated into practice at school level. It focused on what is known internationally about inclusive education development and implementation and what is not known about the local factors influencing its conceptualisation and implementation in Vietnamese schools. The study furthermore problematised the position of a foreign researcher undertaking research in Vietnam and aimed to identify strategies which might support navigating the complex research context, whilst avoiding a singular Western perspective on data collection and analysis. This qualitative study used a case study approach to gather data through semi-structed interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observation in two primary schools in Vietnam. As part of the data analysis process, the emerging findings were discussed with both Vietnamese and foreign critical friends. The data was presented through a series of critical incidents which explored the key issues from different perspectives. Reoccurring key themes in the critical incidents were further analysed and discussed.

Development of the Research Questions

My personal interest in the research topic evolved from my past experiences of working in the field of inclusive education in Vietnam. I started to work in Vietnam in 2006 as a Special Education Trainer[2] at the Quy Nhon University. I supported the faculty of Special Education in introducing the subject 'inclusive education' into the pre-service teacher training. Later, in 2008, I became a project manager for Handicap International (now Humanity and Inclusion) in Bac Kan Province, Northern Vietnam. I supported the Bac Kan Department of Education and Training (DoET) to implement inclusive education in the province. My role in Bac Kan had a significant impact on the development of my thinking. I gradually realised that implementing inclusive education was far

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[2] The title 'Special Education Trainer' was selected by the Quy Nhon University. I am aware the term 'special education' is problematic. This explored further in Chapter Two (p. 22), in which different perspectives on inclusive education are explored.

less straightforward than I initially assumed. At times it was frustrating to see how little progress we made in creating sustainable inclusive practices. On reflection I suspected that this was because we did not pay enough attention to trying to understand more fully the local contextual factors which were influencing the ways in which participants engaged with the training. I realised later, that at the time, my thinking was largely based on personal experiences with inclusive education in Europe. During my Master's degree course at Ghent University, Belgium, I provided individual support at a mainstream school for a child who experienced difficulties in learning. I was also involved with advocacy groups as 'Ouders voor Inclusie' (Parents for Inclusion). These experiences did not prepare me to support inclusive schools in a completely different context. I furthermore realised that our approach to inclusive education implementation, and especially teacher development for inclusion, was not evidence-based. While there was at the time academic literature available on these topics, I felt, as an NGO practitioner, I did not have enough access to these resources. As a result, my colleagues and myself developed programmes based on 'common practice', on how other NGOs supported inclusive education implementation. This was not necessarily based on evidence, nor was it context-specific.

Through conversations with external consultants and further self-study, I broadened my perspective and started to question some of my assumptions. For example, the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2016) encouraged me to re-think our approach as development actors in Vietnam at the time. Firstly, we organised in-service teacher training course based on a cascade model, whereby we would train a small number of teachers in each school. We believed these teachers would re-train their colleagues and they would all start to apply new knowledge and skills in their daily practice; however, this did not happen. Secondly, I realised we focussed heavily on knowledge and skills instead of on developing inclusive school cultures and values. Lastly, we did not fully take political and social factors into account which limited how far inclusive education was implemented in the schools, at least in terms of what we had expected to see. Local education guidelines for example limited how far teachers were able to actually implement what we introduced in the short-term training initiatives. I became aware of the complex interplay between social conventions and strategic decision-making in schools. I learned for example over time that school directors did not select the most motivated teachers to attend training sessions, but rather those with the highest status, which affected how information was shared within the school afterwards. As I gradually acknowledged the complexity of inclusive education

implementation, we slowly started to adjust our programme design. For example, we replaced the cascade training model with school-based training sessions and set-up local support systems for inclusive schools through the provincial special school. This also proved to be extremely problematic as it tended to re-enforce the dominant medical model of disability which was underpinning inclusive education in Vietnam at that time. These experiences and reflections encouraged me to explore the issue of inclusive education implementation further after the closure of the Handicap International programme.

In developing my proposal for this thesis, I therefore formulated the following research questions:

> Research Question One – 'How are concepts of 'education' and 'inclusion' understood at school level in Vietnam?'

The first research question aimed to explore how research participants in the two case study schools in Vietnam understood inclusive education and related concepts. I intended to investigate these local conceptualisations against a backdrop of global trends in terms of inclusive education in order to explore potential tensions.

> Research Question Two – 'What contextual factors influence inclusive education implementation at school level in Vietnam?'

The second research question aimed to identify critical factors in the socio-economic, cultural, historical and political contexts of the case study schools, which impacted on how inclusive education was conceptualised and addressed in the two case study schools.

> Research Question Three – 'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?'

Based on my previous experience in Vietnam, I expected specific and complicated challenges might arise when undertaking this study. For example, I had already experienced legal restrictions in working with local schools and I knew there was a strong level of government monitoring and control during school visits with foreign consultants and researchers. I had also experienced how challenging it could be to work through interpreters and how much time it could take to develop trusting relationships in the field. I therefore added the third research questions to allow space to explore these challenges. I expected this would not only help to understand the complex research context, but also to further contextualize the data collected for the first two research questions.

I felt that this third research question was likely, as with the first two questions, to make a significant contribution to existing knowledge in this field, since there was little published literature relating to these issues in Vietnam.

Chapter Structure

The literature review includes two chapters. The next chapter, Chapter Two, explores different ways in which inclusive education is defined globally. It discusses tensions between different types of definitions and confusion with similar concepts, such as integrated education, Education for All and Child-Friendly Schools. The chapter continues with discussing tensions between global education trends and local implementation of these trends. It looks closer at neo-colonialism in global education development, the continuous dominance of the Global North on policy development and implementation in the Global South. Chapter Three includes literature on inclusive education in Vietnam, to provide a broader understanding of the context in which this study was undertaken. Key themes in inclusive education implementation in Vietnam are discussed against international literature on developing inclusive education policies and practices. Each main segment of the literature review concludes with a section called 'Implications for the study'. These sections summarize the key learning from the literature review and how this informed the research questions and/or research design. Chapter Two and Three are summarized in a set of emerging key themes at the end of Chapter Three. The key themes include an overview of my main learning and of the authors that influenced my thinking and the development of the research focus, questions and design. The key themes are not developed into a conceptual framework or typology to analyse the data. I wanted to allow the analysis to emerge from the data, rather than imposing conceptual frameworks based on theory pre-dominantly developed in the Global North. The series of key themes do provide an insight into my thinking as a researcher when refining the focus and the design for this study.

Chapter Four introduces the research methodology. It places this study within a qualitative research approach. The chapter discusses the choice of a case study research design and strategies to cope with anticipated challenges in undertaking this research. The main data collection methods are explored, including interviewing, observation and reflexive field notes. The

chapter introduces a three-staged approach to data analysis. This approach includes strategies to represent different perspectives and to maintain a comprehensive understanding of the data itself and on how this data was collected, within the data presentation and analysis. The chapter ends with an overview of expected ethical dilemmas and sets out the strategies I hoped to employ in order to navigate these challenges.

Chapter Five includes an account of the difficult process I faced in gaining access to the field and provides a deeper insight into the research context. Chapter five is part of the data presentation, as it is directly linked to the third research question: 'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?'. It discusses some major challenges faced and strategies which were applied in order to access the field and presents some learning points.

Chapter Six introduces the two case study schools, the Hill School and the River School. It aims to set the context in which the data was collected. The chapter ends with a summary of emerging similarities and differences between the two schools.

The data is presented through a series of critical incidents in Chapter Seven. Incidents were chosen based on a critical incident methodology developed by Tripp (1993). Each incident starts with an account of what happened, followed by a justification why the incident was selected. The initial reflections explore the incidents from different perspectives and link the incidents with other field events, literature and/or other critical incidents. The implications include the key learning from the incidents. The emerging key themes from the critical incidents are presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Eight includes a brief account of the process of leaving the field. It was to some extent sudden and unexpected and was in many ways as equally challenging and complicated as the process of gaining access to the field. As such, it provides both an insight into the context, and key learning related to the third research question.

Chapter Nine discusses the key themes from the critical incidents further. They are presented as a series of key themes related to each research question and provide an overview of what I

consider to be the main issues and learning from this study. Chapter Ten concludes this thesis with a summary of the key learning, contributions and implications of the findings.

Chapter Two – Inclusive Education in an International Context

Introduction

The literature review includes two chapters. Chapter Two – 'Inclusive Education in an International Context', explores different ways in which inclusive education is defined. It looks at international trends and influences on inclusive education policy development and implementation in the Global South. Chapter Three – 'Inclusive Education in Vietnam', discusses emerging key themes in the literature concerning inclusive education implementation in Vietnam. The chapter explores tensions in how inclusive education is conceptualized and implemented in Vietnam, and how this relates to international literature on inclusive education development and implementation. The purpose of the literature review is to develop a deeper understanding of the key themes related to the research questions and the general context in which this study is undertaken. The literature review is summarized in a series of emerging key themes at the end of Chapter Three. These themes include an overview of my main learning and of the authors that influenced my thinking and the development of the research focus, questions and design. The key themes will not be used as a framework to analyse the data in this study. A more open approach is designed to allow the analysis to emerge from the data itself, instead of using a framework with pre-defined themes and categories. In doing so, it is expected to avoid imposing inclusive education theory, pre-dominantly developed in the Global North, on data collected in the case study schools in Vietnam. The approach to data analysis is discussed with more detail in Chapter Four – 'Methodology' (see 'Data Analysis, p. 104).

In approaching this literature review I undertook a number of academic searches, using key terms linked to the research questions. As the amount of academic publications on inclusion in Vietnam is rather limited, I have also included grey literature such as publications from international NGOs, international agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO and the Vietnamese government. I contacted my personal network in Vietnam (both foreign and Vietnamese colleagues who work with NGOs, Vietnamese government and universities) to find Vietnamese policy documents and Vietnamese publications on inclusive education. I used English translations of Vietnamese documents. The research interpreter helped to check the accuracy of these translated documents. In addition,

where applicable, literature on wider education reforms in Vietnam and education reforms in countries with similar cultural and political contexts as Vietnam were also reviewed.

Defining Inclusive Education

Mitchell (2005a, p. xiv) described inclusive education as 'one of the most dominant and controversial issues confronting educational policy-makers and professionals around the world today'. Since its introduction in policy and academic discourse in the early 1990s, the term has included many different and often conflicting perspectives. This is a point noted by a wide range of researchers, for example (Rieser et al., 2013, Gabel and Danforth, 2008a, Peters, 2003, Ainscow et al., 2006, Graham and Slee, 2008, Miles and Singal, 2009, Mitchell, 2005b, Armstrong et al., 2010, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016).

Firstly, the most commonly described dichotomy in inclusive education definitions concerns narrow and broad definitions of inclusive education. In its most narrow way, inclusive education is described as placing children with disabilities in mainstream settings (Mitchell, 2005a). There is a wide range of broad definitions on inclusive education. Common elements of broad inclusive education definitions are presented in the table below.

Theme	Literature
Inclusive education is an active and never-ending process of increasing learning and participation for all students	(Clough and Corbett, 2000, Ainscow et al., 2006, Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Armstrong et al., 2010, Liasidou, 2015, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)
It is concerned with participation, learning alongside others and collaborating in shared learning experiences	(Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Ainscow et al., 2006, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)

It involves <u>reducing barriers and exclusionary practices</u> to learning and participation for all learners	(Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Ainscow et al., 2006, Mitchell, 2005b, Graham and Slee, 2008, Slee, 2013, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)
It goes beyond a single focus on including children with disabilities, and also recognizes that <u>all children</u> fundamentally belong in and are full members of mainstream schools and communities	(Mitchell, 2005b, Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Kozleski et al., 2011, Liasidou, 2015, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)
Inclusive education recognizes and <u>values differences</u> among learners	(Clough and Corbett, 2000, Booth and Ainscow, 2016, UNESCO, 2005, Mitchell, 2005a, Armstrong et al., 2010, Liasidou, 2015, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)
Inclusive education goes beyond physical placement of children with disabilities in regular settings. Inclusive schools are concerned with the <u>quality of education</u> for all learners and concerns all aspects of schooling	(Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Mitchell, 2005b, Barton, 1997, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)
Inclusive education expects <u>society and education structures to change</u> in order to ensure schools can respond to the diversity among learners. Children have the fundamental right to education and do not need to change to fit in existing education structures	(Ainscow et al., 2006, Fletcher, 2005, Graham and Slee, 2008, Armstrong et al., 2010, Kozleski et al., 2011, Liasidou, 2015, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)
Inclusive education requires a shift in <u>values and belief systems</u> underpinning education.	(Ainscow et al., 2006, Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Barton, 1997, Liasidou, 2015, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)

Inclusion goes beyond education and has as ultimate goal to create <u>inclusive societies</u>. It is based on a belief that all members of society have the right to equal access and participation in all aspects of the community	(Mitchell, 2005b, Ainscow et al., 2006, Kozleski et al., 2011, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016)

Secondly, the concept of inclusive education is in policy and practice often confused with 'integrated education'. 'Integrated education' occurs when students with disabilities are placed in existing mainstream educational schools with the expectation they adjust to the requirements of these schools (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). 'Inclusive education' involves a whole-system approach, in which all aspects of the education system are systematically reviewed and reformed in order to overcome barriers in participation and learning for all children (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). The concepts of integrated and inclusive education find their origins in different paradigms on disability, education and society. The concept of integrated education is linked to a medical or deficit model, while inclusive education is linked to a social or rights-based model. Within the medical model, disabilities are viewed as a problem of an individual. Interventions towards children with disabilities thus involve attempts of, often medical, specialists to cure or to adjust the individual to the norms in the society (WHO, 2007, UNICEF, 2014a). These interventions often lead to segregation in special centres or units for children with disabilities (Rieser, 2012, UNICEF, 2014a). Within the social model, disability is viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon, through a complex interplay of individual conditions, social and physical environmental factors (UNICEF, 2014a, WHO, 2007). Disability is viewed as the result of attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers in the society, which lead to exclusion and discrimination (UNICEF, 2014a). Interventions consequently focus on removing these barriers (WHO, 2007, UNICEF, 2014a). Policies and programmes change from a sole focus on prevention and rehabilitation towards rights and participation in all domains of life (Grech, 2016). The shift from a medical to a social or rights-based model in thinking, policy-making and implementation is significant. It is based on a fundamental recognition that all human beings belong in the mainstream discourses. It marks a shift away from charity towards obligating governments to ensure human rights of all citizens are respected and realized (Katsui et al., 2016).

Finally, inclusive education is also often confused with concepts such as 'Education for All' (EFA) and 'Child-Friendly schools', both at policy level and in practice. While these movements share in origin the same goals, they developed as separate movements (Miles and Singal, 2009, Rieser et al., 2013). UNICEF developed the child-friendly school model as a way to address all the elements that influence the well-being and rights of children as learners. It is a holistic framework which is concerned with education, health, security, nutrition and psychological well-being (UNICEF, 2009). Shaeffer (2011) highlights the opportunity of using the child-friendly school model to implement inclusive education. The original child-friendly school manual however lacked a focus on children with disabilities (Rieser et al., 2013). Likewise, the Education for All movement overlooked children with disabilities. (Ainscow et al., 2006, Miles and Singal, 2009, Rieser et al., 2013). This omission might have prompted policy makers and international aid organisations to narrow the concept of inclusive education down to a focus on children with disabilities.

The wide range of inclusive education perspectives and confusion with other concepts can be problematic at different levels. The term 'inclusive education' has gained familiarity among policy makers, international development agencies and practitioners and appears in a wide range of policy documents, guidelines and strategies, often without clear definition (Graham and Slee, 2008, Armstrong et al., 2010, Slee, 2013, Kozleski et al., 2011, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). This can lead to the assumption that the concept is understood and implemented in a similar way across different contexts. This assumed uniform understanding and acceptance of inclusive education is likely to mask the complexities of its implementation. In reality, very different understandings of what inclusive education is lead to a wide range of, sometimes opposing, implementation strategies and practices which are all called 'inclusive education' (Mitchell and Desai, 2005, Dyson, 2005, Graham and Slee, 2008, Liasidou, 2015). Mitchell and Desai (2005, p. 166) for example found a very wide range of educational provision across Asian countries for children who were previously excluded from education. Johansson (2014) similarly found in India very different practices, all called inclusive education. In some schools, meeting the child's needs through extra support outside the classroom was considered as inclusive education. In other schools it meant all students were learning in the same classroom. The co-existing of these conflicting practices under the name of inclusive education can lead to the acceptance and support of forms of segregation and exclusion, while the official rhetoric in policies and among decision makers continuous to support inclusion. GC4 (General Comment No. 4 to Article 24 of

the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) is very clear that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) requires governments to end all forms of educational exclusion and segregation and to work towards the full realisation of inclusive education, as intended in article 24 (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Assuming a universal understanding of what inclusive education means can furthermore be problematic in the context of international education development. It ignores specific local contextual factors which influence how inclusive education is understood and conceptualized across different contexts. Education reforms as inclusive education, developed predominantly in the Global North, cannot easily be transferred to other contexts (Grimes, 2013, Nguyen et al., 2009, Srivastra et al., 2013, Mitchell, 2005b, Artiles and Dyson, 2005, Kozleski et al., 2011, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). When transferred to another context, inclusive education does not simply replace already existing education approaches. Rather, it is interpreted based on specific contextual factors and merges with existing practices (Mitchell and Desai, 2005). The tension between the global and the local leads to inclusive education interpretations and practices that are complex, unique in each setting and dynamic (Fletcher and Artiles, 2005). The difficulty lies not only in the ignorance of the local historical, social, economic and political factors that shape education systems, but also in the ambiguity of the inclusive education concept itself (Artiles and Dyson, 2005, Brown, 2005, Maudslay, 2014). Precisely since inclusive education has always been strongly influenced by local contextual factors, there is according to Artiles and Dyson (2005) no 'perfect' model of inclusive education to be transferred.

Despite the growing popularity of inclusive education in international education development, the concept remains contested. The continuing criticism and resistance towards inclusive education can limit its implementation in the field (Armstrong et al., 2010). Whereas in the early years, inclusive education was sometimes seen as too difficult or utopian, it is now considered by some as 'tried and failed' (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 112). Warnock (2010) for example believed that a large number of children are unable to learn in a regular classroom. According to her, their learning needs cannot be met in a general education setting and there is a high risk for bullying and stigmatisation. She therefore argues to defend the right to learn, not the right to learn in the same environment as everyone else (Warnock, 2010, p. 36). In the same publication, Norwich

(2010) responded to the arguments of Warnock. He argues that when inclusive education has failed, it was related to shortcomings in the quality of general provision rather than in the concept of inclusive education (Norwich, 2010, p. 74). In his response, Norwich (2010, p. 105) developed a 'model of flexible interacting continua of provision', in which appropriate provision is delivered within an inclusive education framework. The outcomes are special and 'hybrid' school arrangements, which co-exist with inclusion education arrangements. Johansson (2014) similarly argued to move beyond the dualism of mainstream and special schools. She argues for a situated and pragmatic approach in which different strategies and resources are used to educate children with disabilities. Liasidou (2015) and Slee (2001) on the other hand opposed the idea of a continuum of provision from special to inclusive education. They argued that the continuum concept rationalizes special education thinking and practices and allows societies to marginalize or exclude groups of children (Liasidou, 2015, Slee, 2001). Slee (2001) and Barton (1997) had earlier already noted that special schools have no reasons to exist, they only exist because the general education system failed to educate all children.

The continuum concept furthermore ignores the social construction of special educational needs and disability and limits opportunities to search for and remove barriers to learning and participation in the school and wider communities (Liasidou, 2015, Slee, 2001). General Comment 4 on Article 24 of the UNCRPD encourages governments not to sustain two systems of education, a mainstream and special education system. According to GC4, the ultimate goal should be full inclusion of all children with disabilities. The comment furthermore noted that 'in-between strategies' such as partial inclusion or special units within mainstream schools do not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

While the debate continues, these critical voices towards inclusive education do indicate the complexity of the concept and implementation (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) argued that while these debates are ongoing in Northern contexts, countries of the Global South remain under pressure from aid agencies and international donors to implement inclusive education based on models from the Global North. This argument is explored further in the next section 'Neo-Colonialism in Inclusive Education Development' .

Given the difficulties to develop a clear and widely accepted definition of inclusive education, Artiles and Dyson (2005) questioned if inclusive education can be transferred at all, given the complexity of the concept and the strong local influence on its conceptualization and implementation. Local practices of segregation and exclusion however do not have to be accepted uncritically because they are local (Artiles and Dyson, 2005, Loreman, 2008). Artiles and Dyson (2005) suggested changing the processes of policy transfer and policy borrowing into learning processes. They argue that inclusive education is in any context the outcome of historical and cultural choices, meaning that alternative choices were theoretically possible. Barton and Armstrong (2008, p. 6) reminded the field that 'inclusive education is not an end in itself, but a means to an end'. This notion of inclusive education leaves space to explore contextual understandings of inclusive values and of the 'alternative choices' or different models of inclusive education which are theoretically possible and perhaps more appropriate in different contexts. According to Artiles and Dyson (2005) it is possible to develop these theoretically possible alternatives by learning how education, teacher training and inclusion are organised in other contexts. This can create reflective moments, which allow policy makers and practitioners to reflect and discuss upon their own choices and possible alternatives. These learning processes are however a lot more complex than simply transferring and copying educational approaches and models across the world. It requires political willingness and capacity to engage in reflection and improvement processes (Artiles and Dyson, 2005). It also requires time and flexibility to develop alternative education approaches. This might not be encouraged in an era of globalisation and neo-liberalism in education, with pressure to meet international education targets, perform well in international testing and ensure cost-efficiency and efficacy in education. This is explored further in the next section, 'Neo-Colonialism in Inclusive Education Development' (see p. 32).

Implications for the Study

There is a growing recognition in the literature that it is challenging to transfer inclusive education, a concept which is predominantly developed in the Global North, to other contexts. There is less literature available on what inclusive education might mean in different contexts and which implications this has for its implementation (Armstrong et al., 2010, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). There is a need for a more nuanced understanding of inclusive education, which takes the

complexities and realities of education development in the Global South into account, rather than pointing out where and how inclusive education implementation has failed according to Northern standards (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). This study aimed to contribute to the field by examining how inclusive education is understood and conceptualized, implemented and understood in two local primary schools. The study was concerned with the tension between the global development of inclusive education and the local responses when translated into practice at school level. These issues informed research question one, how the concepts of education and inclusion are understood in the case study schools, and research question two, on the contextual factors which impact inclusive education implementation at local level.

Given the complexities in defining inclusive education, especially in a cross-cultural context, it was important to develop a research design which did not start from fixed theoretical concepts, but instead allowed me to be open and reflective about different meanings participants gave to these theoretical concepts. It required me to constantly critically reflect about my own assumptions and be cautious for misunderstandings in the field. The challenges and complexities in developing an appropriate research methodology were significant and shaped the study in different ways. These complexities and challenges are explored under the third research question of this study 'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?'. The research methodology is discussed in Chapter Four (see p. 80).

My personal perspective on inclusive education as a concept developed over the course of the study. Initially, my understanding of inclusive education was based on 'Disability Studies' and theory around 'School Improvement'. In disability studies, inclusive education is viewed as a moral choice, as it is argued that segregated forms of education have a long-term negative impact on people with disabilities (Oliver, 2000, Young and Mintz, 2008). Inclusive education from a school improvement perspective on the other hand does not focus on specific groups of children. It is in its most simple form understood as high quality education for all children (Clough and Corbett, 2000). I developed a broad vision on inclusive education, concerned with system-wide reforms and embedded in values as social justice, rights, participation and belonging. After a long process of engaging with the field and reflexive conversations I became aware of how my initial thinking was restricted by dichotomies. I interpreted practice in the case study schools based on my

personal understanding and the initial literature review either as 'a broad understanding of inclusive education' or as 'disability inclusion'. I categorized for example the thinking form teachers about disability as either as 'ad deficit perspective' or 'a rights-based perspective' and their practice as either 'teacher-centred' or 'child-centred'. This thinking in terms of binaries is still visible in my initial interpretations of the critical incidents (see p. 138). I made rather quick judgements, instead of engaging with the complexities of inclusive education in the case study school contexts. Near the end of this study I develop a more complex understanding of inclusive education as a concept, which allowed to uncover subtleties in the thinking and practice of teachers in the case study schools, which could not always be neatly categorized in the dichotomies which were explored in the literature review.

Neo-colonialism in Inclusive Education Development

Post- and Neo-colonialism

Understanding the dynamics of colonialism can help to understand current pressure on countries of the Global South to comply with global education trends (Grech, 2016, Armstrong et al., 2010). Part of the colonial project involved a civilisation mission, through which 'developed', and thus 'superior', actors helped and civilised the 'underdeveloped others' (Grech, 2016, p. 12). In this civilisation mission the superiority and domination of colonial economies, practices and theory was strengthened, thereby silencing or ignoring alternative theory, knowledge and practice. This domination did not end with the eradication of the colonial era in the twentieth century. Global economic power, dominance in research and theorising and in global policy development remained firmly in the hands of the former colonial powers (Grech, 2016, Armstrong et al., 2010, Senier and Miranda-Galarza, 2016).

Post-colonialism studies what happened after the colonial powers were overthrown or resisted and its continuing impact on policy development and economical and social issues in former colonized countries (Senier and Miranda-Galarza, 2016, Crossley and Tikly, 2004, Tikly, 2004). Crossley and Tikly (2004) criticized the prefix 'post', as 'colonialism is not 'over' (Crossley and Tikly, 2004, p. 148). Tikly (2004) referred to a new kind of imperialism which emerged in the context of

globalisation. This new imperialism involved changes in power structures and the establishment of global and regional economic and political structures after the Second World War. The term 'neo-colonialism' is sometimes used to emphasize these new forms of global power and influence and to refer to more subtle forms of control than the violence and coercion during the colonial period (Crossley and Tikly, 2004, Tikly, 2004, Senier and Miranda-Galarza, 2016).

Neo-colonialism influenced in different ways education development in countries in the Global South. Northern perspectives continue to dominate international debates on inclusive education. There is a continuous, unilateral, transfer of inclusive education theories and implementation strategies from the Global North to the Global South (see also 'Defining Inclusive Education', p. 24). To understand how Northern perspectives continued to influence education development in the South, it is important to take a closer look at the driving force behind neo-colonialism, namely globalisation.

Globalisation

Tikly (2001, p. 156) defined globalisation as 'a set of processes' which involve 'complex deterritorialisation of political and economic relations'. Tikly (2001, p. 156) furthermore emphasized that there is always a power element in globalisation processes. The consequences of globalisation, both positive and negative, are unevenly divided among geopolitical regions (Tikly, 2001). Globalisation has a complex, but significant, influence on education development of national governments across the world (Fletcher and Artiles, 2005, Armstrong et al., 2010). Conflicting global trends, networks, and agencies impact national education development. Different authors (Tikly, 2004, Hardy and Woodcock, 2015, Armstrong et al., 2010) mentioned a dualism in global influences on national education development. On the one hand there is a neo-liberalist trend towards marketisation of education. Agencies as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and World Bank have traditionally promoted the empowerment of the market and minimal role of the state in public services (Tikly, 2004). On the other hand, there is the human-rights framework which puts pressure on national governments by setting international agreements, measurable development targets and providing financial incentives for

national education development according to the human-rights framework. Education is approached as a basic human right and most UN agencies support state interventions to ensure these rights (Tikly, 2004). National education policies in low and middle income countries can be seen as the outcome between these two different sets of global agendas (Tikly, 2001, Hardy and Woodcock, 2015).

Neo-liberal Influences on Inclusive Education

The neo-liberalist influence on education development in Vietnam has remained moderate. Socialist ideologies continue to dominate political, social and economic developments. As a global development discourse, neo-liberalism has however entered Vietnamese policy development. This is for example evident in the economic argumentation in education policy documents. The National Education Strategy 2011-2020 aimed to 'raise the quality of human resources' to 'serve the cause of industrialisation and modernization of the country and develop a knowledge-oriented economy' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012, p. 10). A major education reform, Vietnam New School Model (Vietnam Escuela Nueva, VNEN), supported by the World Bank, aimed to enhance the quality of education to support Vietnam in becoming a successful post-industrial nation and to avoid an economic slowdown or 'middle-income trap' (Parandekar et al., 2017, p. 5).

Neo-liberalism is a political and economic philosophy which originated in the United Kingdom and United States of America (Tamatea, 2005). The central idea is that market forces are efficient in allocating resources, responsive to individual needs and lead to increased standards and public accountability (Barton, 1997, p. 236). Examples of neo-liberal culture in education are an emphasis on individual choice, competition as a strategy to raise quality, high-stakes testing and the use of international performance indicators such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) to measure quality of education (Liasidou, 2015, Mitchell, 2005b). There is a concern that neo-liberal principles reduce complex and value-laden concepts such as quality of education or school effectiveness to quantifiable and measurable indicators, which can lead to unsustainable and superficial results (Tikly, 2004, Tamatea, 2005, Liasidou, 2015).

Inclusive education gained quite late attention in the neo-liberal education discourse (Hardy and Woodcock, 2015), and is mainly justified based on economic arguments. Commonly used arguments are that inclusive schools are more cost effective than special schools (Hardy and Woodcock, 2015, Mitchell, 2005b, Artiles and Dyson, 2005), and that it supports children who were previously excluded from education to become economically productive (Liasidou, 2015, Artiles and Dyson, 2005). Economic arguments like these have a strong impact on policy development, especially in the Global South where resources are limited (Artiles and Dyson, 2005, Mitchell, 2005b). Different authors (Grech, 2016, Liasidou, 2015, Artiles and Dyson, 2005, Barton, 1997, Mitchell and Desai, 2005, Slee, 2013, Hardy and Woodcock, 2015) however pointed at the tensions between a neo-liberal education culture and key values of inclusive education. Governments are encouraged to reduce public expenditure and to allocate available resources to meet pre-determined development goals within a relative short period of time (Grech, 2016). Inclusive education is however a complex process which requires long term implementation strategies and budget allocation for minority groups who might never be fully economically productive. Grech (2016) argued therefore that a broad understanding of values-based inclusive education is not compatible with neo-liberal perspectives on development and education.

Neo-liberal measures in education, such as competition between schools, public ranking of schools and emphasis on parental school choices are furthermore in conflict with key principles of inclusive education (Mitchell and Desai, 2005, Barton, 1997, Slee, 2013, Liasidou, 2015). (Mitchell and Desai, 2005, p. 195) highlighted the tension between the values of 'excellence' and 'equity' and of catering for the needs of the majority and for the needs of the minorities. The ranking of schools based on narrow performance indicators might encourage highly ranked schools to select 'desirable' students and discourage them to accept children with disabilities, who might affect the school's performance rates (Barton, 1997, Slee, 2013, Liasidou, 2015). Teachers, who are often assessed based on the performance of their students in neo-liberal education cultures, might be less motivated to include students who are unlikely to meet the standard criteria (Liasidou, 2015). Pedagogy and curriculum are focussed on 'teaching to the test'. Special schools and all other forms of educational segregation become a 'neo-liberal safety net' for those children who have difficulties in achieving well in high-stakes tests or coping with content-loaded curricula (Liasidou, 2015, p. 14). When children experience difficulties in learning and participation, the focus is placed on individual and family 'deficits' rather than on wider

inequalities in schools or societies (Liasidou, 2015). This is not in line with a broadly defined, rights-based perspective on inclusive education.

Inclusive Education within the Rights-Based Framework

International Legal Framework for Inclusive Education

The human rights framework has had a significant impact on national education development worldwide. Within this framework, inclusive education is conceptualized as a basic right. Education is a human right in itself (art 26) and a mean to achieve other rights, such as the right to be a full member of society (art 22), the right to have an employment (art 23) and the right to have a standard of living adequate to ensure well-being and health (art 25) (UN, 1948). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948 art 26) and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989 art 28) ensure the right of every child, without discrimination, to education. Given the non-discrimination principle in the Human Rights and Child Rights, these conventions also apply to children with disabilities, thus guaranteeing them equal access to education. This was re-affirmed through the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO, 1990) and Dakar Framework on Education for All (UNESCO, 2000). The EFA commitments were formalized into six goals (UNESCO, 2000). The influence of the EFA framework has been significant. It provided the blueprint for national educational development from 2000 onwards (Tamatea, 2005, Armstrong et al., 2010). The EFA goals were summarized and adopted in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (UN, 2000) and the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015).

The rights of people with disabilities always had a complicated place in the human rights framework. Although it is obvious that all human rights apply to people with disabilities as well, there has been little effort in the past to support the realization of the rights of people with disabilities (Grech, 2016). Despite growing awareness and global shift towards a rights-based model of disability, the medical perspective is still dominant in policy development and implementation around the world. Disability is continuously framed as a specialist and individualized issue (Grech, 2016, Chataika and McKenzie, 2016). It has been argued that the broad vision of EFA and MDGs has overlooked children with disabilities (Miles and Singal, 2009,

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Bines and Lei, 2011, Grech, 2016). As a reaction to the continued exclusion and discrimination towards people with disabilities, a set of specific frameworks and conventions was developed (Mittler, 2005, Grech, 2016). These include the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1994), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (UN, 1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) is considered as a milestone in the development of inclusive education (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016, Hardy and Woodcock, 2015). It recognized for the first time that inclusive education is the best approach to provide education for children with disabilities. The statement encouraged governments to develop schools that accommodate all children, in their neighbourhood schools, where they would go if they did not have a disability (UNESCO, 1994). While the Salamanca Statement did raise awareness on inclusive education among policy makers and practitioners, it also linked the inclusion movement strongly with disability and special needs education. It has therefore been unable to challenge the education system as a whole (Miles and Singal, 2009, Grimes et al., 2015). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) re-affirmed again the right of children with disabilities to access mainstream education. Article 24 states that the right to education should be realized without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, through the provision of inclusive education. It mentions furthermore that children cannot be excluded from general education systems based on their disability and that reasonable accommodations need to be provided within the general education systems (UN, 2006). The UNCRPD is the first legally binding document which obligates governments to include children with disabilities in mainstream education (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

The question of how best to address disability and inclusion in the human rights framework remained complex and researchers have provided different perspectives. Different authors (Mittler, 2005, Chataika and McKenzie, 2016, Katsui et al., 2016) argued that it is necessary to adopt a twin-track approach through which the rights of people with disabilities are secured

through their inclusion in generic human rights instruments and by developing disability-specific instruments and initiatives. As disability rights have traditionally been a low priority among governments worldwide it is believed that they will not be automatically mainstreamed, unless there are specific and institutionalised mechanisms to safeguard and monitor the rights of people with disabilities (Katsui et al., 2016, Chataika and McKenzie, 2016). Chataika and McKenzie (2016) however noted that disability-specific polices and interventions can become a barrier to full inclusion when they become a goal in itself and the larger socio-economic context is no longer considered. Grech (2016) is concerned with the continuous absence of disability issues in general rights frameworks and education goals. While the disability-specific policies and conventions had an important impact on disability policy development, they have also kept disability outside of the mainstream development terrain. Disability was not a cross-cutting theme in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and has as a result been largely ignored in development reports and initiatives in the past decades (Grech, 2016). The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (UN, 2015) did attempt with goal four, 'Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All' (UN, 2015), to address the lack of focus on marginalized groups, and promote inclusive education. While this is a step forwards, disability is not yet fully recognized as a human rights issue. Disability mainstreaming is not a goal on itself, as gender equality is (goal 5) (Grech, 2016). Armstrong et al. (2010) and Ainscow et al. (2006) on the other hand critiqued the targeted approach of the EFA goals. The Dakar Framework of Action for example specified 'all' as including 'the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health, and those with special learning needs' (UNESCO, 2000, p. 14). Similar lists of disadvantaged children have been copied into many national EFA laws and programmes around the world. Armstrong et al. (2010) argued that by defining 'all' as a list of specific target groups, confusion was created. Instead of rethinking the education system as a whole and initiating fundamental reforms to increase access and quality for all, EFA was approached as a series of 'add-on' programmes (Armstrong et al., 2010). As barriers and exclusion to education happen locally, instead of internationally defining target groups, it would have been more useful to research local factors leading to exclusion and segregation (Ainscow et al., 2006, Slee, 2013).

The international legal framework has placed a considerable pressure on countries to sign the agreements and meet, mainly donor-driven, education targets. The UN agencies have been powerful in promoting inclusive education through research, advocacy for policy development and funding of development programmes (Armstrong et al., 2010). Non-compliance is not an option for countries that need external support (Caddell, 2005, Gabel and Danforth, 2008b). Nguyen et al. (2012, p. 141) considered this as a form of neo-colonialism, 'the perpetuation of a colonial mind-set under the pressure of financial loans'. The relationship between countries of the Global North and Global South in international policy development and development target setting has been unequal. International agencies as the World Bank and UN agencies tend to favour neo-liberal and individual approaches from the Global North (Chataika and McKenzie, 2016). King and Palmer (2013) for example mapped the complex consultation process leading to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). They noticed that the discussion was dominated by, what they call, 'the Aid-Industry', Northern international bodies, including NGOs, think tanks, consultancy firms and development agencies. As a result, the SDGs largely reflect issues, and thus funding, central in their own operations. This includes a strong focus on 'pre-primary education', 'quality' and 'life-long learning'. A focus on 'skills for work', a concern of many parties in the Global South, was much later added to the debate. The assumption that there is an international consensus on education goals therefore masks inequalities in opportunities to participate in decision-making (Caddell, 2005). King and Palmer (2013) concluded that aid remains a Northern domain, about donors and recipients.

It has been argued that policymakers, under pressure to meet international and time-bound education targets, often prefer the 'quick fix' of borrowing policies and approaches from the Global North instead of waiting for research to find out whether these policies and practices would actually work in the new context (Nguyen et al., 2012, Thanh, 2014, Carrington et al., 2016, Sharma et al., 2013, Gabel and Danforth, 2008b). (Tan and Chua, 2015) nuanced neo-colonial pressure to borrow education policies and practices from elsewhere. They placed 'policy borrowing' in a continuum of educational transfers from imposed educational transfers at the one end, to voluntary adoption of foreign approaches, models and discourses at the other end. This voluntary adoption is often driven by a desire to perform well in international testing and national

assessment (Tan and Chua, 2015). Others argued that the human rights framework, Education For All goals and related education approaches are so pervasive that there is little room to think about alternatives (Tamatea, 2005, Caddell, 2005, Gabel and Danforth, 2008b). The need to contextualize concepts as inclusive education in national policy development and practice has been well documented (Srivastra et al., 2013, Forlin, 2013, Grimes et al., 2012, Goldstein, 2004, Grimes et al., 2015, Forlin and Ming-Gon, 2008, Armstrong et al., 2010). It is necessary to allow time to thoroughly study contextual complexities, to research which authentic approaches already exist to support education reforms and how the reforms will fit within the existing institutional framework (Nguyen et al., 2012, Artiles and Dyson, 2005, Forlin, 2010b). National policies need to incorporate flexibility which allows for space at the local level to develop meaning and ownership of educational changes (Grimes et al., 2012). This flexibility and time to develop contextual meaningful targets and policies is seldom an option for countries in the Global South.

Neo-colonialism within education development from a human rights perspective is paired with 'a false universalism'. The human rights framework is often considered as neutral and applicable in any given context. Underlying values in rights-based education development initiatives, such as 'equity', 'social justice' and 'human rights,' are taken for granted and presented as if they have a universal meaning (Armstrong et al., 2010). Katsui et al. (2016, p. 194) argued however that '… there are no politics-free zones where stakeholders can unite in terms of absolute good'. Stakeholders inevitably bring their own cultural, social, economic, political and historical background to discussions about international conventions, policies and targets. Abstracting human rights, international policies and targets and their underlying values also masks the difficulties when translating the supposedly neutral and apolitical principles and policies into local contexts which are far from neutral and strongly influenced by different socio-economic, historical and political factors (Artiles and Dyson, 2005). Artiles and Dyson (2005) argued that the rights-based concept of inclusive education is not only about the rights of learners, but also about how these rights should be delivered. International aid is often linked with acceptance of specific views on education and development (Gabel and Danforth, 2008b). Perspectives from the Global North on individual uniqueness and entitlements and how education should be accommodating this uniqueness dominated education policy development and implementation worldwide (Artiles and Dyson, 2005, Senier and Miranda-Galarza, 2016, Chataika and McKenzie, 2016). Tamatea (2005) argued for example that, although presented as neutral and universal, the Education For

All framework is deeply rooted in neo-liberal worldviews. While the EFA goals were developed from a human rights perspective, it has been linked to a neo-liberal strategy to achieve these goals. Notions as 'quality', 'transparency' and 'accountability' for example directly emerged from a neo-liberal liberal audit culture (Tamatea, 2005). There is a concern that within this perspective complex educational concepts such as quality of education, inclusion or learning progress are reduced to quantifiable and decontextualized indicators (Tamatea, 2005, Armstrong et al., 2010). Since the EFA framework and related implementation strategy are so dominant in international and national education development, there is almost no space for alternative ways of thinking. According to Tamatea (2005, p. 326), this has resulted in a 'McDonaldisation' of education development. All over the world very similar education programmes are set up to reach the same targets, regardless of the context in which they are implemented.

Implications for the Study

The literature on neo-colonialism in international education development not only challenged how perspectives of the Global North influenced policy development in the Global South, but also how research on this topic continued to be dominated by research traditions, frameworks, interpretations and theories developed in the Global North (Crossley and Tikly, 2004, Tikly, 2004). This raised a series of challenges for me as a qualitative researcher. I wanted, as a European and in many ways an outside researcher, represent the voices of Vietnamese teachers in such a way that allowed their voices to be heard and avoided speaking for them. After reading more literature about neo-colonialism in education development and research, I became aware that my initial approach to this study was rather problematic and would lead to 'speaking for' teachers. I positioned myself as 'outsider looking in' (for further exploration of my position in the field, see 'Positionality', p. 85). I aimed to register and analyse what happened in the case study schools, while distancing myself from the field in an attempt to remain neutral. The concept of 'polyvocality', as explored by Coffey (1999, p. 188 and 129) has helped to become aware and address this form of neo-colonialism in this study. Through presenting the researcher perspective alongside with perspectives of others in a more equal way, researchers avoid 'giving voice to others'. Polyvocality provides space to explore multiple versions and multiple realities. The

reflexive thread throughout this thesis way in which the data is presented through the critical incidents aimed to bring polyvocality in this study.

 I furthermore wanted to explore the extent to which Vietnamese realities could be analysed by using theory from the Global North. I realised that it was important that I found a way to include Vietnamese interpretations in the analysis. These challenges helped to shape the research design and methodology (see also 'Chapter Four – Methodology', p. 80). The adopted strategies for example included an open and flexible approach to data collection and analysis, reflexivity about my own assumptions, frequent discussions with Vietnamese and foreign critical friends and including different perspectives in the data presentation.

The next chapter 'Chapter Three – Inclusive education in Vietnam' explores how inclusive education was developed and implemented in Vietnam and how this related to international literature on inclusive education implementation.

Chapter Three - Inclusive Education in Vietnam

Introduction

This chapter explores critical issues in implementing inclusive education in Vietnam. It discusses tensions in how inclusive education is conceptualized and implemented in Vietnam, and how this relates to international literature on key factors in inclusive education implementation. The literature review indicated that Vietnam made progress towards inclusive education with a wide range of supportive policies and increased enrolment of previously excluded groups of children. It is argued in this chapter that there are however challenges in linking inclusive education with Confucian and communist values.

When re-reading this chapter in the final stage of the writing process, I became aware that this literature chapter on education in Vietnam might somehow be problematic. Based on the extensive literature review, experience in the field and conversations with critical friends I became more aware of how neo-colonialism is sometimes manifested in cross-cultural education research. The initial version of this chapter was very much written from the perspective of 'an outsider looking in'. I acknowledge that to some extend this initial perspective is still visible in this chapter. I am inevitably in many ways an outside researcher (for further exploration of my position in the field, see 'Positionality', p. 85). With the help of a network of Vietnamese peer researchers, I was able to include more publications from Vietnamese researchers in this chapter. Where relevant, I also added publications from researchers from similar contexts, mainly China and Hong Kong. I decided to keep this literature review chapter on inclusive education in Vietnam, as it might be helpful for readers who are less familiar with the context and to provide an overview of some of the key concepts which influenced my thinking when developing the research design, approaching the field and interpreting the data.

The chapter starts with a brief introduction of education in Vietnam, to set the general background. The chapter continues with exploring inclusive education conceptualisation and implementation, structured around four main themes 'Inclusive policies', 'Inclusive cultures', 'Inclusive practices' and 'Resources for inclusive education'. The key learning from this chapter is

briefly summarised in 'Implications for the study'. The last section summarizes the emerging key themes from the literature review in Chapter Two and Three.

Education in Vietnam

The Education Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019) forms the basis of the Vietnamese education system. Vietnam's education system includes early childhood education (including nursery, kindergarten and pre-school), for children from 3 months to 6 years old. Early childhood education is followed by 5 years of primary education (grade 1-5). Secondary education is divided into 2 levels: lower secondary (grade 6-9) and upper secondary (grade 10-12). After completing upper secondary, students can enter higher education (college or university). Students can enter various vocational training programmes after completing primary, lower secondary or higher secondary education (MoET, 2014). Education is compulsory for children between 5 and 14 years old (UNESCO UIS, 2020), and mostly delivered through public schools (UNESCO IBE, 2011).

Since the mid 1990s, the Vietnamese education system has made progress towards international indicators. The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) claimed to have achieved universal primary education in 2000 (MoET, 2014). MoET is currently working towards universalisation of pre-primary education (for children of 5 years old) and states that in some cities and provinces universal lower secondary education has already been achieved (MoET, 2014). The net enrolments at pre-primary education level has increased from 72% in 2001 (MoET, 2014) to 78.5% in 2013 (UNESCO UIS, 2020). At primary school level the net enrolment rate increased from 95.9% in 2007 (MoET, 2014) to 97.97% in 2013 (UNESCO UIS, 2020). More girls (98.12%) than boys (94.04%) make it to the last grade of primary school (UNESCO UIS, 2020). The drop-out rate decreased from 3.3% in 2006 to 0.12% in 2013, and the completion rate increased from 83.6% in 2005 to 92.2% in 2013 (MoET, 2014). Nearly all students (99.79%) transition from primary to lower secondary education (UNESCO UIS, 2020). Although Vietnam's progress in education during the past two decades appeared to be impressive, it might be necessary to be cautious when interpreting the statistics. London (2011) for example critiqued the strong focus on increases in school enrolment as an indicator of progress. He argued that the Vietnamese government has placed such importance on access to education to measure performance, that it might be likely

that Vietnamese officials and teacher have exaggerated enrolment figures or allowed students to graduate, regardless of their learning outcomes (London, 2011).

In addition, not everyone seemed to be benefiting equally from the increased access to education. There are no clear data on the number children with disabilities who access education. According to NCCD (2010) 28% of the children with disabilities went to school in 2008. MoET (2014) reports that in 2013, 68,711 children with disabilities were going to school at primary school level, which would be only 5% of all identified children with disabilities. UNICEF and General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2018) on the other hand claimed that net school attendance rate for children with disabilities at primary school level was 81.7% in 2018. Since the methodology in the report is lacking, it is difficult to know why the estimated of school attendance among children with disabilities is so much higher than indicated in previous data sets. Children with disabilities who did access education have a higher risk to drop out before completing primary education, with drop-out rates for children with disabilities up to 60% in some provinces (Le et al., 2007). In comparison, according to MoET data the national drop-out rate at primary school was 0.12% in 2013 (MoET, 2014). In 2008 only 0.91% of the children with disabilities entered lower secondary education (NCCD, 2010), while the national net enrolment rate in lower secondary education that year was 82.7% (MoET, 2014). It seemed likely that children with disabilities are not accurately represented in the national education statistics, which report nearly universal enrolment in education.

The differences in education access among ethnic groups furthermore raised questions with the overly optimistic education statistics. The Population and Household Census of 2009 showed that there are differences in school enrolment rate among children from different ethnic groups. While the overall enrolment rate for primary school in 2009 was 95.5%, among Khmer children it was 87.4% and 72.6% among Mong children (UNFPA, 2011). Other ethnic minorities seemed to have better access to education, with primary school enrolment rates of 97.5% for Tay children, 92.7% for Thai children and 95.7% for Muong children (UNFPA, 2011). The gap in school access widened at higher education level. In 2009 the overall enrolment rate at lower secondary was 82,6%. For children from the Khmer ethnic minority this is only 46.3% and for children from the Mong ethnic minority 34.1% (UNFPA, 2011). MoET claims that this gap was closed by 2012/13 (MoET, 2014). In contrast, Nguyen et al. (2013) concluded based on their analysis of Education For All data in

Vietnam that the education gap between children in rural and urban areas and between ethnic minorities and the rest of the population was growing.

Inclusive Education in Vietnam

This section provides an overview of key themes in the literature on inclusive education in Vietnam to develop a deeper understanding of the context of the case study schools. Where applicable, international literature on inclusive education implementation is discussed to place the developments in Vietnam in a broader context. The purpose is not to evaluate the progress of inclusive education implementation in Vietnam. Progress towards inclusive education has been slow everywhere. Armstrong et al. (2010, p. 26) for example argued that inclusive education did not meet the 'great expectations from the 1990s'. Despites numerous international conventions and large investments in Education For All programmes by international development agencies, millions of children with disabilities still do not have access to basic education in the Global South and many children with disabilities in the Global North are still segregated from mainstream education (Gabel and Danforth, 2008b, Grimes et al., 2015, Armstrong et al., 2010). The implementation of inclusive education policies in practice remained low (Grimes et al., 2015, Armstrong et al., 2010, Mitchell, 2005b) and overall there have not been fundamental changes to make education systems more inclusive and to remove discriminatory and other barriers (Grimes et al., 2015, Slee, 2013). This chapter provides some insights in the achievements and challenges in the progress towards inclusive education in Vietnam.

While the themes are presented separately, I recognize they are all interlinked. Inclusive education implementation requires a comprehensive system-wide reform of education systems with simultaneous interventions and changes in education policies, culture, and practice (Liasidou, 2015, Bines and Lei, 2007, Graham and Slee, 2008, Armstrong et al., 2010, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). This makes inclusive education implementation very complex, as Liasidou (2015, p. 163) mentioned '…the process of educational change towards the realization of an inclusive discourse is a chaotic, unpredictable and multidimensional endeavour'.

Inclusive Policies

The Vietnamese government is committed to achieve international education targets and realized additional efforts are needed to reach previously excluded groups of children (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012). Inclusive education promised access for all children to education, which is attractive for policy makers who aim to meet international Education for All goals (Kozleski et al., 2011). The Vietnamese government developed a wide-range of policies to support the implementation of inclusive education (UNICEF, 2015). The right to education for all children in Vietnam was established through the Constitution of 1992 and its amendments (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992) and the Education Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019). The commitment of the government to provide education for all is reconfirmed with the 'National Education for All (EFA) Action Plan 2003 – 2015' and its revision in 2012 (Harris, 2012). Inclusive education is furthermore regulated through the signatory of international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006). The Vietnam Disability Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2010) is considered as a key document as it mentioned inclusive education for the first time in a binding law.

Despites the commitment of the government and the wide range of available policy documents, there are remaining challenges at policy level to implement inclusive education. The inclusive education policies in Vietnam were developed as a set of 'add-ons' to the Education Law. Additional policy documents such as 'Decision 23 on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities' (MoET, 2006a), 'Circular 42 on Education for People with Disabilities' (MoET et al., 2013) and 'Circular 39 on Inclusive Education for Children in Difficult Circumstances' (MoET, 2009) provided guidelines and strategies for teachers on how to teach specific groups of children, without changing the key principles of the Education law. The additional policy documents promoted a mainly individualized approach for inclusive education implementation. Decision 23 stated for example that each child with disabilities in mainstream schools needs to have an individual education plan. It allowed children with disabilities to start education at a later age and mentioned their eligibility for reduced or exempted school fees. The decision furthermore stipulated there should be no more than three children with the same type of impairment per

school and each class with children with disabilities can be reduced in number by five children (MoET, 2006a). Circular 42 reinforced these guidelines and clarified that teachers can reduce or exempt parts of the curriculum for children with disabilities (MoET et al., 2013). There is not much evidence of policies and programmes aiming at system-wide change. Programmes aiming at general education reform, such as the Vietnam New School Model (World Bank, 2012) and the EFA action plan (Harris, 2012) did not, or only sporadically, mention about inclusive education. It has been argued that the targeted and individualized approaches reduced complex socio-economic, cultural, political and historical issues, as educational access, to individual problems. The wider education system and barriers which created unequal access remain unaddressed (Nguyen et al., 2013).

The large amount of policy documents related to inclusive education, each with slightly different definitions, made it unclear what inclusive education actually means in Vietnam. This can create confusion at implementation level. In the National Action Plan on Education For All (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2003) the government defined inclusive education for example as:

> 'An education approach aimed at extending access to formal education, in the classroom, to all children, especially those who have tended to not attend formal schooling. These include children with physical disabilities, children with learning and/or mental disabilities and children who are traditionally more likely not to enrol or drop out from school for various reasons, including economic constraints, culture, gender inequalities and children from ethnic minority backgrounds with limited understanding of the language of instruction.'

Circular 39 on Inclusive Education for Children in Difficult Circumstances (MoET, 2009), used a similar inclusive education definition:

> 'An educational approach to meet individual educational needs of all children in pre-school education, general education, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, economic conditions, social background, life circumstances and study conditions'

The circular described 'children in difficult circumstances' as 'children from ethnic minority families who don't speak Vietnamese, orphans and street children' (MoET, 2009). The Disability Law of 2010 (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2010), reduced inclusive education to the following narrow concept:

'a mode of education, integrating persons with disabilities with persons without disabilities in educational institutes.'

The updated Education Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019) seemed to open the concept again:

'Inclusive education is an educational method aiming to meet different needs and abilities of learners; ensure equal learning rights, education quality, suitable with the needs, characteristics and capacity of learners; respect diversity and differences of learners and avoid discrimination.'

The law however continued to target 'children with special backgrounds' and children with disabilities with inclusive education (art 15). Such targeted focus on inclusive education conceptualisation has been problematised, as it encourages and add-on approach rather than system-wide reforms to increase quality education for all (Armstrong et al., 2010).

The confusion is further aggravated by a lack of a clear strategic choice for inclusive education at policy level. The Disability Law for example prohibited discrimination in education access based on disability. The law however continued to support segregated forms of education, depending on the 'suitability' and 'personal development' of children with disabilities (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2010 art. 28). While the Disability Law promoted inclusive education as the main mode of education for children with disabilities, the government has committed itself with the Education Strategy 2011 – 2020 (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012) to invest more in segregated education options for 'children with disabilities, children with HIV/AIDS, street children and other disadvantaged children'. The updated Education Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019) similarly promoted inclusive education and the encouraged segregated special schools for ethnic minorities (art 61), gifted children (art 62) and children with disabilities (art 63).

It has been argued that contradictions between education policies, guidelines and strategies can limit inclusive education implementation (Ainscow, 1999). GC4 recommends national governments to not only develop policies to support inclusive education implementation, but also to review existing policies and practices to ensure alignment with the UNCRPD and remove all kinds of discrimination towards people with disabilities (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Confusion at policy level has been linked to the ambiguous and contested nature of the inclusive education concept itself (Armstrong et al., 2010, Liasidou, 2015). The

concepts of 'integrative education' and 'inclusive education' are often misunderstood and used interchangeably in inclusive education policies (Bines and Lei, 2007, Liasidou, 2015). This ambiguity and confusion at policy level can lead to situations where countries embrace the inclusive education rhetoric, while still defending practices of segregated education for children with disabilities (Gabel and Danforth, 2008b, Armstrong et al., 2010, Mitchell, 2005b). This is evident in Vietnam with the increased popularity of special education, despites the government commitment towards inclusive education. The number of children with disabilities in special schools increased from 9,239 in 2009 to 16,000 in 2013, while the number of children with disabilities in inclusive schools decreased from 147,929 in 2009 to 52,711 in 2013 (MoET, 2014).

Bines and Lei (2007) formulated a number of recommendations for inclusive education policy development based on a review of 28 Country Education Sector Plans for disability responsiveness. They emphasized that the concept of inclusive education should be clearly defined in policy documents and consistent through all related guidelines and materials. Bines and Lei (2007) further recommended a participatory process to develop inclusive education policies to ensure the voices of all involved stakeholders, including people with disabilities, are heard. Such participatory process is according to Tan and Chua (2015) necessary to link international policies and conventions with existing local knowledge and the reality of classroom practices. Since inclusive education is such a complex concept, requiring simultaneous interventions at different domains, it is recommended for Ministries of Education, Health, Social Welfare and Employment to collaborate, with as shared goal full implementation of the UNCRPD and inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society (Bines and Lei, 2007, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). To reinforce practical implementation, Bines and Lei (2007) recommended furthermore developing realistic policies and targets, which are accompanied by sufficient budget allocation and rearrangement of existing resources.

Comprehensive inclusive education policies with clearly defined concepts and intervention strategies however do not yet guarantee an easy implementation or shared understanding at field level (Armstrong et al., 2010, Bines and Lei, 2007, Tan and Chua, 2015). Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) argued that teachers do no simply undergo education reforms. They approached teachers as active agents, who interpret and mediate policies based on contextual factors, situated

knowledge, previous experiences and personal values. Tan and Chua (2015) showed how in China, a context with a strong top down structure and tendency of policy adherence, teachers maintained their traditional values throughout various education reforms, even though these values were sometimes in conflict with the education reforms. Teachers make day-to-day decisions in their classrooms which influence policy implementation. Issues as working in large classrooms, having to deal with inflexible curricula, cover content-loaded curricula, a shortage of teaching and learning materials or concerns of the home situation and support of the students, have a significant impact on how teacher view and ultimately implement education policies (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). The active engagement of teachers with education policies makes the implementation process unpredictable. Teachers become 'both policy actors *and* subjects' (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016, p. 207).

Inclusive Cultures

School Culture

Researchers (Ainscow, 1999, Corbett, 2001, Grimes et al., 2012, Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Fink and Stoll, 2007, Howes et al., 2009a) emphasized the importance of developing inclusive values and school cultures for sustainable implementation of inclusive education. The earlier efforts to implement inclusive education focussed on ensuring access to education and removing physical barriers. These efforts ignored however the cultural, emotional and moral aspect of inclusion (Corbett, 2001). Dyson (2000) argued that when inclusive education focuses only on removing barriers, it is very likely that new, more subtle barriers will emerge.

It can be problematic to define what school culture and values are, since much of school culture is implicit and teachers are sometimes not fully aware of their own values and the implication this might have for their practice (Fink and Stoll, 2007, Carrington and Robinson, 2006). Kugelmass (2004) updated the 3-dimensial model of culture from Hall (1983) to analyse inclusive school cultures. In her model, dimension one represented the visible technical level. It included the

educational practice and combined physical arrangements, displayed artefacts and verbal and non-verbal language used at the school. Dimension two, the private level, included the identified values and beliefs which influence the school practice. They are shared by the members of the school and can be observed in the everyday life and interactions at the school. Dimension three, the implicit level, referred to the underlying culture which forms the foundation for the beliefs and actions at the school (Kugelmass, 2004). Corbett (2001, p. 45) called this 'deep culture', which included 'acted-out values'. It is the level where students 'either feel marginalized or valued' (Corbett, 2001, p. 45). Schein (2010) explained the deep level of culture as assumptions that are 'so taken for granted that someone who does not hold them is viewed as a "foreigner" or as "crazy" and is automatically dismissed' (Schein, 2010, p. 23).

The literature remained relatively vague on how inclusive school cultures look like. GC4 mentioned that inclusive cultures encourage collaboration, interaction and problem-solving to develop accessible and supportive school environments for all (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Corbett (2001) found that within the inclusive schools involved in her research, there was a culture of openness, self-reflection, sharing, flexibility and collaboration between teachers and with the students and parents. The Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2016) has been used worldwide as a tool to help schools in identifying inclusive values and to translate these values into inclusive practice. Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) argued that developing inclusive school cultures and values is more complicated than often assumed. The literature often presents teachers' attitudes and values in an oversimplified way, assuming homogeneous attitudes towards children with disabilities and inclusion (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) however found in their research on inclusive education implementation in South Africa that the involved teachers had conflicting values and opinions regarding teaching children with disabilities in their classrooms. Nguyen et al. (2006) similarly found a discrepancy between what Vietnamese teachers believe is good education, reflecting Western models of child-centred pedagogy, and what they actually do in their classrooms, which remained teacher-centred. According to Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) it is necessary to do more research on the situated values and priorities which influence teaching practice to understand better how teachers make everyday decisions in their classrooms.

Cultural Influences on Education in Vietnam

It is important to not only look at values and culture within schools, but also how the wider cultural context influences what happens inside schools (Armstrong et al., 2010). This section discusses some of the cultural influences on education in Vietnam.

Traditional Values

Vietnam was under Chinese colonial rule from the 10th to the 19th century. Chinese philosophies and religions as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism therefore had a deep influence on the Vietnamese culture and education system (Doan, 2005). Truong and Hallinger (2015) argued that although globalization influenced Vietnamese culture, Confucian traditions remain to have a strong influence upon the Vietnamese culture today. The concept of 'Confucian Heritage Culture' (CHC) is generally understood as cultural contexts that have been influenced by Confucian principles, such as China, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam and Japan (Ryan, 2010, Waldmann, 2000). Confucian philosophy is based on the writings of Confucius (551-479 BCE). Confucius aimed to create a philosophy to bring harmony and order in the society based on a set of practical rules for daily life (Waldmann, 2000, Katyal and King, 2014, Thanh, 2014). Harmony is to be achieved through family relationships, which are hierarchical. People are expected to accept their status within their family and society (Mitchell and Desai, 2005, Burr, 2014). Superiors must guide and love inferiors, who on their turn should obey their superiors (Burr, 2014). Individuals are thus expected to develop as social beings, elements of families and society (Mitchell and Desai, 2005), who show loyalty for their superiors, conform with social rules, strive for harmony and control their emotions (Katyal and King, 2014).

Confucian values and norms have often been placed in contrast with Western values and norms (Ryan and Louie, 2007). This encouraged strong stereotypes towards learners from both Western and Confucian Heritage cultures. I discussed some of these stereotypes in this section as I believed this was relevant in the context of this study. My main critical friend (see also 'Relationship with the Interpreter', p. 96 and 'The Role of Critical Friends in Data Analysis', p. 108) often referred to similar contrasts between Western and Confucian educational practices when discussing field events. After briefly exploring some of the common stereotypes I discussed why I as a researcher

do not fully agree with placing Western and Confucian education systems and cultures as opposite concepts against each other.

Teachers in CHC have been described as authorities who guide students through increasing their knowledge (Saito and Tsukui, 2008). Teachers are viewed as role models of correct behaviour and are respected by their students (Nguyen et al., 2006). Knowledge is considered as a fixed set of information, rather than as constructed in dialogue and discovery (Nguyen et al., 2012, Tan and Chua, 2015). Teachers are expected to hold all knowledge and transfer this to their students. Students are not expected to question or challenge this knowledge (Thanh, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2006). Ryan (2010, p. 43) summarized some of the most common stereotypes towards learners from Western and Confucian cultures in the following table:

Western education	Confucian education
Deep learners	Surface or root learners
Independent learners	Dependence on the teacher
Critical thinking	'Follow the master'
Student-centred learning	Respect for the teacher
Adversarial stance	Harmony
Argumentative learners	Passive learners
Achievement of the individual	Achievement of the group
Constructing new knowledge	Respect for historical texts

The perceived fundamental differences between Western and Confucian education made some researchers (Nguyen, 2015, Thanh, 2014, Tan and Chua, 2015) wonder if education reforms based on Western approaches are possible or even desirable in Southeast Asian schools. Especially the transformation from teacher-centred to child-centred pedagogy is considered as complicated in CHC schools. Educational reform towards child-centred pedagogy are crucial in inclusive education implementation (Rose, 2008, Croft, 2010). Nguyen et al. (2012) argued that these kinds of transformations are difficult in CHC schools as it might conflict with traditional roles and positions of teachers and students. They placed teachers as 'guru of knowledge' in Confucian classrooms versus a 'facilitator of knowledge' in Western classrooms and 'ultimate figure of

authority in the classroom' versus 'a classroom coordinator' (Nguyen et al., 2012). The impact of CHC on education reforms will be explored more in the section 'Inclusive Practices' (see p. 58).

My own position towards the debate on the differences between Western and Confucian education systems leans towards the arguments of researchers as Tikly (2004), Ryan and Louie (2007) and Thanh (2014). According to Tikly (2004, p. 187) there is a tendency to view non-Western cultures as 'fixed', with little change over time. Current trends or differences based on gender, socio-economic status or ethnicity are often ignored. As any culture, Confucian Heritage Cultures are dynamic and changing, based on shifting social contexts, ideologies, economic developments and interactions with other cultures (Thanh, 2014, Ryan and Louie, 2007). Rather than focusing on stereotypes about CHC students and debates on the compatibility of education reforms with Confucian values, the full complexity of influences on schools, teachers and students should be embraced (Ryan, 2010). I too do consider culture as dynamic and one of the many influences on educational practices. As I researcher, I found the stereotypes of both Confucian and Western learners, teachers and education practices rather restrictive in interpreting field events. The critical incidents (see p. 138) aimed to explore the complex interplay of different contextual factors and how these influence thinking and practice of teachers in the case study schools.

Socialist Values

From its onset, the Vietnamese education system has been heavily politicized and the subject of political struggle. During the French colonisation (1858-1945), the Confucian education system was replaced by a French - Vietnamese system, which introduced Western-style education in Vietnam (MoET, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2013, London, 2011). The aim was to train Vietnamese people to serve in the colonial administrative system, in a way which would not undermine French colonial power (MoET, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2013, London, 2011). The education reforms by the French colonisers were however conceived by many as an attack on Vietnamese culture and traditions. Thus, instead of supporting the colonial administration, the French-Vietnamese education system stirred anti-colonial sentiment (London, 2011). Prominent future political leaders, such as Ho Chi Minh, studied in the French-Vietnamese schools. After continuing their

studies abroad, they returned to Vietnam to lead the resistance against the French (London, 2011). During the anti-colonial war, the Viet Minh army set up 'guerrilla-style' education campaigns to educate the people and unite different ethnic groups (London, 2011).

After the independence from France in 1945, president Ho Chi Minh declared 'fighting against hunger, against illiteracy and against enemy invasions' as the three key priorities for the newly established national government (MoET, 2014, p. 6). The Vietnamese education system developed as two separated systems during the American war (1955-1975) (Duggan, 2001, London, 2011). Education in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Northern Vietnam, was modelled after the Soviet education system. Education in the Republic of Vietnam, Southern Vietnam, followed a mixture of American and French influences (Doan, 2005). After the war and re-unification of Vietnam (1975) the two education systems unified and followed the Northern model (Doan, 2005, London, 2011). The Soviet education model resulted in a strong focus on knowledge transmission and reproduction, heavy emphasis on literature, celebration of national symbols and heroes and standardisation of teaching and assessment (Tan and Chua, 2015, London, 2011). Several education reforms in the past two decades have attempted to modernize the Vietnamese curriculum. Researchers have argued that Vietnamese education remained however politicized, due to the strong presence of the Communist Party in schools (London, 2011, Truong and Hallinger, 2015, Tran et al., 2017).

The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) remains strongly present in all public schools and maintains control over the school management (London, 2011, Truong and Hallinger, 2015, Tran et al., 2017). In each school there is a Communist Party Committee (CPC). The CPC has the final word on any school matter. The Committee is led by the School Party Secretary. Although in theory the positions of School Party Secretary and School Director are different, in most schools both functions are filled by the same person (Truong and Hallinger, 2015). The school director thus represents the voice of the Communist Party of Vietnam in schools. Truong and Hallinger (2015) found this had implications for the leadership and collaboration culture in Vietnamese schools. Criticism of leadership and the Party is commonly not accepted in Vietnam. All stakeholders in the study of Truong and Hallinger (2015) believed that order and obedience were necessary to ensure efficient school management. Tran et al. (2017) and Mitchell and Desai (2005) argued furthermore that socialist values in education might be at odds with core values

underpinning education reforms, such as inclusive education. Mitchell and Desai (2005) stated for example that in Chinese schools, values as 'duty' and 'loyalty' are more important than 'individuality'. Therefore, individual differences between children were not considered in the development of the curriculum and in teaching and learning approaches (Mitchell and Desai, 2005).

International Influences

Vietnam faced a steep economic crisis in the years following the American war, due to continuous conflicts and military expenses in Cambodia and China, rigid implementation of the communist ideology and international isolation (ODI, 2011, Lawrence, 2008, World Bank, 2006, Tsuboi, 2007). There was insufficient budget to fund the national education system. As a result, the size and quality of education decreased rapidly (World Bank, 2006, London, 2011). The government issued a set of policies, called the 'Doi Moi' (Recovery) and 'Mo Cua' (Open Door) policies to respond to the economic crisis (ODI, 2011, Tsuboi, 2007). The policies gradually reformed the Vietnamese economy from a centralized subsidised system to a more market-based economy and brought significant economic, human and social development (Tsuboi, 2007, ODI, 2011).

Within the spirit of the Doi Moi and Mo Cua policies, the government began to reform the national education system in the mid 1980s (MoET, 2014). The education reforms aimed on the one hand to respond to the economic growth, which required a higher skilled workforce with competences as creativity, independence, flexibility and team work (Thanh, 2014). Researchers (Tran et al., 2017, Nguyen et al., 2013, London, 2011) have argued therefore that the education reforms following the Doi Moi marked the introduction of neo-liberalism and marketisation in Vietnamese education. The main education reforms included the collection of tuition fees at all education levels, socialization (interpreted as mobilizing funds from families, communities and private organisations), updating the heavy and rigid curriculum and allowing private kindergartens (Doan, 2005, Thao and Boyd, 2014). On the other hand, the education reforms aimed to seek international integration by adopting international education policies and targets. The Mo Cua policies allowed the Vietnamese education system to draw from Western education approaches (Truong and Hallinger, 2015). Some of these reforms included a move away from a teacher-

centred to a child-centred pedagogy (Thanh, 2014, Hamano, 2008, Thao and Boyd, 2014) and the implementation of methods such as cooperative group learning (Thanh, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2012) and formative assessment (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015). It has been argued that the values underlying the education reforms have not blended well with the existing values in Vietnamese education (Nguyen and Hall, 2017, Nguyen et al., 2013, Thao and Boyd, 2014, Thanh, 2014, Tran et al., 2017). The education reforms have therefore not always been received positively at school and community level (Nguyen and Hall, 2017, Thao and Boyd, 2014). Nguyen et al. (2013, p. 78) argued that because of policy-borrowing and copying of the Western education approaches, the Vietnamese education system has remained 'imperialist' in nature.

Inclusive Practices

Pedagogy

Questions about pedagogy are central in the debate on how to implement inclusive education. Alexander (2004, p. 11) defines pedagogy as 'the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted'. There is an ongoing debate in the literature whether teaching children with disabilities is essentially different, requiring a specific pedagogy, or if a regular pedagogy can be used. The suggestion that there is a special pedagogy has been reinforced by a medical model of disability and the associated belief that the needs of children with disabilities are best addressed by experts and specialists (Slee, 2013). Researchers such as Norwich and Lewis (2005) and Croft (2010) claimed they were unable to identify any substantive evidence to support the argument that children with disabilities need a specialised pedagogy. Hitchcock et al. (2002) argued that the idea itself that there is a group of children who learns in a similar way and another group, often those with disabilities, who learns in a fundamentally different way is flawed. They furthermore argued that all children learn in a unique way, due to a huge amount of subtle differences (Hitchcock et al., 2002).

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argued that inclusive education requires a paradigm shift in pedagogical thinking. Pedagogy in inclusive classrooms usually starts from the assumption that

for most children general teaching and learning strategies will be enough and differentiated or additional strategies are necessary for children with disabilities or other identified learning needs. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) suggested moving towards a pedagogy which is available for all children and provides rich learning opportunities for everyone. This is in line with the requirements of the UN CRPD and GC4 to ensure children with disabilities access education and the same high-quality curriculum on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). A general pedagogy that is available to all learners avoids stigmatisation, which is often associated with differentiation. It encourages teachers to have high expectations for all children and support them in reaching their potential (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Examples of pedagogical approaches that are available for all learners are 'Universal Design for Learning' and 'Child-Centred Pedagogy'. The UNCRPD defined Universal Design as 'the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design' (UN, 2006 Art.2). Universal Design for Learning aims to design learning environments and teaching and learning approaches that are accessible to all learners. In doing so, it shifts the burden for removing barriers to access and participation from the individual learner and special educators towards the general education system. As a result, the quality of education increases for all children (Hitchcock et al., 2002). Key features Universal Design for Learning include offering multiple means of representation, of action and expression and of engagement (UNICEF, 2014b).

Child-centred or learner-centred pedagogy has been promoted by UNESCO and UNICEF to implement inclusive education (UNESCO, 2004a, UNESCO, 2005, Kaplan and Lewis, 2013, UNICEF, 2014c, UNESCO, 2009b, UNESCO, 2001). Child-centred pedagogy also starts from the recognition that all children learn in different ways. Teachers therefore use a wide range of teaching methods and activities to approach the same content with a diverse group of learners (UNESCO, 2004b). Other key features of child-centred pedagogy include the recognition that children create their own meaning and knowledge, linking learning at school with learning at home and in the community to create meaningful learning opportunities, encouraging cooperative learning in mixed ability groups, designing accessible and attractive learning environments and ongoing assessment of learning (UNESCO, 2004b).

Researchers (Nguyen and Hall, 2017, Nguyen, 2015, Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Thao and Boyd, 2014) have argued that education reforms towards child-centred pedagogy have been slow and complicated in Vietnam due to a conflict between the belief systems in Vietnamese schools and values underpinning child-centred pedagogy. Nguyen (2015) for example argued that child-centred pedagogy, which require teachers and students to construct knowledge together, form close relationships and active participation from students, might be in contradiction to the desire of Vietnamese teachers to save face in front of the classroom and in the society. Saving face in the context of education means 'maintaining student's absolute trust in their teacher's knowledge' (Nguyen, 2015, p. 211). Thao and Boyd (2014) found in their research on pedagogy reform in Vietnamese kindergartens that teachers continue to prefer direct instruction above more child-centred or play-based teaching practices. The study of Saito et al. (2008) showed that while Vietnamese teachers have been trained in child-centred teaching approaches, they continue to use more traditional, teacher-centred, approaches in their classrooms.

Other studies showed that child-centred pedagogy is possible in Vietnamese schools, when teachers are allowed to adopt a 'hybrid' version which combines both elements of traditional Vietnamese pedagogy and child-centred pedagogy. Thanh and Renshaw (2015) for example found that Vietnamese teachers do implement elements of child-centred pedagogy when they can maintain a direct link with formal examinations and can use both innovative and traditional methods. The teachers in the study did for example organize oral presentations and discussions based on multiple-choice tests (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015). The study of Thanh (2014) showed that cooperative group learning can be implemented in Vietnamese classes, provided that teachers can use a hybrid approach which respects traditional values of both teachers and students. Students felt more comfortable when direct confrontation was avoided, when they selected a group leader who was tasked to maintain harmony and when they worked with friends rather than in than random mixed-ability groups (Thanh, 2014). Tan and Chua (2015, p. 699) found that elements of child-centred pedagogy can work in Chinese schools, when teachers continued to have 'shorten moments of intensive teacher-directed teaching'. This allowed teachers to combine innovative and learner-centred pedagogy with issues that are traditionally valued in education, such as a strong focus on content and preparing students for exams (Tan and Chua, 2015). Nguyen et al. (2012) emphasized that developing such hybrid practices is not so much

about adjusting Western approaches to work in Vietnamese schools, but about developing practices which combine Western and authentic Vietnamese practices. This hybridity in practice can be seen as examples of what Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) understood as teacher agency in policy reform. It shows that teachers in CHC schools do not simply accept top-down pedagogical reforms. Instead, they try to make sense of the reforms within their specific context and develop a practice which works within the value system of the school community.

In the discussion on pedagogical reforms in Vietnam, it is important to question how both researchers and Vietnamese teachers understood concepts as child-centred pedagogy. Nguyen and Hall (2017, p. 253-254) studied the willingness of Vietnamese teacher students to implement child-centred pedagogy. They found that although both teachers students and their lecturers frequently used terms as 'student-centred', 'cooperative learning', 'active learning', 'peer learning' or 'group work', the meaning of these concepts had been lost in the 'cultural processes of translation'. Both students and lecturers did not fully understand the concepts as they were developed in the Global North and did therefore not demonstrate the use of these approaches in their practice as expected (Nguyen and Hall, 2017).

Curriculum

Accessible and flexible curricula are essential in implementing inclusive education (UNESCO IBE, 2016, UNESCO, 2009a). Hitchcock et al. (2002, p. 10) defined curriculum as:

> '... the overall plan for instruction adopted by a school or school system. Its purpose is to guide instructional activities and provide consistency of expectations, content, methods, and outcomes.'

Many inclusive education initiatives focus on how to differentiate teaching, content and materials to ensure children with disabilities can access the general curriculum (Armstrong et al., 2010). It has been argued that it is more effective to reform the general curriculum in order to provide access and support learning for all children. This can lead to a curriculum that is better for all students and reduce the need individual modifications and the use of assistive technology (Armstrong et al., 2010, Hitchcock et al., 2002, UNESCO, 2017b, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). All children have the right to benefit from a commonly accepted

level of quality education. Therefore, all children have the right to the same core curriculum (UNESCO, 2009a, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Traditional curricula are often content-loaded and perceived as a list of facts which students need to repeat in exams and tests (UNESCO IBE, 2016, UNESCO, 2009a). They are built on the idea that all children in a group learn the same things, at the same time, by using the same means and methods (UNESCO, 2009a, p. 18). There is however a general recognition that all children are different and learn in different ways (UNESCO, 2009a, Hitchcock et al., 2002, UNESCO, 2004b, UNESCO, 2017b, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Inclusive curricula are therefore flexible, encouraging a range of different teaching and learning styles and methods and include flexible and ongoing strategies to assess learning (UNESCO, 2009a, UNESCO, 2017b, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Universal Design for Learning is the guiding principle in designing inclusive curricula (UNICEF, 2014b, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Key elements of inclusive curricula using a Universal Design for Learning framework include: flexible goals to provide appropriate challenges for all children, multiple means of representation of content, flexible and diverse methods to provide appropriate learning experiences for all and flexible assessment methods to continuously inform teachers and children about their learning progress and adjust instruction when needed (Hitchcock et al., 2002).

The Vietnamese government strictly controls curriculum development (London, 2011). Curriculum in Vietnam is often understood as the implementation of textbooks (Saito et al., 2008). Teachers can only use textbooks published or approved by MoET (Salomon and Ket, 2007, Doan, 2005). This means in practice that all Vietnamese teachers follow the same curriculum, go through the same text- and workbooks and have the same lessons and activities at the same time (Nguyen et al., 2012, Thao and Boyd, 2014, Saito et al., 2008, Duggan, 2001). In this sense, Vietnamese teachers are seen as 'bureaucrats', who deliver a fixed curriculum rather than developing individual goals and strategies (Saito et al., 2008, p. 97). This can be a barrier to inclusive education as exam-oriented and rigid curricula make it difficult for teachers to address barriers for learning and participation in the classroom (Forlin, 2013, Sharma et al., 2013, Tan and Chua, 2015, Saito and Tsukui, 2008, Nguyen et al., 2012).

The Vietnamese government made considerable efforts the past two decades to reform the curriculum and allow for more flexibility. The updated curricula reduced the number of subjects and amount of content to cover, ensured more relevant content and introduced a child-centred pedagogy (Hamano, 2008, Duggan, 2001, Saito et al., 2008). Despites all efforts, the Vietnamese curriculum remained rigid and heavily content-loaded (Nguyen et al., 2012, Saito et al., 2008, Duggan, 2001). Although the series of curriculum reviews gradually created more openness for teachers to make autonomous decisions, this is generally not reflected in the practice of many teachers (Saito et al., 2008, London, 2011). Many Vietnamese teachers prefer to strictly implement the curriculum and materials provided by MoET to avoid criticism from authorities, colleagues and parents (Saito et al., 2008). In addition, the Vietnamese teacher standards continue to favour teacher-centred elements, such as clear handwriting on the black board, voice coverage or use of the provided materials, over issues relevant for child-centred pedagogy, such as classroom relationships (Saito et al., 2008). This can demotivate teachers to be more creative with the curriculum (Saito et al., 2008).

Researchers (Tan and Chua, 2015, Nguyen and Hall, 2017) linked the continuous struggle to make the curriculum more flexible with how knowledge and the role of teachers are understood in both Confucian Heritage Cultures and Soviet education models. Knowledge is for example considered as a fixed set of information (Nguyen et al., 2012, Tan and Chua, 2015), and the curriculum is seen as a collection of key knowledge points (Tan and Chua, 2015). Teaching in this perspective means the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student (Tan and Chua, 2015, Saito and Tsukui, 2008, Thanh, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2006, Nguyen and Hall, 2017). Tan and Chua (2015) argued that for curriculum and pedagogical reforms to work, it is necessary to address the relationship between teachers and students and the cultural perspectives on knowledge and teaching.

There is currently a new reform ongoing to update the curriculum, teaching and assessment methods and textbooks. The focus is on introducing skills such as life skills, creativity and practical skills, which are considered as necessary to strengthening the Vietnamese economy (Nguyen and Hall, 2017). The latest curriculum update is expected to introduce more autonomy and flexibility for teachers (Nguyen and Hall, 2017). It is yet to be seen what the implications will be for the practice of Vietnamese teachers.

Daily Practice

A wide range of inclusive education definitions (see also 'Defining Inclusive Education', p. 24) resulted in a broad variety of practices in schools and classrooms (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011, Mitchell and Desai, 2005, Dyson, 2005, Graham and Slee, 2008). The Vietnamese policy framework for inclusive education promoted the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and other individualized support. There is however discussion over whether these kinds of individual measures are facilitating inclusion or furthering segregation (Ekins and Grimes, 2009, Corbett, 2001). According to Corbett (2001) there is a polarisation between those who follow a model of differentiation and those adhere to a broad approach, using a Universal Design for Learning. The ones in the first group encourage the use IEPs, differentiation and individual support in mainstream classrooms, while the ones in the latter group would reject any form of individual support, thereby denying differences and difficulties in learning (Corbett, 2001). Florian (2008) however argued that the rejection of inclusive education practices which depend on the identification of individual differences does not equals a rejection of the existence of educational differences between students. The educational differences are linked to differences in how children respond to learning activities, rather than based on a medical diagnosis. Differences in learning between children are a matter of degree rather than of categorical distinction (Florian, 2008).

The problem with individualized approaches, is that these approaches tend to reduce complex barriers to access and participation in education to individual problems, to be addressed by individual measures. It avoids searching for strategies to improve education and schooling for all children (UNESCO, 2017b, Liasidou, 2015). Furthermore, these individual approaches are stigmatising, as they openly mark specific groups of children as different, requiring additional or different teaching strategies (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). Individualized approaches can distract from efforts to ensure all children have equitable access to the same high quality curriculum (UNESCO, 2017b, Ekins and Grimes, 2009, Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). Separated or individual teaching approaches often lead to lower expectations towards children with disabilities and to lower quality curriculum. Low expectations have been mentioned as a major barrier to successful inclusive education (Corbett, 2001, Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). An

inclusive pedagogy, based on the principles of child-centred pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning have therefore been mentioned as an alternative for individualized approaches (Florian, 2008, UNESCO, 2017b, Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

It has been argued that Vietnamese teachers face institutional constraints in developing inclusive practices (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Nguyen et al., 2012). Education policies, directions and guidelines in many South East Asian countries send conflicting messages to teachers and school principals. Schools are increasingly expected to implement inclusive education approaches and ensure access and participation for a wide range of learners, while at the same time they are held accountable according to narrowly defined indicators as student performance rates in high-stakes tests and exams (Forlin, 2013, Benjamin, 2002). Teachers who are judged based on the performance of their students on these tests and exams might be less willing to spend time and effort in teaching children with disabilities or learning difficulties (Forlin, 2013).

Resources for Inclusive Education

Teacher Development

It has often been argued that a lack of knowledge, skills and experiences among mainstream school teachers to teach children with disabilities is one of the main constraints in providing quality education for children with disabilities in Vietnam (Rosenthal and Mental Disability Rights International, 2009, MoLISA and UNICEF, 2009, NCCD, 2010). While the importance of teacher development for inclusive education has been widely recognized (Global Campaign for Education and Handicap International, 2013, Lewis and Bagree, 2013, UNESCO, 2017b, UNESCO, 2009a), such arguments tend to 'blame' teachers for limited implementation of inclusive education. Consequently, teacher development initiatives often start from a 'deficit model' (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016, p. 211). It is however important to recognize that inclusive education implementation is a complex issue, requiring a range of actions at different levels, with different stakeholders (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, Bines and Lei, 2007, Graham and Slee, 2008). GC4 therefore calls for a holistic or 'whole-systems' approach in which interventions to realizing full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education are

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embedded in the general education culture, policy and practice (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Teacher development for inclusion cannot be addressed in isolation from policy and pedagogy reform, reorganisation of schools and classrooms, addressing physical, attitudinal and institutional barriers and ensuring support and practical conditions in which teachers can actually implement what they have learned (Armstrong et al., 2010, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). It needs to be acknowledged that, especially in the Global South, teachers face real daily challenges in implementing inclusive education. Instead of perceiving teachers as 'a problem', teacher development should start from a respect for teachers and acknowledgment that many teachers genuinely try to implement new policies, using the limited resources they have available and facing challenging such as inadequate staff and lack of support services (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016).

Pre-service Teacher Training for Inclusive Education

Decision 23 on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities regulates pre-service teacher training for inclusive education in Vietnam (MoET, 2006a). Courses on inclusive education are offered in four universities and ten colleges across the country. Students can either choose modules on inclusive education in the general teacher training for primary education or they can choose to study special education, where knowledge and skills on disability and inclusive education are taught. According to a study by MoET and UNESCO (MoET and UNESCO, 2009), graduated students from the pedagogical universities and colleges do not have enough knowledge and skills to teach children with disabilities. The study identified a number of reasons for the low success of the pre-service training on inclusive education. In general teacher training, the subject on inclusive education is offered as an optional module and is not very popular among the students. The module only provides knowledge on children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities, instead of introducing a broad understanding of inclusive education (MoET and UNESCO, 2009). It has been argued that offering inclusive education as a separate module reinforces the idea that it is 'special', requiring 'specialist knowledge and skills', and is likely to maintain the exclusion of disadvantaged groups (Forlin, 2010a). An embedded approach, in which inclusive education is part of the compulsory curriculum for all teacher students and reflected in

every subject, is therefore more effective in ensuring teacher students develop inclusive values and feel responsible to teach all children (Forlin, 2010a, Global Campaign for Education and Handicap International, 2013, Rieser et al., 2013, Slee, 2001). The focus in the Vietnamese modules is heavily on theory and knowledge, with little or no opportunities to practice inclusive education methodologies and teaching approaches (MoET and UNESCO, 2009). It has been argued that due to the heavy focus on international and national legal frameworks, general philosophy and attitudes towards inclusion and disability in teacher development, teachers remain uncertain on 'how to do inclusion in practice' (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). It is therefore recommended that the content of teacher training for inclusion is based on a twin-track approach, including both broad principles on inclusive education and specific and practical examples of how teachers can create inclusive learning environments (Lewis and Bagree, 2013, Rieser et al., 2013, Grimes et al., 2015).

The special education teacher training in Vietnamese colleges and universities also provides modules on inclusive education. These modules only focus on children with disabilities. Graduates from special education teacher training tend to work rather in special school and inclusive education resource centres than in mainstream schools (MoET and UNESCO, 2009). Teacher training initiatives on inclusive education often heavily focus on 'characteristics' of children with different impairments and specific techniques on how to teach these different groups of children (Slee, 2001, Rieser et al., 2013). The focus on special teaching techniques for children with disabilities, reinforces the idea that inclusive education is about special needs and requires specialised skills and specially trained teachers. There is still a place for specific knowledge and skills on impairments, when it is based on a broad understanding of teaching and learning from a child-centred and rights-based perspective (UNESCO, 2009a). Rather than training teachers in specialist knowledge and skills, it is more efficient to support them in developing inclusive and child-centred practice and collaboration with specialists when needed (UNESCO, 2009a).

In-service Teacher Training for Inclusive Education

There is no coherent in-service teacher development system for inclusive education in Vietnam. In-service teacher training is provided through summer courses, qualification improvement

training course (weekend modules), demo lessons by district supervisors and school-based training modules (Hamano, 2008). The frequency and type of the training modules differs from school to school (Hamano, 2008). Vietnamese teachers have limited opportunities for professional development as education journals and academic books are not widely available and only a limited number of teachers per school is invited for training modules (Saito et al., 2008). Both the Provincial Department of Education and Training (DoET) and international agencies and NGOs have organised in-service training modules to prepare teachers to work in inclusive settings (CRS, 2010, Caritas Switzerland, 2012, Handicap International, 2012). This support remained largely fragmented and uncoordinated. Very often international projects use a 'cascade training model'. In this training model, a core group of teachers is trained to retrain their colleagues. The cascade model was traditionally considered as an efficient way to train a large group of teachers on a relatively short period of time, requiring a limited amount of resources (Rieser et al., 2013). The model has received significant criticism because it often fails to lead to changes in teacher behaviour and classroom practice (Global Partnership for Education, 2018). The success of the cascade model depends on the training skills of the core group of teachers and the key message of the original training often gets lost in the process (Rieser et al., 2013).

Deppeler (2010, p. 181) argued that teacher training should move away from 'something that is done to teachers' towards 'something that teachers continue to do together'. It was in the past assumed that by showing teacher a 'good way of teaching' they would automatically apply it in their daily practice (Carrington and Robinson, 2006). This approach often fails, as it ignores a number of factors influencing the implementation of education reform, including practical issues that affect implementation of new teaching strategies, such as hindering policies, rigid curriculum or overcrowded classes (Carrington and Robinson, 2006, Forlin, 2010a, Kaikkonen, 2010, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016); specific social and cultural context of the school in which the change has to take place (Carrington and Robinson, 2006, Deppeler, 2010, Forlin, 2010a, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016) and already existing knowledge within school communities (Deppeler, 2010).

It is increasingly recognized that teachers learn collaboratively within the context of their school and community. Alternatives for traditional models for in-service teacher training thus include school-based training models which enable reflective practice and collaboration among teachers

and community members (Ainscow, 1999, Miles et al., 2003, Howes et al., 2009b, Deppeler, 2010, Forlin, 2010a, Grimes et al., 2015:Rieser, 2013 #20). In-service teacher development for inclusive education needs to move from periodic events towards a continuous process of teacher support and development (Rieser et al., 2013, Howes et al., 2009b). It has been argued that teachers and school staff must be given professional development support to strengthen values and competencies needed to cultivate inclusive education in schools (Booth and Ainscow, 2016). This works best when schools have developed a culture of learning, trust and support (Booth and Ainscow, 2016).

Teacher Educators

It has been argued that Vietnamese teacher educators have limited knowledge and skills about inclusive education and child-centred pedagogy (MoET and UNESCO, 2009, Hamano, 2008, Nguyen and Hall, 2017). Their own teaching style is therefore mainly teacher-centred and lecture-based and does not model inclusive teaching approaches (Hamano, 2008, Nguyen and Hall, 2017). Nguyen and Hall (2017) found in their study on introducing student-centred pedagogy in pre-service teacher training that Vietnamese teacher students were generally willing to try more learner-centred learning approaches and engage in reflective collaborative learning. The students however maintained a strong traditional perspective on their lecturer's and their own role. They continued to see the teacher educators as experts, deserving unquestioning respect, and themselves as knowledge receivers. The students therefore trusted the opinions of their lecturers more than the reflections, experiences and ideas from their classmates. Nguyen and Hall (2017) concluded therefore that introducing teaching innovations without addressing deep-rooted cultural beliefs and without full understanding of these approaches by the teacher educators can be counter-productive. They argued that teacher educators need to develop a deeper conceptual and practical understanding of teaching reforms, engage in discussions about what these reforms mean in the Vietnamese education context and model teaching innovations when training teachers or teacher students (Nguyen and Hall, 2017).

Teacher collaboration has been mentioned both as an approach to teacher development and as a resource to implement inclusive education. Booth and Ainscow (2016) argued that teachers collaborating and supporting each other's learning and improving each other's practice is one of the most under-used resources for inclusive education (Booth and Ainscow, 2016). Corbett (2001) found that in the case study schools in her study, collaborative problem solving among teachers was one of the most important key factors to successful inclusive education implementation. When teachers receive feedback, engage in discussions and critical reflective inquiry, they are more likely to find solutions for barriers and try innovative approaches in their classrooms (Howes et al., 2009b). It is therefore important to create space and structures in schools for teachers and school leaders to reflect and learn together (UNESCO, 2009a, UNESCO, 2017b, Howes et al., 2009b). Teacher collaborations work best when this is embedded in school cultures which are based on trust, sharing and open communication (Corbett, 2001, Booth and Ainscow, 2016).

Researchers have encountered difficulties in initiating reflective teaching and supportive collaboration among teachers in Vietnamese schools. Saito et al. (2008) for example established professional learning communities to implement child-centred pedagogy in Vietnamese schools. The researchers felt the teachers did not fully understand the concept of collaborative peer support. The teachers in their research were evaluating colleagues instead of providing constructive feedback and support during professional learning community meetings (Saito et al., 2008). Nguyen and Hall (2017) found that despite the implementation of child-centred teaching reforms, none of the teacher trainers in their action research viewed feedback sessions after observing lessons as an opportunity for teacher students to explore new ideas or to develop their own evaluation. The study of Truong and Hallinger (2015) on leadership in Vietnamese schools indicated that Vietnamese teachers were reluctant to share their opinions and school leaders were not willing to accept broad participation from teachers. The action research of Grimes et al. (2012) in Lao PDR on the other hand showed it is possible for teachers in a similar socio-political and cultural context as Vietnam to be supported to be reflective. It required however navigating a number of socio-culture barriers. Nguyen and Bui (2016) similarly found the schools in their study were, despite constraints and struggles, able to develop professional learning groups in

which teachers had space to critically reflect and provide support for their colleagues in implementing teaching reforms.

Specialized Support

GC4 required governments to develop support and resource systems for inclusive teachers (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). In many countries this support is provided by special educators or teaching assistants who work alongside classroom teachers. Support often focusses on individual interventions towards children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017b). Slee (2013) argued that inclusive education implementation has been reduced to finding additional resources, teaching assistants and resource rooms or centres. Different authors pointed out that the presence of special educators or teaching assistants can become a barrier instead of a resource for inclusive education when this provision is implemented based on medical model of disability. Individual support from special educators or teaching assistants often segregates children with disabilities from classroom activities (Slee, 2001, UNICEF, 2014c). The classroom teachers might feel less responsible for teaching children with disabilities in their group and might become dependent on the additional support (UNICEF, 2014c, Slee, 2001, UNESCO, 2017b, Grimes et al., 2015). Individual support might mask learning difficulties and barriers. Classroom teacher might therefore not be challenged to change classroom practices which could potentially benefit all children (UNICEF, 2014c, Booth and Ainscow, 2016). Booth and Ainscow (2016) argued that if classroom practices are designed based on Universal Design for Learning principles, the need for individual support towards children with disabilities will be reduced. Booth and Ainscow (2016, p. 48) therefore define 'support' in a broader sense, as 'all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to the diversity of children and young people in ways that value them equally'. Florian (2008) do believe there is a space for special educators and specialized knowledge in inclusive education. The support should however be directed towards the teacher, to ensure everyone is participating and learning, instead of towards individual learners (Florian, 2008).

The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training explored Inclusive Education Resource Centres (IERC) as a mean to provide support for inclusive schools (MoET and MoLISA, 2012). The

IERCs intended to provide early identification for children with disabilities, curricular support for inclusive teachers, and support for parents of children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2015). Some centres aimed to provide rehabilitation services and vocational training as well (MoET and UNICEF, 2014). A research from MoET and UNICEF (2014) showed that the IERCs in Vietnam don't always meet the expectations. The majority of the staff members were not qualified on special or inclusive education. The IERCs had limited to no connections with inclusive schools within their community, and therefore mainly provided segregated education for children with disabilities at the centre (MoET and UNICEF, 2014). Resource centres can be effective and become a valuable source of support, only when the resource teachers are trained in inclusive education and provide advice and support to regular teachers, parents, education officers and community members on how to create inclusive environments (Miles et al., 2003, Cedillo and Fletcher, 2010, Rieser et al., 2013, Grimes et al., 2015, UNESCO, 2017b). It has been argued that in countries where there is no strong special education network, it is better to invest directly in developing inclusive practices in local schools than to establish new resource centres (UNESCO, 2017b).

Community Participation

GC4 encouraged the collaboration between teachers, students, DPOs, civil society organisations (CSOs) and support groups inside and outside the school to increase knowledge about disability and local barriers to participation (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Sustainable inclusive education implementation depends on the support of a range of local stakeholders (Booth and Ainscow, 2016, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Community collaboration and parent involvement are, similar to teacher collaboration, often under-used resources in inclusive schools (Booth and Ainscow, 2016, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Parental involvement and community participation is found to have a positive influence on student achievement and helps to build inclusive environments (Gross et al., 2015).

A research from Caritas Switzerland (2014) on civil society engagement in inclusive education in Vietnam showed that many education managers and teachers were suspicious towards civil society and community involvement in schools. They did not see how community members could

contribute to increased access and quality of education in their schools. The Vietnamese Education Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005) did encourage parental and community involvement in schools. It stated that each school should establish a representative committee of parents. Parent groups reported however that it remains very difficult to obtain a legal status due to the complex and inflexible legal and administrative requirements (Caritas Switzerland, 2014). As a result, the percentage of schools with active parent association is low in comparison to other countries in the region (IRC, 2012).

There is very limited community participation in Vietnamese schools outside the framework of the political mass organisations (Caritas Switzerland, 2014). Although the space for citizens to form organisations and collaborate with the government and public services is widening in the recent years, there are still many restrictions (Kerkvliet et al., 2008, Norlund, 2007). The communist mass organisations remain therefore key players at the Vietnamese civil society (Taylor et al., 2012). The most relevant mass organisation at school level is the Youth Union. The Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (commonly known as 'Youth Union'), strives for 'the Party's Ideal and Goal of National Independence and Socialism, for the cause of rich people, strong country, just, democratic and civilized society' (HCYU, 2018). The Youth Union prepares young people for future membership within the Communist Party of Vietnam. Candidate members must have been members of the Small Star Pupils (6-9 years old) and Young Pioneers (9-15 years old) (Valentin, 2007). Membership to the Small Stars Pupils and Young pioneers is considered as important, since it can lead to Party membership. Selection criteria include (Valentin, 2007, p. 306):

> 'Having a good family background; good school grades; good behaviour and morality (self-discipline, no talking in lessons, no fighting in school, respect and obedience towards teachers)'

Teachers and other students are usually involved in the assessment of candidate members (Valentin, 2007). There is thus a strong connection between schools and mass organisations. Although the mass organisations at local level experience more autonomy than those at higher levels, the mass organisations remain under influence of the government and Communist Party of Vietnam (Norlund, 2007, Kerkvliet et al., 2008). This interrelatedness suggests a level of control from the government on what happens inside the schools and classrooms, which can in turn affect how people behave in schools.

It is increasingly recognized that Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) have an important role in inclusive education implementation. Close relationship between schools and DPOs help to address negative attitudes towards children with disabilities, to fully understand barriers in going to school, to find culturally appropriate strategies to address these barriers and to mobilize local resources (Grimes et al., 2015). Vietnam does not have a strong tradition or network of DPOs (Caritas Switzerland, 2014). Most DPOs have been established out of dissatisfaction with the disability support provided by the government. They focus therefore strongly on self-help and less on advocacy and policy development and implementation (USAID, 2013). Vietnam Federation of Disabled People (VFD) is the umbrella organisation of DPOs in Vietnam. The organisation is being criticized for being an organisation 'for' rather than 'of' people with disabilities (UNICEF, 2012). The VFD has branches at province and district level. They are strongly linked to the government, yet they seem to have little influence on decisions making (UNICEF, 2012).

Implications for the Study

The literature review on inclusive education in Vietnam showed that while inclusive education was part of Vietnamese education policies and reforms for the past two decades, there remained some persistent bottlenecks in its implementation. A recurring theme in the review were the difficulties in linking values and belief systems underlying recent education reforms with existing traditional Vietnamese belief systems. Whether it was in designing the national curriculum, implementing child-centred teaching and learning strategies or organizing inclusive teacher support and development, it seemed to be challenging for the government and practitioners to merge concepts developed in the Global North with Vietnamese cultural perceptions and beliefs towards the role of teachers and students, the nature of knowledge and the purpose of education. In addition, a number of practical, institutional and political constraints complicated inclusive education implementation in Vietnamese schools. This reiterated the complexity of inclusive education development and implementation and the impact of specific cultural and contextual factors in the process. Developing a deeper understanding of these cultural values and beliefs towards education and inclusion and the specific contextual factors impacting inclusive education implementation were a key focus of this study.

Emerging Key Themes in the Literature Review

This section summarizes the emerging key themes in the literature review, covering 'Chapter Two - Inclusive Education in an International Context' and 'Chapter Three - Inclusive Education in Vietnam'. The key themes helped to develop a deeper understanding of the research topics and context and to refine the focus for this study. This overview does not provide an analytical framework. Using a set of pre-defined themes and categories to analyse the data collected in Vietnamese schools could be problematic. Theory pre-dominantly developed in the Global North on how inclusive schools should look like would not leave enough space to take contextual factors into account. A more open approach, allowing analysis to emerge from the data, was applied (see 'Data Analysis', p. 104).

- Inclusive education – A problematic concept

The literature review showed that inclusive education is a complex and contested concept, which is understood differently across contexts. Definitions range from narrow concepts, as in placing children with disabilities in mainstream schools, to broader understandings, including fundamental reforms of educational systems with the aim to increase participation and reduce barriers to learning for all children. These different understandings of what inclusive education means resulted in a broad range of practices at school level. The work of Booth and Ainscow (2016) and Ainscow et al. (2006), for example, encouraged me to develop a broad perspective on inclusive education, which is concerned with developing quality education for all children and takes local and broader contextual factors influencing inclusive education implementation into account.

It is increasingly recognized that conceptualisation of inclusive education is contextual and that there is not one model of inclusive education which can be unproblematically transferred to other contexts. Authors as Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) and Armstrong et al. (2010) influenced my thinking about inclusive education policy development and implementation in cross-cultural contexts. They argued that the way in which inclusive education is understood in international

agreements, targets and programmes is strongly influenced by theory from the Global North. Transferring the concept as such to different contexts is problematic as this does not only ignore the complexity of the concept itself, but also the complex realities in which teachers in the Global South are required to implement inclusive education. This study aims to contribute to the need for more contextualized understanding of the contextual factors which shape everyday decisions teachers make and how international and national policies are enacted at local level.

- Neo-colonialism in inclusive education development

This key theme explored further how international education agreements, policies and targets remained strongly dominated by theory predominantly developed in the Global North. The term 'neo-colonialism' is used to describe the continued influence of the Global North on policy development and implementation in the Global South. This was manifested in a growing pressure on national governments to comply with international human rights policies and targets. The literature review showed that the human rights framework is not only about the rights in itself, but also on how these rights should be realized. International support became interlinked with acceptance of specific perspectives on development and education. Governments, who experienced pressure to meet time-bound international education targets and score well on global education test, tended to draw from education policies programmes from the Global North rather than developing context-specific policies and programmes.

This study was inspired by the work of Mai Phuong Nguyen, Cees Terlouw and Albert Pilot (for example (Nguyen et al., 2012, Nguyen et al., 2009, Nguyen et al., 2006)). These researchers problematized in their studies the ways in which cross-cultural education research often forces theory and analytic frameworks developed in the Global North on data collected in the Global South. In doing so, existing knowledge and practices in schools, which may look different from Northern models, are ignored. This understanding shaped this study in different ways. I was conscious about my position as foreign researcher in Vietnamese schools. There was therefore a strong focus on local partnerships in the research design. Along the way, the perspectives of both Vietnamese and foreign critical friends became important in helping me to make sense of what happened in the field. The work of Nguyen et. al. reminded me during the data analysis not to

evaluate local practice based on Northern models of what inclusive education should look like, but instead to be open to alternative practices and remain reflexive about my own assumptions.

- Key issues in inclusive education development and implementation in Vietnam

The literature review identified a number of critical factors and challenges in inclusive education development in Vietnam.

- o Policy development

  The education policy reforms since the mid 1980s to support increased participation and quality of education for all showed the commitment of the Vietnamese government to meet international agreements and targets. The literature review argued however that the policy framework lacks a clear understanding of and strategic choice for inclusive education. In practice, this leads to continuing segregation of specific groups of children.

- o Cultural influences

  Educational practice in Vietnamese schools has been influenced by a range of cultural belief systems and values. It has been argued in the literature that especially Confucian values did not blend well with recent education reforms (Nguyen, 2015). Whether it is in designing the national curriculum, implementing child-centred teaching and learning strategies or organizing inclusive teacher support and development it seems to be challenging to link concepts developed in the Global North with cultural perceptions and beliefs towards the role of teachers and students, the nature of knowledge and the purpose of education. Others showed that hybrid practices which combine elements from Vietnamese traditional education and reforms based on education models developed in the Global North can work in Vietnamese schools (for example (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Thanh, 2014)).

- o Curriculum

  It has been argued that the Vietnamese curriculum remains rigid, content-loaded and textbook-based (Saito et al., 2008, Duggan, 2001). Limited flexibility made implementation of inclusive education challenging. It has been recommended in

international literature to develop curricula which are flexible and accessible for all (UNESCO IBE, 2016, Hitchcock et al., 2002).

o Practice

Inclusive education is in Vietnam mainly implemented through a series of individual measures, such as individual education planning or reducing curriculum content. It has been argued in international literature that such measures can reinforce segregation, stigma and discrimination. Instead, it is recommended to develop practice and curricula based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning, which are accessible for all (for example (Hitchcock et al., 2002, Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

o Teacher development

Pre- and in-service training of Vietnamese teachers in inclusive education remained challenging. Pre-service teacher training for inclusive education was offered through separate modules that focus heavily on theory concerning disability. This could reinforce a deficit model of disability and inclusion (MoET and UNESCO, 2009). Researcher have reported limited success of school-based in-service teacher development based on peer support and collaborative reflection (for example (Saito et al., 2008)).

o Support for inclusive schools

The Vietnamese government encouraged the establishment of Inclusive Education Resource Centres to support inclusive schools. Evidence showed that these centres have limited connections with mainstream schools and act mainly as special schools (MoET and UNICEF, 2014). According to international literature, such centres can be effective when support is directed towards the teacher, to ensure everyone is participating and learning (Florian, 2008).

o Community participation

Community support is an often under-used resource for inclusive education (Booth and Ainscow, 2016). The political climate was restrictive for civil society organisations in Vietnam. Consequently, community support for schools was mainly provided through political mass organisations.

Based on the literature review, it could be assumed that progress towards inclusive education in Vietnam remained limited due to a range of challenges. This however does not do justice to the efforts of Vietnamese teachers, who are trying to make sense of education reforms in very

complicated circumstances. While the recommendations from international literature were helpful and theoretically made sense, some of these recommendations remained vague and uncontextualized. It is for example not clear how 'pedagogy accessible for all' or 'creating curricula for all' could look like in Vietnamese schools. In addition, stereotypes of education in Confucian Heritage Cultures and evaluating Vietnamese practice based on Western indicators and models might miss subtle changes in practice. This study aimed to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex realities which influence the inclusive education implementation in the case study schools.

The next chapter 'Chapter Four – Methodology' discusses how the methodology was designed to address the research questions. It places the research within the qualitative research approach, discusses ethnographic case study research as research design, introduces the research methods and potential challenges in applying these methods, the approach to data analysis and anticipated ethical dilemmas.

Chapter Four – Methodology

Introduction

The methodology for this study was designed to explore the following three research questions.

1. The first research question 'How are concepts of 'education' and 'inclusion' understood at school level in Vietnam?' aimed to explore how research participants in the two case study schools in Vietnam understood the concept of inclusive education. These local perspectives were to be placed next to how inclusive education is defined internationally and addressed in national legalisation and practice to identify potential tensions.

2. The second research question 'What contextual factors influence inclusive education implementation at school level in Vietnam?' aimed to identify critical factors in the socio-economic, cultural, historical or political contexts of the case study schools which impacted how inclusive education was conceptualised and addressed.

3. The third research question 'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?' intended to look in detail at the process to collect and analyse data for the first two research questions. This question was added as, based on my previous experience in the field of inclusive education in Vietnam, I expected specific and complicated challenges might arise when undertaking this study. Adding the third question created space to fully explore these challenges and further contextualize the data collected for research question one and two.

Based on the three research questions, a qualitative research approach was considered as most appropriate. The first two research questions required a rich and detailed exploration of how teachers made sense of inclusive education within the specific context of their school. A case study design with ethnographic elements was selected to facilitate a detailed inquiry from different perspectives within the context of two primary schools. The qualitative research design was also motivated by the third research question, which shaped in great deal the research design. I experienced for example that the legal requirements to undertake research in Vietnam were complicated and very difficult to understand for non-Vietnamese researchers. Developing

local partnerships to help to navigate the legal procedures and local challenges was therefore an important part of the research design. I noticed during previous school visits there was always a sense of control or monitoring from authorities and political associations. I also experienced how challenging it could be to work through interpreters. The methodology therefore needed to be explorative and allow time and flexibility to develop field relationships and adjust strategies when necessary. The strategies to copes with these anticipated challenges are further explored in this chapter.

The study commenced in January 2015 and finalized in February 2020. Although there was a lot of overlap and 'going back and forth' in the research process, it is possible to broadly distinguish the following phases in the research process.

Phase one	January – May 2015	• Exploring potential partnerships with international agencies and NGOs to facilitate access to the field
Phase two	May 2015 – October 2016	• Identification of Hanoi University of Education (HNUE) as partner to provide access to the field
		• Formalize partnership with HNUE
		• Relationship building with gatekeepers, peer Vietnamese researchers and interpreter
		• Establishment of Research Support Group and Education Sector Discussion group to initiate conversations with critical friends
		• Literature review and methodology development
		• Obtain legal permission for field work
		• Selection of case study schools
Phase three	October 2016 – April 2018	• Data collection in case study schools
		• Reflective conversations with critical friends
		• Ongoing data analysis
Phase four	April 2018 - February 2020	• In-depth data analysis
		• Reflective conversations with critical friends

		• Thesis writing

This chapter starts with placing this study within a qualitative research approach. The next section 'Research Paradigm' links this study broadly to social constructionism. It discusses the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions and their implications for the research design. 'Research Design' explores case study research to address the research questions and defines the cases. The section on 'Partnerships and Relationships' was added to discuss how various networks and partnerships were developed as strategies to cope with anticipated challenges in undertaking research in Vietnam. 'Research Methods' explores interviewing, observations and field notes as data collection methods. 'Data Analysis' discusses the three-staged approach of data analysis in this study. The chapter ends with 'Research Ethics', to discuss the ethical procedures followed in this study and some specific considerations when undertaking research activities in the Vietnamese case study schools.

Research Approach

A qualitative approach was chosen to explore the research questions in this study. The research questions all required an in-depth exploration of the perspectives of different participants within their specific context. The aim of this study was to understand how teachers in two case study schools in Vietnam made sense of inclusive education and what key factors influenced its implementation in these school. A qualitative approach was most appropriate as it enabled an exploration and detailed understanding of a central phenomenon in a specific context (Creswell, 2012). The focus on the perspective of teachers on what inclusive education is and how it should be implemented in their school further justified a qualitative approach. Qualitative research aims to understand how people give meaning to what happens in their specific context (Taylor et al., 2016, Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). In focusing on the perspectives of the teachers, this study recognized 'multiple truths' (Taylor et al., 2016, Creswell, 2007). This key aspect of qualitative research was of particular importance in this study. To avoid neo-colonial interpretation of what happened in the case study schools, I was conscious not to take my personal understanding of what inclusive education is and how it should be implemented for granted. My own perspective was rooted in literature and theory developed in the Global North.

Imposing this perspective in analysing what happened in the case study schools would have been problematic. This study was not concerned with whether inclusive education implementation at the case study schools was 'right' or 'wrong', in comparison with international and national policy frameworks. Rather, the study aimed to understand how the global concept of inclusive education and related national policies were interpreted at local level. The concept of multiple truths in this study is explored further in this chapter (See 'Research Paradigm', p. 89).

A qualitative research approach enabled to shift away from a narrow and technical focus on 'what works in inclusive education' to an understanding of the complex interconnection between different contextual factors influencing inclusive education implementation. Pijl and Meijer (1997, p. 31) argued already early on that inclusive education research should move beyond the 'how-to-do-it' questions. Inductive, qualitative, studies have a potential to gain deeper understanding of social contexts, patterns and experiences and to bring this contextual understanding into wider debates on sustainable inclusive education implementation (Pijl and Meijer, 1997).

Finally, a qualitative research approach allowed 'to approach field work without being constrained by pre-determined categories of analysis' Patton (2002, p. 14). Qualitative research is inductive, developing understanding from the emerging data (Taylor et al., 2016, Creswell, 2012, Hammersley, 2013). Qualitative research designs are consequently flexible and evolving as the researcher understands more about the participants' perspectives and their contexts (Taylor et al., 2016, Hammersley, 2013). This approach opened space to understand the complexity of inclusive education implementation in the case study schools, rather than searching for a set of critical issues as defined in inclusive education theory developed in the Global North.

A qualitative approach was also chosen to approach the third research question concerning the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in Vietnam as a foreign research. This exploration was largely based on personal reflections and conversations with critical friends about my research journey in finding access, undertaking research activities in the field, trying to understand what happened and addressing ethical concerns. A qualitative approach which focusses on processes rather than on outcomes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) was considered as most suitable.

A common criticism towards qualitative research is the risk for subjectivity and bias from the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007, Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Flyvbjerg (2006) argued however that bias is a human characteristic and therefore present in all research approaches. Qualitative researchers are conscious about their subjectivity and are constantly reflecting about how their opinions and prejudices might influence the study. They however also accept that fully neutralizing the subjectivity of the researcher is neither 'possible nor desirable' (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 38). This notion of subjectivity is often turned into a strength and key aspect of qualitative research (Hammersley, 2013). Qualitative researchers use their reflections, assumptions, paradigms and framework to analyse and interpret the collected data (Creswell, 2007, Hammersley, 2013). Some have argued to replace notions as 'objectivity', 'validity' and 'generalizability' with concepts more appropriate with a qualitative research approach, such as for example 'trustworthiness' (Ely et al., 1991). Trustworthiness means that

> 'the processes of the research are carried out fairly, the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied. The entire endeavour must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analysed, how one's own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated' (Ely et al., 1991, p. 93)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) furthermore argue that reliability in qualitative research does not mean the same as in quantitative research. Rather than different researchers coming to the same findings in the same setting, it means an as close as possible fit between what happened and how the researcher recorded it. This alternative perspective on quality of research therefore does not lead to a lack of rigor in qualitative research (Ely et al., 1991, Yin, 2003, Flyvbjerg, 2006). Prolonged field research (Ely et al., 1991, Creswell, 2012) and triangulation in data collection methods, using the same data collection methods over different periods in time and using perspectives of different researchers on the same data increase the reliability and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Ely et al., 1991, Flyvbjerg, 2006, Cohen et al., 2007, Stake, 2005, Taylor et al., 2016). Reflexivity, or openness and detailed information about the researcher and the research process, furthermore increases the trustworthiness and reliability of the research (Hammersley, 2013). Similar strategies were built into the design of this study to increase the trustworthiness and reliability. These strategies are further discussed in throughout this chapter.

Positionality

Insider or Outsider Researcher

While as a Belgian researcher, studying at a British University, I appeared to be an outsider in Vietnam, my position was more complex. I lived and worked in Vietnam for a nearly ten years before starting this study. Past discourses viewed the insider/outsider dilemma as a strict dichotomy, where researchers either belonged to the same community as the research participants (insiders) or did not belong to the same community (outsiders) (Katyal and King, 2011, McNess et al., 2015). Insider researchers were believed to be able to fully understand the research participants as they shared the same experiences, whereas outsiders would offer an additional perspective, be more objective, or notice information that might be overlooked by insiders (Katyal and King, 2011). The notion that research participants can be 'fully understood', either by insider or outsider researchers, has been contested in the literature. Taylor et al. (2016) for example described a continuum with on the one end qualitative researchers who believe the reality can be objectively known by unbiased researchers and at the other end those who claim objective reality does not exist and all knowledge is subjective. This issue and my own position somewhere in the middle of this continuum is discussed further in Chapter Nine (see p. 205). More current discourses views insiderness/outsiderness as a continuum instead. Both researcher and research participants have multiple identities and shift between the roles of insiders and outsiders (Katyal and King, 2011, McNess et al., 2015, Chawla-Duggan, 2007). Yang (2011) concluded that more important than the insider-outsider dichotomy is the familiarity of the researcher with the cultural context of the research.

Although I certainly did not have an insider position, I was not a fully an outsider as well and I did have a fair amount of familiarity with the cultural context of this study. I lived and worked in different areas in Vietnam, both urban and rural, in the central provinces, in the Northern highlands, in the capital and in the South of Vietnam. I supported inclusive education pre-service teacher training at the Quy Nhon university, managed an inclusive education project for Handicap International in Bac Kan and worked as a consultant to support and evaluate inclusive education programmes from Caritas Switzerland and CBM in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Both my professional and personal life became strongly embedded in Vietnam. Although I still consider

myself somehow as a temporary visitor, my children do call Vietnam their home. Surrounded by Vietnamese friends and colleagues, we have been part of Vietnamese daily life and culture for more than a decade. Over the years I have attempted to learn the Vietnamese language. It was extremely challenging for me to learn a tonal language. I however did manage to gain a very basic understanding of Vietnamese. After working many years in the field of inclusive education, often with an interpreter by my side, I picked up key vocabulary related to education, inclusion and disability. I never reached the level in which I would be able to have in-depth conversations in Vietnamese and was far from able to work without an interpreter. I did however speak enough Vietnamese to have very basic conversations with the research participants and follow the main topics of conversations by picking up on key words.

I experienced that this insider/outsider position sometimes could be used to my advantage. My foreign nationality and different appearance often allowed me to ask unusual questions or to make cultural mistakes. To some degree I will always remain the foreigner who does not fully understand Vietnam. At the same time, I experienced that short introductions and conversations in Vietnamese can often break the ice. Peer researchers, teachers and parents tend to open up to me when they know I have been in Vietnam for a long time and can link their stories with earlier experiences in Vietnam. The familiarity with Vietnamese culture and field of inclusive education also helped to anticipate some of the challenges of undertaking research in Vietnam. This has informed the design of this study. The recognition that no one is fully an insider or outsider and the openness to engage in conversations about what shapes the knowledge, research strategies and findings of researchers and participants can lead to enriched understanding (McNess et al., 2015). The connection with both Vietnamese and foreign critical friends enabled to explore the field events from different perspectives on the insider/outsider continuum.

The selection of Vietnam as country to undertake the study was an autobiographical choice, based on my personal interests which developed through professional and personal experiences in Vietnam. In doing so, I placed myself inside the study from the beginning. My lived experiences had an influence on the research design, data collection and analysis. It has been recognized that researchers are inevitably part of the social world they are researching (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, Coffey, 1999). The research orientation is shaped by the socio-historical background of the researcher (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007) and the researcher is shaped by

the relationships, interactions and experiences within the field (Coffey, 1999). Rather than trying to eliminate the impact of the researcher on the study, qualitative researchers often acknowledge and reflect upon their emotions, values, socio-political and cultural background and how this interacts with the field and the study in general (Coffey, 1999, Cohen et al., 2007). A reflexive thread throughout this thesis brings to the foreground my own development as a researcher and how this influenced the fieldwork, data analysis and writing of this thesis.

As a result of this reflexive attitude throughout the study, I became more aware of the complexity of my insider-outsider position in this study. This moved beyond my insiderness/outsiderness in relation to the case study schools and required me to also reflect on my position towards the wider context of the case study schools. It took a long time before I was able to perceive myself as a neo-colonial subject in this study. I became aware of how my thinking was shaped by my own cultural, socio-economic, political and background and how this shaped my position in the field, how I related with the teachers, how far I was able to understand what happened in the case study schools and how I approached data collection and analysis. I realized how subtle difference in the use of language between the teachers and me and the assumptions I made based on my socio-cultural and educational background and previous experiences, interfered with my understanding of the educational practices at the case study schools. I gradually became more aware of the complexity of the contextual factors influencing the practice at the school and less focused on what I expected to see in inclusive schools based on the literature review. This explored further in the critical incidents (see p. 138) and the discussion chapter (see Chapter Nine, p. 205).

Researcher versus Consultant

I undertook this study as a part time commitment. Before and during the study I worked as an inclusive education consultant for various projects within and outside of Vietnam. A qualitative approach allowed to recognize and deal with the challenging balance between a researcher and a consultant role. The reflexivity in my field notes would for example allowed me to notice when I was judging and evaluating, rather than exploring.

I expected there might be a similar confusion between my position as researcher and as consultant at the field level. I first visited the Hill School in the capacity of a consultant, when I guided a Philippine delegation around Vietnamese inclusive schools. The perception of me as a consultant might have been reinforced in both case study schools as the Hanoi University of Education negotiated for my access to the field. There might have been an expectation I would bring 'expert knowledge' and direct support to improve inclusive education practices in the case study schools. Other researchers (Grimes, 2013, Ainscow, 2002) had similar experiences and rather embraced this role than attempting to avoid it. Both Ainscow (2002) and Grimes (2013) adopted the role of a 'critical friend' towards the schools in their researches. They developed a collaborative form of inquiry in which they encouraged research participants to reflect about their own situation and try to understand the issues from different perspectives. Such exchange of perspectives and deep self-reflection often led to increased awareness about their practice. This increased awareness could lead to social change. In this sense collaborative inquiry could be seen as a form of action research. Ainscow et al. (2006) have called this 'principled interruptions', moments in which teachers 'stop and think' about the what is happening in the school and are crucial in developing inclusive schools (Ainscow et al., 2006). This shows some similarities with Kvale's (2007) notion of interviews as dialogic conversations. Here too, the researcher placed her/himself within the research process and knowledge was constructed together in a reflexive process. McNess et al. (2015, p. 306) argued furthermore that this creation of knowledge is especially interesting within intercultural communication, when insiders and outsiders meet and 'develop a great creativity, mutual understanding and new wisdom'.

This study was not an action research, the aim was not to change or improve the practice of inclusive education in the case study schools. Before the start of the study, I however expected that because of the way the focus group discussions were designed, the teachers who participated might engage in critical reflections about inclusive education in their school, which in turn might encourage them to review their own practice. As explored in the section on research methods (p. 99), for various reasons I started focus group discussions with short activities to initiate reflective discussions among the teachers. Due to the research design with monthly visits, I was not constantly at the case study schools. It was beyond my control or even monitoring what happened in between the visits. I was however open to the possibility that critical reflections with other

colleagues based on the reflective focus group discussions might happen and impact the practice at school.

My shifting position between a researcher and consultant role is explored further in the Critical Incidents (see p. 138) and the Discussion Chapter (Chapter Nine, see p. 205). In practice the roles often blended, and it was at times not clear for everyone involved in this study, the teachers, critical friends, gatekeepers to the field and myself, what my position was. While this was often challenging and as discussed in Chapter 9, did impact the data collection, I also learned that it was not always possible to mitigate this issue. As a researcher I still was a person with a complex identity and I was perceived in different ways by the teachers. Rather than trying to neutralize my other roles, I learned to reflect and be open about my position and how this affected data collection and interpretation.

Research Paradigm

Creswell (2007) identified five paradigms or worldviews which underpin qualitative research, namely post positivism, social constructionism, advocacy/participatory and pragmatism. Each research paradigm is based on a specific epistemological and ontological stance and shapes the way researcher design their study. This study is broadly placed within social constructionism, recognizing that the research design does not fit neatly under this paradigm.

According to Burr (2003) it is difficult to define social constructionism. While most constructionist research shares some features, there are no characteristics they all have in common. It is therefore best to look at the common assumptions to understand social constructionism (Burr, 2003). These include (Burr, 2003, Hammersley, 2013):

- Knowledge is constructed through social interactions instead of based upon objective observations of the world
- Therefore, all knowledge is historically and culturally specific
- There are multiple interpretations of the world, or 'multiple truths'. There is no hierarchy in these multiple truths

- Interpretations about knowledge differ across cultures and contexts and within cultures and contexts

Since knowledge is considered to be socially constructed, constructionist researchers often focus on the social interactions which shape interpretations and understanding of the world (Hammersley, 2013). An often-used methodology is therefore discourse analysis, the analysis of spoken or written language to uncover interpretation of events or people and co-construction of knowledge (Burr, 2003). Similar to social constructionism, there was an underlying assumption to this study that an objective truth does not exist. I recognized there were different perspectives in looking at inclusive education in the two case study schools. I was conscious not to take my own assumptions, interpretations or 'truths' for granted to avoid imposing a Western perspective on how inclusive education developed in the case study schools. This emphasized the explorative nature of this study. Thomas (2016) refers to Foucault's 'polyhedron of intelligibility' in the framework of case study research. He argued that, as everyone experiences each event differently, we can only understand those events by looking at it from different perspectives. I aimed to be open to the perspectives or truths of the teachers involved in this study. The purpose was not to uncover the truth about inclusive education development in Vietnam, but to represent, interpret and understand how a group of teachers gave meaning to inclusive education in their school. I acknowledged my own influence on the construction of the research findings and interpretation. I therefore remained reflexive about my own interpretations and assumptions about what happened during the field visits. Frequent conversations with my interpreter, who became my critical friend, challenged my understanding and brought a more Vietnamese perspective into the analysis. While this study shared some of the key assumptions of social constructionism, it did not use discourse analysis as main methodology. Instead, the research used a case study design and the main data collection methods included interviews, classroom observations and the use of reflexive field notes and research diary.

Research Design

Case Study Research

The research questions were explored through a case study design. Inclusive education is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon (see also 'Chapter Two', p. 23). Case study research had the potential to address inclusive education in all its complexity and to explore different perspectives and factors within the specific context of the case study schools. Corbett (2001, p. 16) argued that inclusive education research requires a 'guerrilla engagement with the specific' to explore the complexities of inclusive policy development and pedagogy.

A case study is a detailed investigation of a single subject, particular event, or set of documents within a bounded system (Yin, 2003, Stake, 2005). Case studies can be seen both as research methodology and as product of the research (Yin, 2003). Case study research as a methodology is of particular interest when researchers aim to understand contextual factors (Yin, 2003), as in this study. Case studies can provide rich and complex accounts of a wide range of different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives within a school community (Corbett, 2001). Case study researchers usually spend extensive time in the field and are involved in a range of activities to collect in-depth data from different sources (Stake, 2005, Yin, 2003, Creswell, 2007). A variety of methods, including observations, interviews, document research, reflection and revision, is used to gather data on both the particular and the common of the case (Stake, 2005, p. 457). This triangulation helps to increase the accuracy of the analysis and findings, to reduce misinterpretations and to identify different 'realities' in which the case is seen (Stake, 2005). The data collection methods used in this study are discussed in 'Research Methods' (see p. 99).

Stake (2005, p. 443) distinguished three types of case studies. 'Intrinsic' case studies research the case because of an interest in the case itself. 'Instrumental' case studies use the case to gain insight in a wider issue. 'Collective or multiple' case studies combine two or more instrumental case studies. This study is an instrumental case study research as the purpose was to gain insight in how inclusive education is implemented in Vietnamese schools and in the challenges in undertaking research in Vietnam. It was also a collective case study research, since this study included two schools. The goal was not to compare inclusive education implementation in the

two schools, but to gain deeper insight and contextual understanding of how inclusive education is conceptualized and implemented in Vietnam.

The case study research design was inspired by some key assumptions with ethnographic research in the field of education. Ethnographic research recognizes education as a complex and multi-layered field. To gain deep understanding about education, it should therefore be studied as a whole, not fragmented (Pole and Morrison, 2003). The design for this case study research was similarly built upon the assumption that to study a complex issue as inclusive education in a cross-cultural context, it was necessary to gather personal perspectives of teachers within their school context on how they made sense of inclusive education. The ethnographic inspiration for the case study design required extending the research process and field work over a longer period of time. It was expected this would allow to build trust relationships in the field and to gain deeper insight in subjective perspectives and experiences and explore the topic from different perspectives. The data presented further in this thesis (see 'Chapter Seven', p. 138) indicated that this process was due to specific contextual factors more complicated and less straightforward than initially anticipated. The research design further shared the assumption with ethnographic research that a range of data collection methods were required to develop in-depth understanding of different meanings and perspectives from various participants and to explore contextual factors mediating inclusive education implementation in the case study schools.

This research design was however not strictly ethnographic. Participant observation is often used as central data collection method (Hammersley, 2013). Ethnographic researchers usually spend an extended period of time in the field and use a range of data collect methods with different stakeholders (Creswell, 2012). I visited the two case study schools regularly over a period of nearly two years. Each visit lasted for one or a half day per school. It was therefore not expected that I would become part of the daily life at the schools, as is often the case in ethnographic research. While this study did use a variety of data collection methods, participant observation was not a main data collection method. Due to language barriers and political restrictions regarding research it was difficult to stay longer in the schools and to take up a more active role.

Defining the Cases

The case study schools are introduced in Chapter Six (see p. 123). This section aims to define the boundaries of the cases, why and how the schools were selected and what my expectations were at the start of the data collection. This reflection is guided by a set of critical questions developed by Stake (1995).

What is the Case?

This study covered two cases. Each of those cases studied the perceptions of teachers towards inclusive education and how it was implemented in a school. Two primary schools were selected in Hoa Binh, a province 70km Southwest from Hanoi. I chose pseudonyms for the case study schools. Case study school one is called 'Hill School' and case study school two is called 'River School' in this thesis. Given the small sample in case study research, the selection of the schools was purposive instead of random (Stake, 2005). As explored in the following chapter (See 'Chapter Five', p. 115), the process of gaining access to the field was very long and complicated. Two institutes, the Training and Development Centre on Special Education (TDSCE) and the National Institute for Education Management (NIEM), facilitated the legal procedures to obtain access to the field. TDSCE, NIEM and I personally worked with the Hill School before. The Hill School was generally recognized by the Ministry of Education and Training, the Hanoi University of Education and the NGO sector as one of the first schools in Vietnam to implement inclusive education. Given the initial connections we had with the Hill School and their early experience in inclusive education, this school was a good starting point for the study.

Adding a second case study school was a pragmatic and strategical choice. I was conscious not to add too many cases, as this could have reduced the in-depth understanding of the cases (Creswell, 2007). Since the legal procedure to gain access to field was so long, I however felt the need to create a 'back-up plan', in case I could not continue the research in the Hill School because of unforeseen circumstances. When requesting legal permission to conduct research in the Hill School, I requested the Hoa Binh Department of Education and Training (DoET) to select a second school. The second case study school was therefore selected for me and not selected to be different from the River School. The River School was located in the same district as the Hill School.

This made the commute to both schools easier. The River School was, although located in the same district, slightly different from the Hill School. The emerging similarities and differences of the case study schools are explored in Chapter Six (see p. 123). I expected that due to the different school contexts, I would be able to approach the same research questions from two different perspectives. This would lead to a richer and deeper understanding of the issues.

What are the Boundaries, Limits and Focus of the Cases?

In both case study schools, I requested to work with the same group of teachers for the entire duration of the data collection phase. I expected this would allow to build deeper relationships and ensure continuity in the conversations. Both schools selected three teachers to participate in focus group discussions. As requested by both schools, all research activities happened during the school hours. It was therefore not possible to include more than three teachers. It was difficult to cover the classrooms while the teachers were involved in the research activities. The vice director of the Hill School frequently joined the research activities as well.

The focus of the different research activities was to gain deeper understanding in how the teachers in the case study schools conceptualized inclusive education and how this impacted inclusive education implementation in their school. I expected that this detailed focus would provide opportunities to explore specific contextual factors in the case study school's historical, social, political or cultural setting which impacted inclusive education implementation. I also expected that the research journey I undertook in the case study schools would allow me to explore the specific and contextual challenges and complexities I encountered while undertaking research in Vietnam.

It is difficult to make generalized statements beyond the boundaries of the researched cases. Researchers as Stake (2005) and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argued that readers can make their own generalizations by linking the cases to their own experiences. Stake (2005, p. 460) furthermore emphasized that:

      'The purpose of the case is not to represent the world, but to represent the case'

He argued furthermore that a focus on generalization might draw the attention away from the particularities of the case. Precisely these particularities form the key to understand the issue in its full complexity (Stake, 2005). Within this research project I too did not seek to obtain generalized statements on how inclusive education is understood and implemented in all Vietnamese schools. I rather sought to develop a deep understanding of how the concept of inclusive education was conceptualized within the specific context of two case study schools in Vietnam.

What is the Issue?

The study was designed to explore the research questions concerning inclusive education understanding and implementation in the case study schools. Through a detailed analysis of these issues I expected be able to reflect on the tensions between international inclusive education conventions, national policies and how it was understood and approached in the case study schools. Whilst avoiding generalized and conclusive statements, I hoped that the cases developed in this study would contribute to the debate on the challenges of transferring educational concepts and reforms across different contexts. With the reflection and analysis of my personal research journey I hoped to identify key challenges and strategies which might be useful for other researchers undertaking similar research in comparable contexts.

Partnerships and Relationships

Various partnerships and relationships were established to cope with anticipated challenges in undertaking research in Vietnam, such as finding access to the field, having open conversations with the research participants, working with an interpreter and making sense of the data. This section explores the different partnerships at national and field level and how it was expected these relationships would support the study.

National Level Partners

Researchers in Vietnam need to obtain legal permission to undertake field work and need to officially register themselves with the local authorities. The long journey to obtain these papers and 'red stamps' is discussed with greater detail in the next chapter (see 'Chapter Five', p. 115). It was clear from the onset of this study that I could not pursue these legal requirements as an individual researcher. The Vietnamese regulations to conduct research and grant permission change frequently and usually depend on the local official's interpretation of the law (Bonnin, 2010). The process can therefore differ from location to location and was difficult to understand for outside researchers. I therefore started this study with looking for a partner organization to facilitate access to the field. I set up a formal partnership with the Training and Development Centre on Special Education (TDCSE), under the management of the Hanoi University of Education (HNUE) and to obtain informal support from the National Institute for Education Management (NIEM).

In order to help making sense of the research process, field activities and collected data, I established up a group of critical friends, the Education Sector Discussion Group. A group of ten colleagues and friends from NGOs, international agencies, teachers and research institutes had bimonthly informal meetings to exchange about our work in the education field in Vietnam. While setting up the formal partnership with the TDCSE, we established a Research Support Group, with twelve peer researchers from TDCSE and NIEM for more focused discussion and sharing of research experiences. It was expected that these groups of critical friends would be helpful especially in the initial phases of the study to contextualize field events and share strategies to cope with challenges. In a later phase, a smaller group of critical friends helped to critically reflect on emerging findings. This is explored further in 'The Role of Critical Friends in Data Analysis' (p. 108).

Relationship with the Interpreter

Working with interpreter could be challenging. Researchers have to rely on the choice of words of the interpreters rather than on the direct meanings and interpretations of the interviewees

(Graham et al., 2014). The complexity of working with interpreters however goes beyond these language issues. Interpreters bring, just as researchers, subjectivity into the research (Scott et al., 2006, Bonnin, 2010, Pui-Hing and Kwong-Lai Poon, 2010, Turner, 2010). Often without the explicit awareness of the researchers, interpreters change the way questions are asked to make them more appropriate for the specific context and research participants (Turner, 2010). Working through an interpreter would thus inevitably impact the collected data.

I included different strategies in the research design to cope with these challenges. I preferred to work with the same interpreter throughout the entire research process. I believed this would ensure continuity at different levels. As the interpreter, key gatekeepers and participants at local level would get to know each other, this could facilitate the logistic organisation of field activities. I expected furthermore that if the interpreter would go through the entire research process with me, she or he would understand better what this research was about, the kind of questions I asked, the data I was looking for and how I preferred the interpretations. This would add to the accuracy of the translations.

As part of the MoU between Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) and Hanoi University of Education (HNUE) (see also 'Chapter Five', p. 115), HNUE agreed to appoint an interpreter to work with me during the data collection phase of this study. I was not involved in the selection procedure. HNUE selected Na, a lecturer and researcher at HNUE. Na was selected because she spoke a fair amount of English, Na and I worked with each other before and she was working on a PhD proposal on the role of support teachers in inclusive education in Vietnam. The dean of Na's faculty believed that by collaborating with me Na would learn about qualitative research methods. The cooperation between Na and me was therefore considered as mutually beneficial. While interpreting during the field visits, Na hoped to learn more about qualitative research. In return, I would be able to work with the same interpreter, who knew the field of inclusive education in Vietnam, for the entire duration of the field work. Na was not a professional interpreter. Although she spoke a fair amount of English, she was not fluent. Her level of English would mean a serious challenge for the data collection. At the same time, I understood the value of undertaking this study together with a Vietnamese peer researcher. I built in more strategies to cope with the challenges in the interpretation from Na. I understood enough Vietnamese to notice either during the conversations or during the transcription when the conversations took a

different turn, slightly different ways in which sentences were translated or different or surprising selection of words. Whenever I noticed such irregularity I made notes and discussed this with Na. If needed, I played parts of the audio recording back to Na or other Vietnamese friends to check for accuracy, whist also ensuring anonymity of the research participants. Triangulation was developed at different levels to improve understanding of the perspectives of the research participants. I visited the same schools over an extended period of time, asked similar questions in different ways and used different methods to collect data. Undertaking field work in two case study schools would allow me to approach the same research questions from slightly different contexts and perspectives. After each field visit, Na and I had a reflective conversation. This did not only help me to understand Na's subjective interpretation of what happened in the field, but also allowed a different perspective on the collected data and the research process to emerge.

The role of Na grew over the course of the data collection phase and beyond. She quickly became a research assistant. Na facilitated all communication between the local authorities, the case study schools and myself. She made appointments for field visits, translated the planning documents and shared information. She helped navigating legal and socio-cultural rules in undertaking research and visiting schools in Vietnam. The reflective conversations after each visit turned into critical friend conversations. I continued to have conversations with Na after the data collection to discuss emerging findings. Na became my main critical friend. Since Na had an impact on the data collection and analysis, her voice was made explicit in the data presentation (see 'Chapter Seven', p. 138). The section 'The Role of Critical Friends in Data Analysis' (see p. 108) explores the input from the different critical friends in this study further.

Field Relationships

It was likely there might be a sense of control or monitoring during the field activities which could restrict what research participants were willing to share with me. I considered it therefore important to focus on building trust relationship in the field. This started with a detailed explanation of what this study was about, what research participants could expect and how data would be shared. I regularly checked the understanding of participants about the study and repeated key information when necessary. I hoped that the frequent visits over a longer period

of time would allow the slowly develop trust and build of relationships. I was aware of the importance of informal conversations to build personal relationships. I therefore took time to drink green tea with the research participants at the start of field visits, to engage in informal conversations, share details about my family life and remember personal details shared by the research participants. I was aware of important Vietnamese celebrations, such as lunar new year, child day, teacher day and woman's day and made sure to bring appropriate gifts.

Research Methods

Different data collection methods were used to explore the research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 6) referred to qualitative researchers as 'methodological bricoleurs', who use a range of different methods and approaches to develop a deep understanding about the topic. This triangulation of data collection methods is a form of validation, as it leads to increased rigor, richness and in-depth understanding (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This section discusses the main methods used in this study; interviewing, observation and reflexive field notes.

Interview

Both individual interviews and focus group discussion with teachers and vice-directors in the case study schools were planned to explore the research questions. Interviewing is considered as a central tool for data collection within qualitative research (Taylor et al., 2016, Fontana and Frey, 2005). Qualitative interviewing aims to understand the situation from the perspective of the participants (Taylor et al., 2016, Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Qualitative interviews can be seen as conversations, exchanges of perspectives, rather than as formal question-and-answer sessions (Cohen et al., 2007, Kvale, 2007, Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, Taylor et al., 2016, Hammersley, 2013). In this sense, interviewing is not a neutral tool. Both interviewer and interviewees influence the interview process with their particular background, history, culture, opinions, assumptions and biases (Fontana and Frey, 2005, Hammersley, 2013). Research participants do not just share their experiences, feelings, meanings and opinions, they construct them together with the researcher during the interview process (Taylor et al., 2016, Kvale, 2007). Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 716) therefore define interviews as

'negotiated accomplishments of both interviewer and interviewee that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place'.

Although qualitative interviews might be modelled after conservations, they are not the same and require specific skills and preparation (Taylor et al., 2016, Ely et al., 1991, Seidman, 2006, Cohen et al., 2007, Kvale, 2007). Researchers need to guide the interviewees towards the research topic, while at the same time leaving enough space and flexibility for the interviewees to share and form their personal perspectives, opinions or experiences (Cohen et al., 2007, Kvale, 2007, Taylor et al., 2016, Fontana and Frey, 2005, Ely et al., 1991). I developed for each field trip a flexible interview protocol (see 'Appendix Three for an example). The protocol included key topics for the interview and key questions to use when necessary. The interview protocols were discussed in advance with the interpreter to ensure a mutual understanding. Taylor et al. (2016) emphasized that such protocol should serve as a flexible reminder, and not as a structured schedule to follow. After all, the interviewer and not the interview protocol is the tool in qualitative interviewing (Taylor et al., 2016).

The interview protocols included short activities to encourage research participants to collaboratively reflect about the discussion topics and relate this back to their own practice. Taylor et al. (2016) and Fontana and Frey (2005) mentioned it is important to find an entry for the conversations. In the design of the introduction activities, I was inspired by the analysis of Nguyen et al. (2006) on group learning in Confucian Heritage Cultures. Focus group discussions in the Global North are often used to explore different and sometimes contradicting opinions from the respondents (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). Nguyen et al. (2006) however argued that in Confucian Heritage Cultures group members tend to avoid direct confrontation to prevent losing face by sharing a different opinion or to maintain group harmony. The introduction activities were designed to create space for teachers to reflect about key topics and discuss opinions before sharing them with me. I purposely did not plan to ask full translation of these conversations, as I believed teachers needed time and privacy to form their opinion. I was aware this could limit and affect the data collection. I however expected that by creating a safe space for teachers, this would positively impact our trust relationships and would lead to more dynamic conversations afterwards, since the teachers would feel more comfortable.

Entry points for discussion in this study included for example looking at and discussing pictures, short assignments for group discussions and making drawings or mind maps to visualize ideas. Some interviews started with Photovoice activities. Wang and Burris (1997) developed the Photovoice methodology in the 1990s. They gave research participants cameras and asked them to take pictures about issues in their environment. The pictures were then used as basis for dialogue and advocacy (Wang and Burris, 1997). Research participants take pictures of what they consider important and how they view themselves and their environment (Taylor et al., 2016, Creswell, 2012). The use of Photovoice as starting point for interviews was appropriate for this study as it allowed teachers to introduce topics for discussion, rather than relying only on my perspective of what should be discussed. This was especially relevant since I was conscious about my position as foreign researcher in Vietnam. Qualitative interviews with different techniques to encourage teachers to take ownership of the conversations were used as a strategy to avoid neo-colonialism, or a solely Western perspective, in the research design.

Observation

Classroom observations were used to gain insight in the teaching practice at the two case study schools. The observations served as a starting point for conversations. Creswell (2012, p. 213) defined observation as

> 'a process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site'.

Observations allow to collect data on behaviour and practices within the context in which they naturally occur (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) distinguished participant and non-participation observation. The research design included a combination of both. When doing classroom observations, the interpreter and I were sitting at the back of the classroom and tried to understand what is happening without participating in the action. More informal participant observations happened during interviews, informal conversations with the teachers and when I was in and around the school to wait for interview sessions or other appointments. Angrosino (2005) noted that research which does not rely mainly on observation still uses observations techniques to notice body language that give meaning to what people way, group dynamics and

settings in which conversations take place. These types of observations were included in the field notes and provided constant feedback on the research activities.

I developed a basic observation protocol which included some key features of inclusive classrooms based on international literature (see Appendix Four). The protocol was used to keep a focus in the observation. There was however flexibility and space to observe issues outside the protocol. Creswell (2012) argued that observations protocols can include reminders about key issues to observe but should however allow flexibility. Cockburn (2005) on the other hand questioned, in the context of classroom observations for evaluation purposes, the usefulness of such observation protocols. Observation protocols tend to reduce the complexity of teaching and the classroom processes into a set of technical and observable criteria (Cockburn, 2005). I was therefore mindful to develop an observation tool which was broad and allowed to look beyond pre-determined indicators. Reflective conversations with the interpreter and the teacher furthermore helped to broaden my perspective and understanding of what happened during the observed lesson.

The effect of the observer on the observed situation has been mentioned as one of the main challenges within observation-based research (Taylor et al., 2016, Creswell, 2012, Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). People tend to change their behaviour and present themselves as good as possible when they know they are observed (Taylor et al., 2016). I expected this might be an important concern when observing in Vietnamese classrooms. When teachers in Vietnam are observed by peer teachers, school directors or local authorities, it is often with the purpose to evaluate them. I therefore talked with the teachers before and after observations to explain the purpose of the activity. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the effect from the observer on the situation is likely to minimize when the researcher builds up relationships with the research participants. I however recognized that observation is never a neutral tool (Angrosino, 2005). Instead, observation data collection and analysis can be seen as a dialogue in which different and sometimes contradicting voices exist next to each other (Angrosino, 2005). The reflective conversations with the teacher and with the interpreter after classroom observations allowed for these different voices to emerge.

Field Notes and Research Diary

I made notes during conversations, field visits, when transcribing interviews and reading materials. These notes were added to the research diary. Field notes and research diaries are frequently used in qualitative research. It has been argued that the primary research tool a qualitative researcher has is oneself (Creswell, 2007, Ely et al., 1991, Cohen et al., 2007). Field notes and diary form a

> 'place where the researcher faces the self as instrument through a personal dialogue about moments of victory and disheartenment, hunches, feelings, insights, assumptions, biases, and ongoing ideas about method' (Ely et al., 1991, p. 69).

Field notes transfer observations, conversations and situations into written texts that can be stored and analysed (Emerson et al., 2001, Cohen et al., 2007). Research diaries help to 'go back and forth' in the data. They allow looking back at earlier assumptions, analysis and conceptual framework and to look forward, in providing direction for the research (Ely et al., 1991).

My field notes included reflections on conversations with critical friends and supervisors, relationships with gatekeepers, interpreter and critical friends, what happened in the field, my developing position as researcher, thoughts when reading resources and transcribing interviews and specific characteristics of and emotions during field visits. In the field I used notebooks with blank pages. I made notes of what happened, key citations I wanted to highlight and contextual factors which might be important. I added personal reflections in pencil to make a distinction between what happened and reflections about what happened. Back home, I typed the field notes in the research diary, using MAXQDA. I added the date, a title and wrote in the main textbox what happened. I used the memo function to add reflections to specific parts of the text. The memo's included reflections I had during the field visit and when typing up the field notes (see Appendix Five for an example).

The use of MAXQDA allowed space for ongoing reflections and inner conversations. The field notes and diary supported an increased understanding of my position as a researcher. It helped in making sense of events during field visits and of emerging relationships. Organising the field notes and reflections therefore were not only a tool to gather data, it also supported early and ongoing data analysis. While typing up field notes and transcribing interviews, I started to attach

codes to text segments to further organise the data. This process is further discussed in the next section 'Data analysis'.

Data Analysis

A Three-staged Approach to Data Analysis

Taylor et al. (2016, p. 169) described qualitative data analysis as

> 'a dynamic and creative process' in which 'researchers attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what they have studied and to continually refine their interpretations'.

The data analysis in this study was approached as an ongoing and iterative process. Ely et al. (1991) argued that qualitative data analysis should begin with the first field notes and continues until the final reporting. During the nearly two years of data collection, I gathered a very large amount of interview transcripts, field notes and observation reports. It would have been very problematic to wait until after the data collection phase to work with this vast amount of data. Approaching data analysis as an ongoing process was however not only a pragmatic choice. The ongoing nature of data analysis guides researchers towards the next steps in the research process (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Taylor et al., 2016). Ely et al. (1991) described qualitative data analysis as making 'circles within circles'. It is a spiral process in which the researcher moves back and forward, revisits and re-analyses data as it emerges and tries to make sense of emerging themes and patterns (Ely et al., 1991, Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). The ongoing data analysis for this study can be broadly divided into three different stages. In stage one I organized the data in themes. Stage two involved re-engaging with the data to identify critical incidents. This served as starting point for further reflection and interpretation from different perspectives. In stage three the reflections and interpretations were analysed against the research questions.

Stage One – Data Organisation in Key Themes

The first stage of the data analysis started with typing up field notes, interview transcripts and observation notes, in a way which would make them accessible for re-reading, commenting and coding. I used MAXQDA software to facilitate this initial step. Such software programmes have been described as 'mechanical clerks' (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 187). The programme can help to store and manage data, but do not do the analysis for the researcher (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, Creswell, 2012). MAXQDA made the transcription process easier and allowed space to add reflective notes during the process of transcribing interviews and typing field and observation notes. These kind of reflections and insights during the transcription process are considered as a first step in analysis and interpreting the data (Taylor et al., 2016). The next step included coding of general themes to make the data manageable (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). MAXQDA allowed to easily code and re-code text segments and to not only retrieve text segments, but also the voice recordings related to these text fragments. This was especially helpful when I wanted to re-check the translation of certain parts of the interview. Qualitative researchers usually develop their code system based on the data, rather than on predefined criteria (Taylor et al., 2016). For the initial coding, I looked for key themes and patterns in ways in which the teachers in the case study schools defined inclusive education and how they tried to implement it in their school. Taylor et al. (2016) and Creswell (2012) described a process in which researchers read through the data, compare it with literature and keep track of hunches and interpretation to search for reoccurring themes and try to make sense of the data. While the emerging themes from the literature review did provide initial guidelines in the coding process, I tried to leave space for themes and patterns to emerge from the data.

Stage Two – Identification of Critical Incidents

A second stage in the data analysis, the identification of critical incidents, was added for several reasons. I realized in the first stage of the data analysis that although I tried to be open for themes to develop from the data itself, the emerging key themes from the literature review were strongly embedded in my thinking. I worked as consultant in several inclusive education projects before and while doing this study. Critical issues related to inclusive education implementation were so engrained in my thinking that it was difficult for me to step away from those themes during the

initial coding of the data. The challenging balance between my role as consultant in other projects and my role as researcher in this study is explored in section on 'Positionality' (p. 85).

The emerging themes from the literature review did allow to reflect on the potential tensions between how inclusive education is understood internationally and locally in the case study schools. By using a theme-based analysis only, I would however risk to impose theory developed in the Global North on the data collected in the case study schools. Identifying and reflecting on critical incidents as part of the analysis process allowed me to step away from the pre-defined, Western, categories, to create space for analysis emerging from the data and to look at the data from different perspective. Using critical incidents in the data analysis and presentation furthermore allowed to keep a strong focus on the context in which the data was collected, which was important to explore the research questions. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argued that the fragmentation of data through coding can lead to decontextualization.

Angelides and Ainscow (2000) suggest the use of critical incidents to analysis school cultures. They describe critical incidents as

> 'surprises followed by reflection or, even, problems followed by solutions' (Angelides and Ainscow, 2000, p. 149).

These incidents are not always big or dramatic events. Usually they are common place or routine events and acts (Tripp, 1993, Emerson, 2007). The incidents only become critical because someone sees it as such (Tripp, 1993). Critical incidents exist in this sense not independently from the observer, they are created. Researchers make value judgments about the significance of the event and a reflection about its meaning (Tripp, 1993, Emerson, 2007). Critical events are usually not self-explicating, they do not provide sudden insights or theoretical claims. Rather, they provide starting points for further inquiry (Emerson, 2007). Further interpretation and reflection take the incident beyond a description of an event. It can lead to the understanding of underlying trends, motives and structures (Tripp, 1993). As such, they help to open complex lines of conceptual development (Emerson, 2007). The use of critical incidents as data analysis requires detailed written accounts of events with as much description as possible to preserve the complexities of social interactions and events (Emerson, 2007, Tripp, 1993). After the incident is recorded it is gradually explored from different dimensions and perspectives. It grows and develops over time (Emerson, 2007).

There are different ways of using critical incidents. Angelides and Ainscow (2000) and Halquist and Musanti (2010) used critical incidents to both collect and analyse data. Their studies included elements of participative action research, which is not the focus of this study. Emerson (2007) used critical, or 'key', incidents to analyse data. The incidents provided starting points for further inquiry and reflection. He argued that critical incidents can potentially point towards different issues, which can each be explored further to reach deeper levels of analysis and understanding (Emerson, 2007). The critical incidents in this study were used in a functional way to make sense of the key concepts related to the research questions within the context of the case study schools. They were a tool to manage and present critical reflection and to support ongoing analysis of the data. The development of the incidents and reflections helped to gain deeper understanding of not only the complexities related to understanding and implementing inclusive education, but also of the complexities of collecting and analysing data itself. I adapted Musanti's criteria for the selection of critical incidents for this study (Halquist and Musanti, 2010, p. 451): the incidents were surprising, which encouraged further reflection; the incidents were 'problematic', they either had some degree of conflict or were difficult to understand or interpret immediately; the incidents represented one or more of the key themes related to the research questions, as identified in the first stage of the data analysis. The selected incidents reflected both themes related to local understanding or implementation of inclusive education and themes related to challenges in undertaking research as a foreign researcher in Vietnam. The identified incidents were discussed with critical friends (see also 'The Role of Critical Friends in Data Analysis', p. 108).

During the data collection phase I started to grasp the complexity of the task at hand, which are explored with greater detail in Chapter Seven (Critical incidents, p. 138). Inclusive education is a multi-layered concept, understood differently across contexts. Exploring how this concept was understood and conceptualized in the case study schools was more difficult than I initially anticipated. The challenges of working with a non-professional interpreter, specific socio-cultural and political factors which influenced how the teachers responded to research activities and different assumptions underlying key concepts and how research should be undertaken, all affected the data collection and analysis. The choice of presenting the data through a series of critical incidents created space to portray and address this complexity in the thesis in an organised way. It allowed to present the key themes within the context in which the data was collected.

Stage Three – Analysis of Key Themes from the Critical Incidents

The third and last stage of the data analysis involved analysing the reflections and interpretations from the critical incidents against the research questions. Reoccurring patterns and themes in the critical incidents were further explored. Each of the critical incidents challenged in a way the emerging key themes from the literature review. The incidents problematized how inclusive education was defined internationally and the identified critical issues in the literature review on how to best implement inclusive education. The critical incidents identified elements in the Vietnamese case study schools which did not fit neatly under these categories.

The Role of Critical Friends in Data Analysis

Critical friends have been used in different ways in educational research, school improvement processes and teacher professional development (Swaffield, 2007). In terms of research, the concept of critical friends is most often associated with action research (Campbell et al., 2004). While this study is not categorized as action research, it does share some of its key elements in working with critical friends. In the research design it was expected that regular conversations with critical friends would support rigour and depth in data collection and interpretation (Campbell et al., 2004) and increase validity through triangulation of perspectives (Stieha, 2014).

Costa and Kallick (1993, p. 50) defined a critical friend as

> '… a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens and offers critique of a person's work as a friend'

A 'supportive, yet challenging relationship' is a key feature of critical friendships (Swaffield, 2007, p. 205). Different authors recognized that these relationships are often uncomfortable, as critical friends do not seek to confirm interpretation and findings. Instead, they aim to challenge taken for granted assumptions, encourage honest reflection and complicate findings by searching for deeper meaning and offering alternative explanations (Campbell et al., 2004, Stieha, 2014, Swaffield, 2007). Critical friends can be both insiders or outsiders to a research project (Stieha,

2014). Swaffield (2007) does recommend for the critical friend to be knowledgeable of the education field.

This study design included different groups of critical friends, both insiders and outsiders to the study. All critical friends had experience in the field of education in Vietnam. The interpreter, Na, was an insider critical friend. She undertook the entire research journey together with me and therefore had a good understanding of in the context in which the data was collected. As researcher and lecturer in inclusive education at the Hanoi University of Education she had valuable perspectives on what happened in the case study schools and it was expected she would be able to provide alternative explanations of field events. The outsider critical friends were the members of Education Research Discussion Group and the Research Support Group, which were established during the first two phases of this study, when I was still searching to find access to the field. When I moved for personal reasons from Hanoi to Danang, central Vietnam, it became difficult to continue regular meetings with both critical friend groups. Apart from Na, I continued to meet with Ben and Sarah. They both had been part of the Education Sector Discussion Group and knew the research project and particular challenges from the start. Ben was a foreign education expert who worked for an international NGO and did action research with kindergarten teachers on increasing well-being and involvement of young children in the classroom. He was selected as critical friend because he worked in Vietnam for more than ten years in different positions. He knew the education sector in Vietnam very well and had research experience in Vietnamese schools. When I met Sarah, she was doing a Master course on Educational Management and consultancy work with a Vietnamese NGO. She later moved to Ghana to start her PhD study on the cultural perspectives towards corporal punishment in primary schools. Sarah was selected as critical friend as she understood the Vietnamese education context and was undertaking a PhD study herself, which helped to ask critical questions about the research design and field interpretations.

The assumption was that the critical friends would each look at the same issues from their unique perspective (Stieha, 2014). This helps to balance the closeness the qualitative researcher usually has with the data and to gain deeper understanding of what happened in the case study schools from different perspectives. Critical friends can

'… provide clarity to grey areas and bring necessary muddiness to something that might have been prematurely clear. … (*they*) can shine light into blind spots whether a researcher is in the first phases of defining the research question or working to understand outcomes' (Stieha, 2014, p. 208)

McNess et al. (2015, p. 309) argued that the creation of a 'third space', where researchers from different backgrounds reflect together about the data, can facilitate contextually situated analysis and generate a deeper understanding across researchers with different cultural background.

Research Ethics

It has been argued that research ethics depend on the context in which the research is conducted (Robinson-Pant, 2005, Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007, Fitzgerald et al., 2012, Christians, 2005). Many aspects of research that may seem rather routine or neutral in Western contexts are a lot more complex in cross-cultural research. Issues such as getting access to the field or gaining informed consent from research participants are often value-laden, multi-layered and sometimes sensitive in cross-cultural research (Robinson-Pant, 2005, Stephens, 2009). This section explores some of the anticipated ethical challenges and the strategies I developed to address these when they would occur. The challenges concerning gaining access to the field are explored in the next chapter (p. 115). The process of gaining access was one of the major challenges in this research and is therefore explored in greater detail.

Before starting this study, I obtained clearance from the Ethics Committee at Canterbury Christ Church University. I submitted an ethics proposal, which was reviewed and accepted. As the field work was undertaken in Vietnam, I also submitted the Overseas Ethics Declaration form. The ethics in this study were however considered as an on-going effort (Leeson, 2007, Bonnin, 2010, Fitzgerald et al., 2012), and would continue to be part of the research process after the initial ethics clearance. I was aware it would be difficult to anticipate which ethical dilemmas might occur (Silverman, 2003, Leeson, 2007). As general strategy I would therefore remain reflexive in my field diary about potential ethical dilemmas and discuss those in detail with the research participants and Vietnamese peer researchers. Christians (2005) argued that research ethics are to be negotiated in the field, in participation of all involved stakeholders. Researchers and

participants 'co-create and manage ethical spaces' within a specific context (Fitzgerald et al., 2012, Leeson, 2007). This was especially important in this cross-cultural study in which research ethics were understood differently by the research participants.

Gaining Informed Consent

To ensure I gained informed consent from the research participants prior to the data collection, I followed the ethics standards and guidelines from the Canterbury Christ Church University. I planned that each research participant would receive an invitation letter and information sheet with key information about the study, how data would be collected, used and disseminated, how confidentiality would be dealt with and the potential risks and benefits of participating. All teachers, directors and vice-directors participating in the research activities were asked to complete and sign a consent form. Other researchers undertaking similar research activities in Vietnam experienced that some participants were unwilling to sign consent forms as they regarded these forms as suspicious (Graham et al., 2014, Morrow, 2013). I was therefore aware to make the consent letters and forms as complete, yet as easy to understand as possible. I planned to allocate sufficient time to introduce the forms to the research participants and explain why I asked them to sign the papers.

Another potential ethical challenge in gaining informed consent was the impact of the bureaucratic structures through which I gained access to the field. The need to gain legal permission is explored in the next chapter (p. 115). There was a risk that because I obtained legal permission from the local authorities, the school directors and teachers could not refuse participation, as they would feel 'pressure from above' (Doyle, 2007, Leeson, 2007). Gaining access and informed consent would therefore be approached as an ongoing effort in this study. After providing formal consent, I planned to ask the participants frequently in a more informal manner whether they remember what this study was about and if they still want to participate.

The issue of obtaining informed consent for the Photovoice research activities was more complicated. There is no consensus in the literature on the best strategy to obtain consent from those whose pictures are taken in the framework of a research project. Harper (2005) argued that

since there is so little written about using photographic research methodologies, it is up to the researcher to decide what is appropriate. Researchers rely on the sensitivity they developed through in-depth understanding of the context to make such moral decisions (Harper, 2005). This is more difficult in cross-cultural research where researchers might be less familiar with the local sensitivities. Some researchers use the same rules as photo journalists and claim they do not need permission to take pictures in public spaces (Harper, 2005). Other researchers suggest a much stricter procedure. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) for example recommended obtaining three layers of written informed consent when doing Photovoice research. The first type of consent includes consent by the research participants. The second type involves consent from the person who is photographed. The third type of consent concerns permission from those in the pictures when the pictures are published (Wang and Redwood-Jones, 2001). The safety of both photographers and subjects of the pictures outweigh the loss of spontaneity for Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001). Other researchers chose for a strategy somewhere in the middle of these two ways of dealing with consent in photographic research. Graham et al. (2014) for example used for their Photovoice research on how children are learning in Northern Vietnam a form of passive consent. The parents of the children received a letter with information about the research project. They were asked to contact the school if they did not want their children to take part or be photographed. Since there is no overall accepted strategy for gaining informed consent when using Photovoice, I plan to discuss the ethical considerations and rules with the research participants. Christians (2005) argued that after all, research ethics must be negotiated in the field in participation of all involved stakeholders.

Benefits for Research Participants

Paying participants may be considered as coercive and in conflict with the concept of voluntary consent (Taylor et al., 2016). Based on earlier experiences in working with Vietnamese schools, I expected that teachers might ask for financial contributions in return for their participation in the study. I was also aware of the cultural importance of giving small gifts to research participants (Waldmann, 2000).

There is no consensus in the literature whether participants can or cannot be paid for their participation in the research (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). Creswell (2012) argued that participants invest a great deal of time and effort in the interviews. It might only be fair to provide them with small gifts, financial incentives or publications derived from the research. Young lives researchers (Morrow, 2013) brought small gifts for the children and families. Others provided locally relevant gifts for the entire community (such as books for the school). I anticipated to bring similar school gifts for each field visit.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

To increase confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants, I planned to change the names of the schools, the research participants, interpreter and contact persons at field and national level. I recognized however that confidentiality and anonymity might be a fluid concept in a one-party communist state. I expected there would be a sense of control and monitoring over the research activities. I met for example with a group of teachers at the Hill School before the start of this study, when I facilitated a study tour for Philippine education authorities to inclusive schools in Vietnam. I learned much later that three of the persons who introduced themselves as teachers, were actually police officers and representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs, who had the task to monitor the conversation.

This meant I could protect the anonymity of the research participants in publications based on the study, I could however not control what the authorities knew about what was shared during conversations and which consequences this might have for the research participants. I was therefore mindful about the way I designed research activities, the kind of questions I would ask and the topics to discuss. Similar to Graham et al. (2014) I planned to avoid placing participants in a position where they have to be openly critical towards people with power over them. As Scott et al. (2006), I did aim to approach topics from a positive angle rather than provoking participants to be critical towards their superiors. As discussed 'Research Methods' (p. 99), I planned to start focus group discussions with short reflective activities. These activities had as function to create a safe space for teachers to negotiate what they wanted to share with me. I therefore would not ask the interpreter to translate these conversations. From a Western perspective, these untranslated conversations might limit opportunities for me to notice contrasting perspectives. I

believed however that creating this space for teachers would make them feel more comfortable, as they were not encouraged to openly challenge or critique each other. I thought it would furthermore reduce potential harm as teachers could decide together what was appropriate to share in the conversation. When all the measures were taken to ensure anonymity and reduce potential harm, I had to trust that the teachers themselves knew what they could and could not share publicly.

Summary of Key Issues

This chapter introduced the research methodology. It placed this study within a qualitative research tradition. The research design showed similarities with social constructionism, although it did not fall neatly under this research paradigm. It shared the underlying assumption that an objective truth does not exist. Therefore, the research was designed to include a range of different perspectives. An ethnographic case study design was selected to address to the research questions. There was specific attention to building local partnerships and consideration of my position as outsider/insider and researcher/consultant. The research methods included interviewing, observation and reflexive field notes. The data analysis involved a three-staged approach, including data organisation in key themes, identification of critical incidents and analysing key themes from the critical incidents. The chapter finalised with a consideration of potential ethical challenges. The study approached research ethics as ongoing and situated. Reflexivity and discussions within the field and with local peer researchers were considered as the main strategies to cope with unexpected ethical dilemmas. Among the anticipated ethical challenges were concerns related to gaining informed consent in a top-down bureaucratic school system, benefits for teachers participating in the study and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity in school culture with significant government control.

Before introducing the case study schools in Chapter Six, I first provide a brief account of the process of gaining access to the field in Chapter Five 'Searching for Red Stamps – Access to the field'. The process of gaining access to the field was complicated and needed more space to be discussed in detail. I believed the challenges in gaining access to the field were fundamental to understand the research context for this study and were directly linked to the third research question on undertaking qualitative research as a foreign researcher in Vietnam.

Chapter Five – Searching for Red Stamps - Access to the field

Introduction

This chapter discusses the long and complicated process to gain access to the field. The first two phases of the study, searching for research partners and formalizing the partnership, took nearly two years from January 2015 to October 2016. This chapter is based on the field notes I made of meetings, informal contacts, mail conversations and other relevant events in finding access to the case study schools. Chapter Six ('Introducing the Case Study Schools', p. 123) and Seven ('Data Presentation through Critical Incidents', p. 138) concentrate on phase three and four of the study, the field work and data analysis. Adding a chapter on finding access to the field aims to maintain a chronological order in the main events in this study.

This chapter is more than an introduction in the context in which this study took place. It is directly linked to the third research question: 'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?'. It discusses some of the major hurdles I had to overcome in order to obtain legal permission to undertake research and finding case study schools, and the strategies which helped to address these obstacles. It is therefore part of the data collection for this study. The last section 'Critical Reflection' includes reflections and learning points related to the process of gaining access to the field.

Finding Access to the Field

I was aware of the need to obtain a legal permission paper to undertake research in Vietnamese schools. I experienced that as a foreign and non-Vietnamese speaking researcher it would be very difficult to obtain this document as an individual researcher. When I was still completing the proposal for this study, I was already exploring potential research partnerships. From October 2014 until May 2015 I had meetings with several NGO workers, representatives from international

organizations and universities to present the study and discuss potential cooperation. The different tracks did not lead to concrete partnerships.

I finally started making progress when I got in contact with the Training and Development Centre on Special Education (TDCSE), under the management of the Hanoi University of Education (HNUE). I met May, director of the TDCSE, through the Education Research Discussion group (see 'Partnerships and relationships', p. 95). May was also doing a PhD study on inclusive education in Vietnam. We discussed the difficulties I experienced in gaining access to the field. May immediately told me that she could help me to get access to case study schools. She said 'Don't you worry. I have a red stamp.' I knew May's red stamp was significant and could be a turning point in the process to get access to the field. A red stamp is a seal to be stamped with red ink on official documents. Government Decree 58 (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2001) provided very detailed instructions on which organisations can obtain a red stamp and how to use it. Each eligible organisation can only obtain one red stamp, which needs to be approved by the government. Official documents are only valid with both a signature and organisation red stamp. May's red stamp meant that she had authority to make decisions regarding her centre and was in the capacity to officially communicate with government institutes. This official communication was necessary in order to obtain a permission letter to do research. May became the first gatekeeper and started opening doors to find access to schools and teachers.

An official partnership between the Hanoi University of Education and Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) had to be established in order for May to be able to work her 'red stamp magic'. Small issues as identifying the correct persons to sign the Memorandum of Understanding between the universities, holidays, typos and inefficient postal services meant months of delay. The final version of the MoU is presented in Appendix Six. In the meantime, I continued to meet with May. She introduced me to Lan, her PhD supervisor and director of the National Institute of Education Management (NIEM). Both HNUE and NIEM had limited experience with qualitative research. We set up a Research Support Group with researchers from both HNUE and NIEM. We met regularly to share experiences in doing qualitative research. The meetings helped to maintain and deepen the relationship with TDSCE and to understand more about the specific contextual factors and challenges in undertaking research in Vietnamese schools. I was able to conduct a pilot focus group discussion with the members Research Support Group to test to approach and

type of questions to ask. The Research Support Group meetings also allowed me to start working and building a relationship with Na, the interpreter.

May and Lan suggested to search for permission to do field work in two schools in Hoa Binh, a province 70km Southwest from Hanoi. Both HNUE and NIEM worked with schools in Hoa Binh before and I visited one of the schools when I was doing consultancy work earlier that year. Once the partnership between HNUE and CCCU was formalized, Lan connected me with Thi, a former PhD student of hers. Thi was originally from Hoa Binh and had personal relationships with the local authorities. She agreed to submit my research proposal to the Hoa Binh DoET and to recommend me. Lan and Thi became second gatekeepers. Although I never met Thi in person, she played a crucial part in getting permission to undertake field work in Hoa Binh.

The third gatekeeper, Hoa Binh DoET, proved to be a more challenging partner to negotiate with. Thi submitted on my behalf a translated research proposal and an accompanying letter from TDCSE with proof of partnership between HNUE and CCCU and with May's red stamp. DoET requested an approval fee of 500,000 VND (17 GBP[3]), which soon increased to 4,000,000 VND (140 GBP). Research approval fees were in a legally grey zone in Vietnam. Some policy documents such as the Circular 58 on Statistic Research (MoF, 2011) and Circular 53 on Census Research (MoF, 2012) did mention the need to receive approval for research design and tools with potential fees ranging from 2,000,000 to 4,500,000 VND. It was however not entirely clear if this research fell under these terms. The authorities could not provide a written acknowledgment of receipt for the approval fee. I was hesitant at first, as the fee seemed dubious and could be seen as a form of corruption. I was afraid I would be requested to pay similar financial contributions later in the data collection phase. After long discussions with my PhD supervision panel and local connections, I decided to pay the fee. Peer researchers at the HNUE shared that this approval fee is common practice when undertaking research in Vietnam. According to May and Lan refusing to pay the fee could result in not receiving permission for field work. I would have to start the whole process over in another province, where the authorities would most likely request a similar approval fee. After settling the fee, the authorities requested a copy of all questions I would ask each research participant during the two-year period of the data collection. Given the qualitative nature of this

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[3] Exchange rate: www.xe.com, December 2019.

research I could not provide this. The authorities agreed with the suggestion to share the field visit preparation before each visit. In addition, Thi offered to take responsibility over the content of my research. In October 2016, I finally received an official permission letter, with red stamps and signatures from the Hoa Binh provincial authorities, to undertake research in two schools in Hoa Binh, the Hill School and the River School.

Both the Hill School and the River School accepted the official documentation and assured their full participation. The directors at both schools however set their own requirements for participation in the research, and thus became the last gatekeepers. Both schools asked for an initial fee of 1,000,000 VND (35 GBP). The requested fees were again in a legally grey zone. After conversations with all involved parties, I decided to also pay these fees. The directors at both schools furthermore shared their expectation that involvement in this research would increase the quality of inclusive education at their school.

Although I received permission to undertake research in the two case study schools at four different levels, gaining access remained a continuous effort. After finding a local partner, obtaining legal permission from the local authorities and consent from the school directors to participate in the study, also the selected teachers formally consented their participation in the study. Even though the field relationships developed over the course of the data collection phase, they remained fragile and building trust was an ongoing effort. Access with the teachers could not be taken for granted. The openness from the teachers fluctuated. Until the very last field visit, I struggled with gaining trust from the research participants and move beyond more superficial conversations. This is explored with more detail in the critical incidents (see 'Chapter Seven, p. 138).

Critical Reflection

The process of gaining access to the field was an unpredictable process. Keeping field notes and reflection about the process of gaining access to the is a part of the data collection process and can contribute to the overall learning (Taylor et al., 2016). In this section I review the main learning points in my personal process of gaining access to the field.

Beyond Control

Much of what happened in the process to gain access to the field was not planned, but also did not fully happen by chance. It could be described best as what Stephens (2009, p. 71) called so accurately 'managed luck'. Opportunity presented itself because I was open to it, followed different tracks at the same time and continued to build a professional and personal network in Vietnam. Gaining access depends both on formal encounters when following hierarchal and bureaucratic procedures and accidental or casual encounters (Stephens, 2009). The connections with May from TDCSE and Lan from NIEM fell under the category of 'accidental or casual encounters'. I met May through the Education Research Discussion Group and I knew Lan from earlier consultancy assignments in Vietnam. The connections that followed from that point fell in the category of 'hierarchical and bureaucratic encounters'. We worked our way through the bureaucratic system to find access at school level. The combination of formal and informal connections meant that the process the gain access to the field was not predictable and other researchers would have to find their own entry points. Relationships were a key factor in this process for me.

'Beyond control' also meant realizing that much of the process of getting access to the field happened 'behind screens', and therefore not fully within my control. May and Na from HNUE and Lan from NIEM became very important friends who opened many doors for me. They helped me to understand the research context in Vietnam and shared key information. They however did not share everything. For example, although I tried to set up meetings with Thi, who was crucial in negotiating with the Hoa Binh authorities, I never met her in person. I still do not know exactly what 'recommending me' or 'taking responsibility for the research content' meant. I also learned that May paid the approval fee of 4,000,000 VND for the local authorities from her own pocket, while I was still thinking about how to deal with this request. Na told me this much later. So, while I tried to give a full account of the process of gaining access to the field, it is possible more happened without being fully aware of it. This did raise questions on what more happened during the data collection phase that could have possibly affected how the teachers perceived me and how they answered questions.

Letting go of full control and searching for managed luck meant creating and being open for opportunities as they came along. I was not able to undertake field work for a very long time. While this was at times frustrating, in hindsight, it did provide opportunities which strengthened data the collection process on the long term. I developed a partnership with Vietnamese researchers from HNUE and NIEM, which was mutually beneficial. The partnership helped to develop a better understanding of the specific research context in Vietnam, to contextualize challenges and to make situated decisions. In return, I shared experience in qualitative research. I had the opportunity to establish a relationship with Na, the interpreter, prior to the field visits. The waiting period before the start of the field work furthermore allowed me to broaden my literature review, refine the methodology and conduct a pilot focus group discussion before starting the data collection.

Multi-layered and Ongoing Process

The process furthermore reconfirmed that gaining access to the field and informed consent is multi-layered and ongoing, as argued by different researchers (for example (Fitzgerald et al., 2012, Ebrahim, 2010, Robinson-Pant, 2005, Creswell, 2012)). I learned that field relationships were a crucial factor in this process. These relationships were however unpredictable, messy and non-linear. While it was a very difficult and perhaps not fully open process to obtain an official research permission letter, it was still far more straight forward than what happened afterwards in the schools. Based on literature on school cultures and leadership styles in Confucian Heritage Cultures and the top-down bureaucratic institutional framework in Vietnam (for example (Truong and Hallinger, 2015, Burr, 2014)), I expected that once permission was granted at higher levels, I would not encounter much more barriers at lower levels. It was however a lot more complex in practice. The directors at both schools did indicate that since I had an official permission letter, there was no issue with me doing research in their school. Still, they set their own requirements by asking initial fees, support with English lessons and learning about inclusive education. The barriers at the level of the teachers were more subtle. The teachers never openly refused participation in the study. Some teachers however seemed to avoid deeper conversations by quoting policies or presenting a rather perfect picture of the school. This could happen unexpectedly, after a series of more open conversations. This is explored further in the critical

incidents (see 'Chapter Seven', p. 138). Whatever was behind what I experienced as 'set backs' in the relationship development, it taught me that getting access to the field is not to be taken for granted. Until the very last field visit I had to clarify the study, my position, re-negotiate access and develop trust. I learned that relationships were not linear, going from distant to gradually developing trust which would lead to gradually more open conversations, as I expected at the start of this study. The relationships were more circular, and I could not always understand what influenced the conversations. It also reminded me that even in top down and bureaucratic cultures and institutional frameworks, teachers do have subtle ways to reinforce their agency (Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016, Nguyen and Bui, 2016).

Lack of Clear Ethical Guidelines

I did not find evidence of clear research guidelines, policies or ethical committees at national level or at institutional level within the HNUE and NIEM. Therefore, when confronted with ethical dilemmas I had no clear rules within country to fall back on. While I was throughout this study guided by the ethical standards of the Canterbury Christ Church University, it was sometimes difficult to apply these to research challenges in another context. Some key ethical standard such as voluntary participation, informed consent or confidentiality were less straightforward than it might seem from a European perspective (See also 'Research Ethics', p. 110). For example, although I had strategies in place to assure confidentiality and anonymity in reporting, I could not ensure confidentiality at local level as there might be government control during the data collection activities. As I received legal permission and the schools and teachers had been appointed by the authorities to participate in the study, it might have been difficult for the teachers to refuse participation. This could affect autonomy and voluntary informed consent. From a Western perspective, the approval fees for the authorities and access fees for the schools could be considered as bribes and they could have affected my position as researcher. From a Vietnamese perspective, these fees seemed to be customary and unavoidable. The initial strategies to cope with these ethical dilemmas were mentioned in the methodology chapter. An exploration of what actually happened and how it might have influenced the data collection and analysis is included in the Discussion Chapter (see 'Ethical Challenges', p. 240).

A key learning point was that when confronted with context-specific ethical dilemmas and in absence of local ethical guidelines, conversations with peer Vietnamese researchers and critical friends were fundamental to making context appropriate decisions. The conversations with these Vietnamese researchers allowed to gain insight in the specific research context, challenges and practices and to make situated ethical decisions.

Summary of Key Issues

This chapter provided an overview of first two phases of the study, 'Searching for Research Partners' (January – May 2015) and 'Formalizing the Partnership' (May 2015 – October 2016). The account of the process of getting access to the field was essential to develop an understanding of the research context. It was considered as part of the data presentation, as it was directly linked to the last research question, on navigating the complexities of undertaking research as a foreign researcher in Vietnam. The key learning of this chapter included an acceptance that I could not fully control everything that happened in this research journey. While I did actively search and try different strategies, much of the process of gaining access to the field involved 'being open for opportunities as they came along'. I furthermore realized that I was not always aware of what some of my key partners did to support my access to the field. This uncertainty of what exactly happened in the field will be explored further in the critical incidents (see 'Chapter Seven', p. 138) and in the account of leaving the field (see 'Chapter Eight', p. 199). Another key learning involved the understanding that gaining access was multi-layered and ongoing. After I obtained the necessary official documents and red stamps, it continued to be an ongoing process to gain access to the teachers and earn their trust.

The next chapter will introduce each case study school based on self-introductions by the teachers through conversations and Photovoice activities. It aims to provide a general overview of the setting in which the field work was undertaken and reflect on the emerging similarities and differences between the case study schools.

Chapter Six – Introducing the Case Study Schools

Introduction

The case study schools are introduced in this chapter to provide an insight in the context in which the study was undertaken. The chapter starts with a general overview of the field activities. Each school is then introduced based on the information the teachers shared throughout different conversations and photovoice activities. I acknowledge this initial presentation of the case study schools can be interpreted as rather limited and one-dimensional. When engaging deeper with the data collected in the case study schools it became clear that introducing inclusive schools is much more complex than counting the number of children with disabilities in the school or providing an overview of involvement in international programmes. This chapter serves as an initial context setting, a much more layered presentation of the practices in the case study schools is presented in the data presentation chapter (see Chapter 7 – Data Presentation Trough Critical Incidents', p. 138).

The chapter ends with a summary of emerging similarities and differences between the case study schools. The Hill School and the River School were similar in many ways. The two case study schools were not selected to be different from each other. A second school was selected to allow for further triangulation of data and provide a back-up plan in case field visits would no longer be allowed in the first case study school. As the data collected in both schools was rich and relevant, it was decided to continue collecting data from both schools.

Field Activities

Between October 2016 and April 2018, I conducted twelve field visits to both case study schools. For each field trip I prepared a planning document, which I shared in advance with the local authorities. The planning included the purpose of the visit, the type of research activity (for example focus group discussion with teachers, individual interview, or classroom observation) and a list of key questions or activities to initiate conversations. An example of a planning

document is included in Appendix Three. The topics for the conversations were based on the research questions and ongoing data analysis.

The following research activities were undertaken during the data collection phase:

- Hill School: 1 interview with the director and vice-director, 11 focus group discussions with teachers, 2 individual teacher interviews and 3 classroom observations, of which 1 in the satellite school
- River School: 2 interviews with the director, 12 focus group discussions with teachers, 1 guided tour in the school and 1 classroom observation.

The Hill School

General Introduction

The Hill School was a cluster of two public primary schools, under the management of the same director and vice-director. The main location of the Hill school was at the centre of the commune and had twelve classes, from grade one to grade five. The second location of the school was more remote. It was referred to by the directors and teachers as 'the satellite school' and had three classes, grade one to three. The satellite school facilitated access to school for the younger children from the more remote villages. In total, there were 413 students and 36 staff members at both locations combined at the start of the data collection phase. Of the 36 staff members, 31 were teachers, both general and subject teachers. Nearly all children at the Hill School satellite and more than half of the children at the main school belonged to the Muong ethnic minority group. The research participants did not notice much difference between children from the Kinh, ethnic Vietnamese and majority ethnic group in Vietnam, and the children from the Muong ethnic minority.

Inclusive education was initiated in the Hill School through a project from CRS (Catholic Relief Service, international NGO), from 1999 until 2002. Project offered training courses on inclusive education for the vice-director and a selected group of teachers. Although the project finished in

2002, the Hill School continued to include children with disabilities. The Hill School considered itself as one of the pioneers of inclusive education in the country. According to the vice-director and teachers, their school served as a model for national inclusive education policies, which were developed by MoET from 2004 onwards.

> 'CRS reported about the project results and outcomes. Based on this the Ministry of Education and Training made inclusive education policies. You can see a lot of laws for people with disabilities from that moment.' (Van, interview, 30 November 2016)

The Hill School Through the Eyes of the Teachers – First Use of Photovoice

Photovoice activities were sometimes used as an entry point to start focus group discussions (See also 'Chapter Four', p. 101). I provided each case study school with a digital camera. The Photovoice activities started with an introductory workshop to explain the method, discuss ethical considerations and practice taking pictures. The teachers at the Hill School were concerned with respecting the dignity of their colleagues and maintaining a positive image of the school when taking pictures. It was therefore decided to, whenever possible, ask permission from colleagues and children before taking pictures. When this was not possible, the participants agreed to show the picture to their colleagues and let them decide if the picture could be used in the study. The participants felt less need to ask permission from children to take pictures. I was concerned this would not be in line with ethical requirements from a Western perspective. We finally agreed the teachers would inform all parents about the study and ask verbal permission to take pictures. The purpose of the first Photovoice assignment was to get used to the method. The teachers were asked to make a series of pictures to introduce their school. It was at the end of the Photovoice workshop and we had limited time to discuss the pictures. I decided to include these first pictures in this chapter, as they introduced some key issues about the school from the perspective of the research participants.

The first picture showed the main building of the school and part of the playground. Van took the picture to show how clean and green the school environment is.

'It is quite a good school environment, because it has a lot of trees. The environment is very clean, a clean building and clean roads.' (Van, Teacher focus group discussion, 22 March 2017)

The students were involved in cleaning and maintaining the school environment. Each class was responsible for cleaning a specific part of the playground. The second picture showed the area that needs to be cleaned by class 4C. According to Van, this helped the students to become aware of their environment and to develop respect for their environment.

'The students learn how to clean and how to protect the environment.' (Van, Teacher focus group discussion, 22 March 2017)

Ha and Kim worked together to show how a classroom in their school looks like. The children sit most of the times in rows, two by two. They all have a textbook to follow the lessons. Sometimes the children work in pairs or turn their chairs around to work in groups of four.

The River School

General Introduction

The River School is also a public primary school. There were 302 students, divided over ten classes, grade one to five, at the start of the data collection. There were 29 staff members, 24 of them were teachers. 269 of the students at the River School belonged to an ethnic minority group, mainly Muong. There were 140 girls at the school, all of them came from an ethnic minority family.

The director and teachers at the River School were hesitant to call themselves an inclusive school. This seemed to be because there were no children with an official disability certificate. There have however always been children with learning difficulties at the school. Most of these children experienced barriers in accessing and achieving in school. They came from poor families or they did not receive much support at home.

The River School was involved in the same inclusive education project from CRS as the Hill School. The River School was also part of the VNEN project (Vietnam Escuela Nueva, or Vietnam New School Model), from 2012 until 2016. The project from MoET and World Bank aimed to enhance the quality of education. This will be discussed further in the critical incidents ('Chapter Seven', p. 138).

The River School Through the Eyes of the Teachers – First use of Photovoice

The teachers in the River School did the same Photovoice activity as in Hill School. We discussed some ethical concerns as well. Similar as in the Hill School, the teachers in the River School were concerned about the dignity of their colleague when taking pictures. They believed no permission was necessary as long as the dignity of their colleagues was respected. We agreed that it was important to introduce the purpose of the picture activities to the other teachers and children. The teachers at the River School agreed to ask verbal permission from colleagues and parents to take pictures.

Lynn took a picture of students undertaking group work. For her, it represented the changes in the River School since the implementation of the VNEN project.

> 'This picture shows that students learn in the style of VNEN. They work in groups. They cooperate and share.' (Lynn, Teacher focus group discussion, 22 March 2017)

When comparing the teaching in their school with the teaching style in other schools in the district that have not been part of the VNEN project, they said:

> 'The teaching method is different. The students do more self-study. In the other schools, the teachers provide a lot of instruction. It is different here. The students work much more by themselves' (Na summarizes a discussion between Vy, Min and Lynn, Teacher focus group discussion, 21 December 2016)

The changes in the teaching style had an impact on the learning progress of the children. Lynn clarified:

> 'During the VNEN project, the students improved their knowledge and their social skills and communication skills. Because in the VNEN project, they need to study a lot by themselves and cooperate in groups. They help each other, share ideas and share opinions.' (Teacher focus group discussion, 21 December 2016)

> 'The most significant difference between the two models of classrooms *(i.e., before and after VNEN implementation)* is that the students are now more active and more proactive in learning. They have better self-control and self-management' (Lynn, Teacher focus group discussion, 14 December 2016)

The impact of the VNEN project on the practice and inclusive education implementation in the River School is further explored in the critical incidents ('Chapter Eight', p. 199).

The second picture showed the school library.

> 'I want to introduce the child-friendly library of the River School. We are very proud of the library. Not all schools have a library like this. … The River School has the best child-friendly library.' (Vy, Teacher focus group discussion, 22 March 2017)

The library included magazines and products brought by teachers and students to display their community, such agricultural products, music instruments and traditional clothes from the Muong ethnic minority. In the corner the teachers made a display of the river which runs in front of the school and small bamboo forest. The library picture showed according to Vy the efforts of the River School to become a child-friendly school with the participation of the students and their parents.

The last picture presented the playground. It was a tradition that the students from the fifth grade collected money to donate a bench when they graduate from primary school. The name of the class and year of graduation were painted on the benches. At the end of the school day both teachers and children liked to sit on the benches. It was a time when everyone could relax and have more informal conversations. According to Min, it represented the friendly atmosphere at the school.

> 'The students and teachers go to the playground after the lesson and sit down on the benches to relax. … They have friendly conversations.' (Min, Teacher focus group discussion, 22 March 2017)

Min added that the school won awards several years in a row for being a 'clean, beautiful and green school', which was also represented by the picture below.

21.03.2017

Emerging Similarities and Differences

Physical Setting

Both schools were located in the same district in Hoa Binh province, 70km Southwest from Hanoi (for a map, see Appendix Seven). The Hill School was located closer to the border with Hanoi. The River School was slightly more difficult to reach and therefore felt more rural, although in distance the commune was closer to the provincial city centre of Hoa Binh. The small roads towards the River School along rice paddies, rivers and hills were especially in the rainy season less accessible.

The physical similarities between the two schools was striking. Both schools had a similar layout. Three separate buildings with classrooms were positioned in a U-shape around the playground. Large trees provided shade and flower and plant beds brightened up the school yard. In both schools, the main building was decorated with a huge poster of Ho Chi Minh helping a young pioneer to tie her scarf. The meeting rooms in both schools were the interviews and focus group discussions were held, were almost an exact copy. The meeting rooms felt very formal and traditional. Heavy and dark tables were positioned in a rectangle. In the middle of the rectangle

there were plastic flower arrangements, which made it difficult to see the faces of the people sitting at the other side. A bust of Ho Chi Minh had a prominent place in the meeting room. The walls were decorated with a Vietnamese flag, a flag with the communist hammer and sickle and slogans with famous quotes from Ho Chi Minh. The slogans said 'Live, fight, work and study following the example of Uncle Ho' and 'To reap a return in 10 years, plant trees. To reap a return in 100 years, educate people'. The walls were furthermore decorated with awards from various teacher and student competitions. Na and I were always instructed to sit at one side of the rectangle tables, the teachers sat down at the opposite side. It all added to the formal atmosphere.

Teachers and Students

The Hill and the River School were similar in terms of teacher and student population. With its second location, the Hill School was slightly larger. In both case study schools there was a relatively high number of teachers. The Hill School had 31 teachers for 15 classes, the River School 24 teachers for 10 classes. In both schools, most teachers did not have a full-time assignment. The teachers were either classroom teachers, responsible for teaching main subjects such as Vietnamese and mathematics to one classroom, or subject teachers, who taught subjects as science, history, geography, arts or sports to different grades. All of the teachers in both schools were Kinh, Vietnamese ethnic majority.

At both case study schools, the majority of the students belonged to the Muong ethnic minority group. Nearly 90% of all students at the River School were Muong. All children at the Hill satellite school were Muong, at the main schools just over 50% of the students were Muong. There are 53 different ethnic minority groups in Vietnam. The Muong are the third largest ethnic minority group and make up for 1.5% of the total population in Vietnam. The Muong mainly live in Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, and Phu To province. According to the official statistics, there is not a lot of difference between Kinh and Muong in terms of educational access (UNFPA, 2011). There is no difference in literacy rates. The net enrolment rate for primary school is nearly similar for Kinh (97.1%) and Muong (95.7%). In comparison, the Mong ethnic minority group has with 72.6% the lowest net enrolment rate at primary school level in Vietnam. The Muong have however a

considerably lower economic status than the Kinh. Among the Muong Households, 66.7% are living in socio-economic conditions classified as 'poor' to 'poorest', compared to 27.6 % of the Kinh households in the same categories (UNFPA, 2011).

Collaboration with International Organisations

Both case study schools were involved in in the same inclusive education project from CRS. The NGO managed an inclusive education project from 1998 until 2002, with interventions at different levels. At central level, CRS supported MoET to develop a bachelor's degree on special education. They cooperated with teacher training institutes at provincial level to support pre-service teacher training for inclusive education. CRS worked at school level to provide in-service teacher training on inclusive education, enhance community collaboration, establishing a network of key teachers supporting a cluster of inclusive schools, raise awareness of school leaders on the right to education for all and the establishment of inclusive education steering committees with relevant local authorities.

The teachers at both schools considered the CRS as a turning point in the implementation of inclusive education in their schools.

> 'Before the project *(CRS project)* we already had children with disability in our school. … . After 1999, we received benefits from the project, like teaching methodology and skills. … For example, before the project, if students with disabilities come to the classroom, they can learn based on their abilities. However, after the project, we know how to adjust or accommodate the content of the programme. We can identify the strengths, so we can teach them. For example, if one of my students has difficulties to learn, however he has skills in drawing, I will make some adjustments to help him achieve some goals with drawing.' (Lynn, Teacher focus group discussion at the River School, 21 December 2016)
> 'In 1999 we became an inclusive school. CRS provided many training workshops about issues as raising awareness in the community, mobilize parents to send their children with disabilities to school, rehabilitation, support parents in educating children with disabilities.' (Kim, Teacher focus group discussion at the Hill School, 21 December 2016)

The River School was involved in the Vietnam New School Model project (commonly known as VNEN, Vietnam Escuala Nueva). The Hill School did not participate in this project. The model was developed in the 1970s in Colombia to improve the quality of education in rural areas and bridge the gap between learning achievement from students in urban and in rural schools. MoET and World Bank collaborated to adapt the model to Vietnam to enhance the quality of education to lead Vietnam towards a post-industrial nation (Parandekar et al., 2017). The pilot schools, including the River School, received funding to implement school improvement plans and to organize bi-weekly teacher meetings for collaborative learning and problem solving.

Research Participants

The director of the Hill School selected Ha, Kim and Hong to participate in the focus group discussions. The vice director, Van, joined most research activities as well. The director of the River School selected Lynn, Min and Vy. When Lynn and Min retired in October 2017, Sang and Ann joined the focus group discussions. The director of the River School participated in two short interviews. Both schools selected senior teachers to participate in the research. All participating teachers worked for nearly 20 years or more at the case study schools. Na, the interpreter, believed this reflected Vietnamese, Confucian, culture. She explained:

> 'When you have visitors, you want to show the best and hide the bad things. You do this because you are afraid that others might see your bad things. You do not want others to think you have problems.' (Na, car conversation, 30 November 2011)

All selected teachers in both schools were female. This was not surprising since 78% of the primary school teachers in Vietnam in 2016 were female (UNESCO UIS, 2019). Apart from one foreign critical friend, everyone who participated in this study, from the national contact persons at the HNUE and TDSCE, members of the Research Support Group, interpreter to the research participants were all female. This was not a deliberate choice. It however reflects how the majority of teachers and school managers in Vietnamese primary education are female.

The presence of the vice director in the Hill School seemed to add a sense of control in the focus group discussions. It seemed the teachers were more careful in what they said and took less

initiative to share their personal perspectives. The teachers in the River School, where the director or vice-director did not join the focus group discussions, appeared to be more participative. They were more critical and shared more challenging situations earlier in the data collection phase. Na suggested another reason why the teachers in the Hill School might be less responsive. Van was the focal person on inclusive education in the district since the start of the CRS inclusive education project in 2002. Na thought that the teachers in the River School felt that Van knew more about inclusive education and should therefore reply the questions.

> 'You should not forget that Van has been in the school for more than 20 years already. She has been involved with inclusive education since the project *(i.e., CRS inclusive education project)* started and she is the focal person on inclusive education. Maybe the teachers feel she has more authority to answer questions. Tam *(i.e., River School director)* has been only been at the River School for 2 years, because of the director rotation system in Vietnam. The teachers at the River School know more about inclusive education at the River School than Tam. They have been at the school much longer. Maybe Tam does not know the answers to your questions.' (Na, car conversation, 30 November 16)

I used different strategies to include the voice of the teachers at the Hill School. I asked more direct questions to the teachers for example. The Photovoice activities allowed to explore individual perspectives, as the teachers were asked to take their own pictures for the assignments. In addition, I conducted individual interviews with Ha. She was not the most vocal teacher in the group, however what Ha shared often challenged my own assumptions about what was going on and encouraged me to reflect deeper.

The research participants at the Hill School remained the same for the entire data collection phase. When Lynn and Min retired at the River School in October 2017, they were replaced by two younger teachers, Ann and Sang. Ann joined the River School that school year as a subject teacher for science, history and geography in grade four and five. Sang worked already for a few years at the River School as a grade two teacher. With only three field visits left in the data collection period, it was difficult to build up relationships with Ann and Sang. They did not appear to be interested in the study and were not very participative in the group discussions. They had not been part of any project activity from CRS or VNEN and expressed rather negative attitudes towards inclusive education and education reforms. I tried to meet with Lynn after her retirement, to continue more informal conversations outside the school context. Lynn was always open and

easy to connect with during the focus group discussions. Lynn agreed to continue her participation in the study. For various reasons we were never able to actually meet with her after she retired.

Summary of Key Issues

The case study schools were in many ways similar to each other. They were both identified as inclusive schools by the local authorities, as they both participated in an inclusive education programme from CRS from 1998 until 2002. The River School also participated in a programme from MoET and World Bank, VNEN, from 2012 until 2016, aimed at increasing the quality of basic education. The Hill School was slightly larger in size, as it had a second location. Both schools had a large population of students from the Muong ethnic minority group. All research participants were female and senior teachers.

The next chapter will present the data through a series of critical incidents. Identification and reflection of critical incidents was part of the three-staged approach to data collection (see also 'Chapter Four', p. 104). It allowed analysis to emerge from the data, include different perspectives in the analysis and present the data in a way which maintained its complexity.

Chapter Seven – Data Presentation Through Critical Incidents

Introduction

This chapter presents the data through a series of critical incidents. The data analysis for this study involved three stages:

1. Organising data in codes to identify themes and patterns, broadly based on the emerging themes from the literature review
2. Identification of critical incidents to allow the analysis to emerge from the data itself and look at the data within its context from different perspectives
3. Deeper reflection and analysis of the key themes from the critical incidents

The following criteria were used to identify critical incidents: the incidents were surprising, which encouraged further reflection; the incidents were 'problematic', they either had some degree of conflict or were difficult to understand or interpret immediately; the incidents represented one or more of the key themes related to the research questions. The incidents are not presented per case study school. Each incident mentions in which cases study school the events happened. Some incidents cover both schools, or the reflections emphasizes differences or similarities between the two case study schools. The focus was on selecting incidents which would allow for further reflection and analysis, not on ensuring a certain number of incidents per case study school was reached. As was clear from the start of the study, the context of both case study schools was very similar. Incidents, and especially the reflections based on the incidents often applied to both schools.

Each incident starts with a description of what happened based on interview transcripts, field notes or observation reports. Emerson (2007) argued that when working with critical incidents, it is important to provide empirically rich accounts of what happened. This includes first-hand data and 'seemingly trivial details' which ensure the complex reality and context in which the incident happened remains intact (Emerson, 2007, p. 439). The section 'Selection of the Incident' discusses why the incident was considered as critical and how it is linked to the research questions. The critical reflection discusses the incident from different perspectives, and where relevant, links it

back to the literature review. Each incident finalizes with a section 'Implications', which discusses how the incident influenced the next step in the data collection or ongoing analysis. Key themes and patterns from the critical incidents are further explored against the research questions in Chapter Nine (p. 205). The different steps in developing each incident, including description of the event, justification of the criticality, initial reflection, implication and discussion, present further levels of analysis. As such, the process represented what (Ely et al., 1991) called 'circles within circles' to reach deeper analysis and understanding.

Incident 1 – Mass English Lesson

Incident

The first incident happened during the introduction visit to the Hill School. After providing key information about the research, the director of the Hill School reflected on the potential benefits for the school when participating in this study. She hoped the teachers would learn more about inclusive education. She also asked if I could talk English with some children to improve their conversational English. After clarifying I was not an English teacher, nor a native speaker, I agreed to have informal conversations with the students. After the research activities with the teachers, all children gathered on the playground to have a conversation with me in English.

> 'When we come out of the meeting room, all 413 the children of the school are lined up on the playground. They do physical exercises, which is quite common in Vietnamese schools. A teacher beats a huge drum. The children do star jumps, swing their bodies from side to side and wave their hands in the air. I stop for a few minutes to watch them. The English teacher tells me that the children are now ready to talk with me. I do not understand what the teacher expects from me. 413 children are standing neatly in lines, looking at me. I give the English teacher a confused nod. She looks at the children, gives a sign and they all shout together 'Hello, how are you?'. I reply: 'I am fine, how are you?'. Some children standing close to me, reply 'I am fine'. The whole group goes on. With each sign of the English teacher they shout another question. 'What is your name?', 'Where are you from?', 'How old are you?'. I reply the questions and try to ask some questions back. My voice does not carry very far. A few children in the first row look puzzled at me.

No one replies. The teacher and children seem to have gone through their questions. There is an uncomfortable silence. I ask what they want to do next and seem to have created further confusion. After some conversation between the teachers and Na, the English teacher shakes my hand and thanks me for the lesson. I wave at the children and thank the teachers. Na and I get in the car and leave the Hill School'. (Field Notes, 30 November 2016, Hill School)

Selection of the Incident

This was a critical incident for me, as it questioned right from the start of the data collection stage if it was clear for the teachers and directors why I came to their school and what my position was. In reflecting about the incident, I noticed that both Na and I also struggled with my position in the field. The boundaries between me as a researcher and as a consultant seemed to be unclear for everyone involved. In addition, we seemed to have different expectation on how research should look like. All of this potentially impacted the data collection and was therefore linked to the third research question, 'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?'.

I was surprised by the way in which the teachers organised the English conversation in the incident. It provided an insight in how teachers understood education, and thus relevant for the first research question, 'How are concepts of 'education' and 'inclusion' understood at school level in Vietnam?'. The underlying pedagogy was difficult to link with critical issues in inclusive education implementation as identified in the literature review. I became however aware of the tensions when using a Western theoretical framework to analyse field events in a different context. This linked the incident again to the third research question.

Initial Reflection

In itself it might not be a big issue to perform other roles in the school while undertaking field work. Perhaps the director of the Hill school just used the opportunity of having a foreigner at the

school to organize an additional language lesson. I agree with Taylor et al. (2016) that since research participants have not much to gain from their involvement in the study, it seems only fair the researcher is prepared to perform other roles and tasks as well.

While it might have been clear that I was not at the school to teach English, it was perhaps less clear that I was not coming to the school in the capacity of an inclusive education consultant or evaluator. A conversation with a teacher in the Hill School seemed to indicate that although the topic of the study might not have been entirely clear, the teacher primarily perceived me as a researcher.

> '*Me*: Do you remember why we have these meetings?
>
> *Hong*: Yes, you want to research everything about children with disabilities.' (Teacher focus group discussion at Hill School, 22 March 2017)

Throughout the entire data collection phase I however continued to notice a tendency from the research participants to present an overly positive picture of what was happening in their school in terms of inclusive education implementation (see also 'Openness', p. 191). In addition, participants often replied questions by quoting directly from policy documents (see also 'Policy Talk', p. 155). This could imply that the teachers did at some level confuse my role with that of a consultant or evaluator and that I was perhaps searching for 'correct' responses. This is further explored in the Discussion Chapter ('Expectations Towards the Research and the Researchers', p. 225), in which I discussed how the research methodology was challenged when aiming to obtain deeper level data and understanding of field events. I furthermore discussed how I gradually became aware of how my Western perspective on 'the truth' initially limited my interpretations and how an understanding of 'different versions of the truth' allowed to develop a more nuanced understanding of why teachers might have presented, what I perceived as, an ideal image of their school and practice. Finally, the Discussion Chapters nuances the Researcher – Consultant dichotomy and explored a more blended position.

Na believed the teachers in the Hill School knew that I was a researcher, and not a consultant or evaluator. In a conversation with Na in which we discussed the experience of teachers with performance assessment and how this might have affected how the teachers perceived us, she said:

'I think they understand that you come to help them. It doesn't matter, I think they understand that you come to just ask them some questions, not evaluate, and will help inclusive education for Vietnam.' (Interview with Na, 13 June 2019)

This conversation might indicate that Na had a different perspective on the purpose of our visits as well. By emphasizing that I was going to help the teachers or inclusive education in Vietnam, she appeared to be placing me towards the consultant end on the 'researcher – consultant continuum'. In later communication Na expressed to have a different perspective on the focus of this study and how the data should therefore be analysed.

' … I think that you should concentrate the on main ideas for inclusive education such as teaching pedagogy, understanding concepts of inclusive education, attitudes on inclusive education, environment, infrastructure and equipment for inclusive education, policies for inclusive education, community involvement, more than talking about cultural conflict. Because culture is a difficult issue and criticized by many people. It just influenced our inclusive education practice in some ways.' (Email conversation with Na, 28 September 2019)

She continued by suggesting to analyse the data based on pre-determined indicators of how inclusive schools should look like.

'… do they have IEPs? Do they reform their teaching methods? Do you see some supports for children with disabilities in schools/classrooms? Do children have a circle of friend? Do children engage in all activities in schools? Do schools have infrastructure for inclusive education? Do they involve community into inclusive education processes? Do they have some funds for inclusive education? Do administrators truly concern about inclusive education and have full training for teachers? What skills do teachers lack? Are there government policies to address this?' (Email conversation with Na, 28 September 2019)

The approach suggested by Na, was very different from the methodology used in this study. It was deliberately decided not to use a conceptual framework, based on inclusive education theory pre-dominantly developed in the Global North, to analyse the data in this study. These conversations with Na could indicate that not only there was confusion on whether I was a consultant or a researcher, but there might also be a different perspective in Vietnam on what it means to be a researcher and how research should be undertaken.

Na and I had sometimes had opposing ideas on how research should be undertaken and how inclusive education should look like. Na seemed to expect a set of concluding findings with clear solutions rather than the explorative and indicative nature of this study design. I was surprised that while Na was closely involved in all the steps of the study, even near the end of the data analysis, it seemed she had a different perspective on the study she had been involved in so closely. It made me wonder how well I supported her in understanding the methodology and its underlying assumption of this study. Her continuing critical questions helped to clarify the design and justify the choice I made along the way. The different perspectives on research are explored further in Chapter Nine (see 'Expectations from Na p. 228).

Na furthermore believed the tendency to reply 'correctly' was rather influenced by cultural factors than by a confusion about my role at the school.

> 'The traditional, the cultural, way of Vietnam is to show off all the good things. And you will hide bad things. You only know about the bad things through your observation, not by what people say. So, when you ask a lot of questions, you might notice some conflicts or contradictions in what people say. That is because they want to show the good things. Only if you become very close friends, they will tell you the truth.' (Na, Interview, 13 June 2019)

Na regularly used this argument in trying to make sense of field events. The Confucian Heritage Culture, as described by Na in this conversation, might have indeed influenced the interactions during the field visits. Cultural influences on schools are however complex. Confucian Heritage Cultures are dynamic and evolving based on socio-economic and historical factors (Thanh, 2014, Ryan and Louie, 2007). Other critical incidents reflect for example on the influence of globalization and involvement in international projects ('Traditional values in 'innovative' settings', see p. 171) and the restrictive policy framework of the one-party communist state (see also 'Flexibility' p. 162, 'Policy Talk' p. 155 and 'Teacher Assessment' p. 185).

When reflecting about the English mass lesson, I noticed I was conflicted myself about my role as researcher at the Hill School. Immediately after the incident happened, I made an immediate judgement about the teaching style and culture at the school. I interpreted the decision of the teachers to organize the English conversation in such way as an indication of a teacher-centred and collective teaching style at the Hill School, before I had done any classroom observation. A

paradigm shift in pedagogical approaches has been suggested as crucial factor in inclusive education implementation. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) for example argued to shift from a pedagogy which works for most with adjustments for some, towards a pedagogy which is accessible for all. In my perspective as a consultant, I held the view that this could be achieved by applying Universal Design for Learning principles in which the content is presented in different ways, students engage and explore this content in multiple ways and are offered a range of options to show what they have learned (Hitchcock et al., 2002). Child-centred pedagogy has also been suggested as a key strategy in inclusive education implementation. In child-centred pedagogy, teachers apply a range of teaching and learning strategies to address the different ways in which children learn, ensure learning experiences are relevant, active and meaningful and learning is accessible and attractive for all learners (UNESCO, 2004b).

When confronted with the mass English lesson, I did not recognize key element of Universal Design for Learning or child-centred pedagogy. I therefore considered the activity as traditional and teacher-centred and perhaps not compatible with inclusive education. I had to learn to explore and problematize, rather than to judge or to explain, as I used to do as a consultant. An article from Nguyen et al. (2009) helped me to see my initial reaction as a form of neo-colonialism. I used a theoretical framework developed in the Global North and applied it to reflect on an incident in a Vietnamese school. In a later study, Nguyen et al. (2012) argued that when researchers look from a Western perspective at education practice in other contexts, they tend to ignore already existing practices, which might be different from Western educational practice, but support nonetheless the same goals. While I categorized the 'mass English lesson' and what I initially observed in the classrooms as teacher-centred pedagogy, I noticed later elements of child-centred pedagogy which were less obvious to observe. Vy explained for example how she organised learning games and quizzes after school hours to help her students to review what they learned during the school day (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, April 2018). When asked for a Photovoice activity to take pictures of how inclusive education looked like in the school, Min shared a picture of such activity. She believed these additional activities represented inclusive education, as all children were able to participate in the games and she noticed how these activities helped her students to increase their motivation and understand better what happened during the class hours (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, April 2017).

Nguyen et al. (2012, p. 149) furthermore argued against the tendency in international education research to focus on 'cultural mismatches'. This made me realize that instead of focusing on the dichotomy between teacher-centred and child-centred education, it would be more helpful to see the decisions teachers make in their daily practice in its full complexity. It was thereby important to recognize the myriad of sometime contradicting values, socio-cultural factors, political frameworks and pragmatic constraints which shaped the education practices in schools. These are explored throughout this chapter. The discussion chapter (see 'Contextualisation of Education Reforms', p. 222) presents a more nuanced understanding of the practice at the case study schools. The concept of 'hybrid practices' is discussed to explore how teachers in the case study schools started integrated elements from education reforms in their practices. These changes might sometimes be perceived as rather minimal and are not always easy to be noticed from a Western perspective. The discussion chapter explores how this changes are nonetheless crucial in developing a nuanced and deep understanding of how teachers interact with changing national and international policies and requirements.

Implications

The possibility that I was at the school to provide direct support or to assess the practice of the teachers might have motivated the research respondents to give 'correct' replies or show they

follow the policy frameworks. The research design anticipated this by allowing time to build trust relationships, triangulation of methods, working with two schools, including participative activities to initiate conversations and regularly repeating the purpose of the research activities. The different incidents indicated that despite these strategies, it remained a constant struggle to move beyond more superficial responses and gain enough trust for in-depth conversations (see 'Policy Talk', p. 155 and 'Openness', p. 191). The field relationships and difficult balance between the roles of researcher and consultant were therefore a common theme for reflection within the critical incidents.

To avoid neo-colonialism in the data analysis, the focus in the coming critical incidents is not primarily on the dichotomy between teacher- and child-centred pedagogy or to check in how far the case study schools meet critical issues to implement inclusive education, as identified in Western theory. The incidents explore the complex contextual factors which influence the perspectives and practices of inclusive education in case study schools. 'Flexibility' for example explores assumptions underlying common education concepts. 'Policy Talk' and 'Flexibility' discuss restrictive policy frameworks in which teachers work. 'Traditional Teaching in 'Innovative Settings'' explores perspectives on the purpose of education and impact of international projects. 'Teacher Assessment' looks at institutional constraints and the impact of pressure and teacher performance rates on inclusive education implementation. 'Laughing with Silly Replies' and 'Where are the Children with Disabilities' explore the perceptions towards children with disabilities.

The incident and reflections indicated that changing pedagogy was complicated and not always easy to understand. This is explored further in Incident 5 (p. 171) and discussed as a key theme in Chapter Nine (see p. 205). Conversations following this incident indicated that teachers tried to make sense of education reforms and actively tried to make it work within their school context, which did not always encourage such innovations.

Incident 2 – Where are the Children with Disabilities?

Incident

As soon as we started the field visits, I became aware of the low number of children with disabilities in both case study schools. At the start of the field visit, out of the 413 children at the Hill School, three children had an official disability certificate. The teachers identified three more children with learning difficulties, who did not have a disability certificate. In the River School, there were no children among the 302 students identified as having a disability at the start of the data collection.

Na and I reflected back on the low number of children with disabilities at both case study schools after the data collection phase.

> 'Na: the teachers knew your purpose when you come to their school and that you want to see inclusive education. So, any time when they have a conversation with you, they always talked about the children with disability, even in the River School, where there were no children with a disability certificate. They said that they have children with disabilities, but we don't know. We don't know for sure they had children with disabilities.
> …
> Na: I think the teachers think that if you come to ask them about inclusive education, it will be related to the children with disability, so, they always want to show you everything about children with disabilities. Because, some people said inclusive education is only for children with disability. They don't think that inclusive education is about involving all people in inclusive education. They just think you want data about children with disabilities, how these children learn and how they are involved in activities at school.
> …
> Me: Do you think there were children with disabilities in River School? Or do you think there might be a possibility that they said that because that was what we wanted to hear?
> Na: I think at any school there are children with disabilities. But it is very strange that in the River School there are no students with disabilities. Where are they? Where are they? Maybe they just stay at home? … Maybe, because some children have like very, very, severe disabilities, they cannot come to school. And maybe the teachers ask them to go

somewhere else? I don't know. But we cannot see any children with disability at that school. Very strange, very strange.' (Interview with Na, 13 June 2019)

Selection of the Incident

This is incident was critical for me as the conversation with Na about the number of children with disabilities in the River School raised some methodological issues. This was not only relevant for the third research question, but also for the second research question, as it might provide an insight in the political and cultural context in which inclusive education is implemented. It appeared that teachers might have overemphasized what they thought I wanted to hear. In further conversations about the number of children with disabilities in the schools, the teachers either seemed to present a very optimistic picture of the situation or emphasised how they followed procedures. I wondered if this was an indication of how the research participants positioned me and how they gave meaning to the research.

The expectation that I wanted to talk about children with disabilities, as I was doing research on inclusive education, seemed to link the concept of inclusion strongly with disability. The conversations in the field however provided a more complex understanding of inclusive education, based on different discourses.

Initial Reflection

The identified number of children with disabilities at both case study schools was lower than national and international estimates. 1.9% of the students at the Hill School and 0.9% of the students at the River School were identified by the teachers as having learning difficulties. According to a study from UNICEF and General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2018) 2.8% of the children in Vietnam have a disability. WHO and World Bank (2011) estimated that worldwide 5.1% of all children are likely to have a moderate to severe disability. Considering that most of the identified children with learning difficulties at both case study schools appeared to have minor functional difficulties, it could be assumed that the number of identified children with disabilities

and learning difficulties is significantly below internationally and nationally accepted estimates. This raised the question where the children with disabilities were in the communities of both case study schools. The teachers in both case study schools believed they identified all children with disabilities within their commune and that all children were going to school.

> '*Van:* We mobilize 100% of the children with disabilities to go to school
>
> …
>
> *Me:* When you say that you reach 100% of the children, do you think all the children in your commune are going to school?
>
> *Van:* Yes. All children of primary school age.' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill school, 14 December 2016)
>
> '*Lynn:* We mobilize all students with disabilities to go to school. And this is a positive thing, because all students must have the right to go to school. We are one of the most effective schools in terms of inclusive education in this district' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 21 December 2016)

The Hill School teachers shared earlier that some families with a higher socio-economic status in the commune send their children with disabilities to special schools in Hanoi. '100% of the children in the commune are going to school', might therefore not mean they all go to the case study schools. The teachers at the River School recognized earlier that at least one child with disabilities was not going to school. They shared how the parents of a child with Down Syndrome decided to keep their daughter at home because she was 'not healthy' and 'too weak' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 14 December 2016). This might indicate that 'mobilizing children with disabilities to go to school' was the not the same as 'children with disabilities actually going to school'. Mrs Van at the Hill School clarified 'mobilizing' as following:

> '*Van:* We mobilize the community to participate in inclusive education. I cooperate with the commune DoLISA. We investigate how many children with disabilities there are in the community. First, we check how many children of primary school age are going to school. Then, when we see that 100% is going to school, we see how many children have difficulties.
>
> *…*
>
> *Hong:* In grade one there was this year a child who was very reluctant to go to school.

Van: Both the teacher and I went to the student's family and we encourage them to go to school, we persuaded him to go to school.

…

Hong: He has no one in the family to take care of him

Van: His father has an intellectual disability and his mother does not live with them anymore.

Me: What did you do?

Hong: It is the role of the teacher and vice director to go to his family and encourage him to go to school. And every day, I ask friends who live close to his house to call him and to encourage him to go to school.' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill school, 14 December 2016)

This indicated that 'mobilizing' meant encouraging parents to send their children to school, without necessarily having to follow that recommendation. The practice of 'mobilizing' seemed rather formal to me at first. The last comment from Hong could however indicate inclusive values at the school. Hong genuinely seemed to care about the concerned child and tried to find systems to ensure the child comes to school every day.

Na's reflection that the River School teachers might have overemphasised the number of children with disabilities at their school as they thought this is what I wanted to hear when researching about inclusive education, indicated a link between inclusive education and disability. The way the teachers in both case study schools and Na herself conceptualized inclusive education provided however a complicated mix of elements of both a deficit and a rights-based discourse. For example, while Van linked inclusive education to disability, she also emphasized the importance of participation.

'The goal of inclusive education is that children with disabilities go to the classroom. More importantly, children with disabilities become part of the school life and everyone accepts them. It is not only about learning knowledge.' (Van, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 14 December 2016)

Similarly, in a Photovoice activity I asked the teachers how inclusive education looked like in their school. Most teachers in both case study schools took pictures of children with disabilities, but also included themes as rights, participation, friendship and cooperation. Lynn for example took a picture of a student she identified as having learning difficulties. She said:

'The most important thing in this picture that is the interaction and friendship between the students. In the picture you will see that Tan works in a group. When she first started school, she was very shy. But in this picture, you can see that Tan participates and is involved in this activity. … Whether inclusion is a success or not, it depends much on the interaction. It depends on the friendship and cooperation between the students, with the teachers and the community'. (Lynn, Teacher focus group discussion, River School, April 2017)

Min emphasised the rights of children with disabilities in her picture selection.

'Children do not only go to school for learning, but also to join and participate in different activities, and to play with friends, and this is the right of children with disabilities.' (Min, Teacher focus group discussion, River School, April 2017)

In her reflection about how inclusive education was defined in the case study schools, Na shared an equally complicated perspective. She referred to the international rights framework, and also linked inclusive education to a special educational needs framework

> 'I have a lot of opportunities to work in many schools in Vietnam. ... Many of them do know about inclusive education legislation, but they don't know the origin. They don't know the international legislation. Or they don't know about Education For All. They don't know about Sustainable Development Goals. They just know a little about inclusive education, they think it is only for children with disabilities. … but inclusive education is for children with special educational needs, right?' (Na, Interview, 17 January 2019)

The conceptualisation of 'disability' at the case study schools remained complicated and difficult to understand. This will be explored further in 'Laughing with Silly Replies' (p. 178).

Na's reflection on the overemphasis on activities for children with disabilities in the River School, raised some methodological questions. These questions were similar as with the first critical incident ('Mass English Lesson', p. 139) on how the teachers positioned me and whether it was clear enough I was not at the school to monitor or evaluate them. Na herself seemed to have changed her position. When we first discussed the number of children with disabilities at the case study schools she said:

'*Na:* We can believe the teachers. The school cooperates with the commune People's Committee to check if all children of school age are in school. They use official lists.

Me: Is it possible that some children are not on the official list? Perhaps because they have a very complex disability, and no one thinks they could go to school?

Na: I don't think so. If a child is born, the parents need to go to the People's Committee to register the child and receive a birth certificate. So, the People's Committee has a complete list of all children in the commune' (Conversation with Na, 14 December 2016)

In the conversations after the data collection phase Na was much more critical. She expressed how strange it was that there were no children with disabilities at the River School and wondered why we had not seen any children with hearing, mobility or visual impairments in both schools. It might be possible that over the years, as not only our professional relationship grew but we also became personal friends, she might have felt more comfortable to be critical.

When re-reading the interview transcripts, I noticed that teachers often replied to questions to the number of children with disabilities and their educational situation by referring to national policies and programmes. When I asked in the River School why one child with a disability was not in school, Lynn replied:

'*Lynn:* We put a lot of effort in negotiating with parents, however the parents still want their child to stay at home. … Annually, we mobilize the children three time to go to school. The first time at the beginning of the school year. We cooperate with the teacher who is responsible for universal primary education. We investigate how many children there are in the commune and how many children with disabilities. Then we go to the parents of children with disabilities and with a group of teachers we mobilize them to send their children to school. A few months later we go back. And we go back again at the end of the first semester. So, we go three times.' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 21 December 2016)

When we discussed almost one year later in the Hill School why some families need to be 'mobilized' to send their children to school, Hong and Kim similarly referred the Law on Universal Primary Education procedures:

'*Me:* Why is it that some families need encouragement to send their children to school?

Hong and Kim: We follow the process of universal primary education. We have the data from the kindergarten school. For example, if there are 120 children, we check how many

children go to school. If one or two children are not in school, we make a commission for universal primary education, and they go to the family's house. They find out what the reasons is their parents don't want to send their children to school. And when they see the reason, so they will mobilize all families to send their children to school.

Me: What are some of the reasons why they don't want to send their children to school?

Hong: That never, never happens in the Hill School.' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 27 November 2017)

I interpreted the frequent policy references initially as a continuing lack of trust in the field relationships. When I discussed these citations with a foreign critical friend, Ben, he provided a different perspective:

'These conversations might show a tendency of policy compliance. The teachers check the boxes of what is required from them from a higher level. They show you that they have completed their tasks. It is interesting though that the teachers think that visiting families three times and persuade them to go to school, that this is enough to solve the problem. I don't know, maybe it works that way in Vietnam. ... But I think it shows a tendency to reduce complex issues such as marginalisation and difficulties in accessing education into a simple set of procedures to follow.' (Ben, Critical friend conversation, 23 November 2019)

Ben's comment moved the issue of 'policy talk' beyond a methodological question for me. While a tendency to reply questions with citing from policy might indeed indicate a lack of trust, it might also provide an insight in how the teachers in the case study schools gave meaning to their practice. Issues as strictly following textbooks provided by MoET or reducing the content or curriculum for children with disabilities could perhaps be seen as examples of a culture of policy adherence and reducing complex educational concepts into manageable procedures, which is explored further in the critical incidents.

Implications

The question 'where are the children with disabilities?' remained unanswered in this study. The incident and reflections however helped to gain a better understanding around some key themes.

The way in which the teachers in both case study schools understood inclusive education appeared to be complex and included elements from different discourses. While inclusive education was linked to disability, which could indicate a deficit discourse, elements of a rights-based discourse appeared have entered the conceptualisation of inclusion as well. Perhaps the involvement in international aid programmes or changing policies added concepts as rights, participation, cooperation and friendship in how the teachers defined inclusive education.

The over-emphasis on activities for children with disabilities, while there might not have been children with disabilities at the River School, could re-confirm that my role as researcher was confused with that of a consultant or evaluator. It might also be linked to Na's earlier comment that people in Confusion Heritage Cultures tend to please others and show off what is going well. This might impact the kind of responses the research participants give and indicate a need for researchers to be very clear about the research process and expectations.

This incident encouraged me to explore the tendency of replying to questions by quoting from policies further in the next incident. It might indicate a lack of trust to share personal opinions during interviews. The 'policy talk' might however also indicate a certain perspective on educational practice, which is relevant for the second research question. Teachers in the case study schools might incline to follow policies strictly when developing their practice. In doing so, it appears they simplified some complex educational trends into manageable procedures to follow. The critical incidents explore further how textbooks provided by MoET were followed strictly (see 'Flexibility', p. 162 and 'Traditional Teaching in 'Innovative Settings', p. 171) and how inclusive practice was mainly understood as reducing content and subjects (see 'Flexibility').

Incident 3 – Policy Talk

Incident

We talked about what it meant to be a 'good teacher' in both case study schools. I prepared an activity to introduce to topic and initiate reflection about the role of teachers. The teachers were asked to write down the first three things that came to their minds when hearing a word. We

started with random words such as 'music' and moved on to 'teacher' and 'school'. Later in the focus group discussion the teachers were asked to make a drawing, highlighting the features that make a teacher 'good'. Although the teachers in both schools were not keen on making a drawing, I felt at the time that we were beginning to develop relationships and communication which allowed to discuss a wide range of issues in how the teachers gave meaning to their role.

When transcribing the conversations, I noticed that teachers in both schools gave very similar replies. When reading the Professional Standards for Primary School Teachers (MoET, 2007), I recognised many of the responses from the teachers. The Professional Standards (MoET, 2007) are a set of basic requirements for primary school teachers. It includes indicators related to three domains 'political qualities, ethics and life style', 'knowledge' and 'pedagogical skills'. The importance of the standards for teacher assessment are discussed in 'Teacher Assessment' (see p. 185). Below are some of these standards, linked to what the teachers from both schools shared during the focus group discussions Appendix Eight includes a full overview of the Professional Standards.

'To display the healthy and pure attitudes, personality and life-styles of an educator', 'Not to conduct any behaviour that violates virtues, honours, prestige of an educator' and 'Not to conduct any negative behaviour in their daily life'

> '*Van:* Teachers are a role model for other people. They must always think about that and behave good. …
>
> *Kim:* A good teacher is not only a teacher in school, but everywhere. It is a moral issue. … For example, my husband sometimes says bad words. I tell him to use good words, so people can recognize our family as a moral family.' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 18 January 2017)

'To live in an honest, healthy, simple, exemplary way to earn the trustworthiness of colleagues, the people and students'

> 'Her ideas are simple. At home she reads books and watches television. At school she is enthusiastic to teach students. She works very hard.' (Hong, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 18 January 2017)

'To have trustworthiness of colleagues, the community and students'

> '*Lynn:* A teacher is loved and respected by her students.
>
> *Min:* Students bring flowers for teachers and they have good grades to show their respect and gratitude for teachers' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 18 January 2017)

'To teach and educate students with all heart, love, equality and responsibility of an educator'

> 'A good teacher loves the students as her own children' (Hong, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 18 January 2017 and Lynn, Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 18 January 2017)

'To love and dedicate to their job'

> 'Teachers love their job' (Vy, Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 18 January 2017)
>
> 'A good teacher works hard. And after Tet Holiday, she must attend the teacher contest' (Hong, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 18 January 2017)
>
> '*Me:* What does 'working hard' mean?
>
> Vy and Min discuss in Vietnamese, Na summarizes
>
> They use the Vietnamese word 'tan tam'. It is traditional Vietnamese. It means your heart and your soul. You have to work with your full heart, you work very, very hard with your whole heart.' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 18 January 2017)

'To be honest in their work'

> '*Vy:* Teachers have responsibility
>
> *Lynn:* Teachers have responsibility and accountability in their work' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 18 January 2017)

'To have basic knowledge'

> 'Teachers need to have a lot of knowledge, a wide range of knowledge' (Lynn, Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 18 January 2017)

'To be able to produce teaching plans'

'A teacher needs to work hard and make lesson plans' (Hong, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 18 January 2017)

Selection of the Incident

I was surprised how far the government policies were reflected in the field conversations. Incident two already showed a tendency in both case study schools to reply questions by referencing government programmes or procedures. As, at the time, I did not understand what this meant and what the implications were for inclusive education implementation I explored the issue further with critical friends.

The reflections were relevant for research question two, as the incident suggested policy adherence and compliance were key features in the school culture of both case study schools. This appeared to influence how teachers in both schools gave meaning to their role and their practice. The incident was also relevant for research question three, as it showed a strong influence of the political context in the way in which research participants addressed questions in research activities.

Initial Reflection

The tendency to reply questions by referencing to policies was a common issue, regardless of the discussed topic. When talking about teacher collaboration, the teachers referred to mandatory sessions to observe each other's lessons. In conversations about the number of children with disabilities, the Law on Universal Primary Education and the related procedures were mentioned. When talking about teaching strategies for inclusive classrooms, teachers mentioned individual education plans and reducing the curriculum and subjects, as regulated in the inclusive education policies.

Na had the following perspective on the incident:

'When teachers are asked about their school or their teaching, they don't answer based on the reality. They reply with general things, such as policies. The policies are very vague. For example, the teacher standards won't help teachers to become better teachers. Or take the mission of my university, it says 'become a model for the whole country'. Everyone will repeat this when you ask what we do. But what does that even mean? How does that help our practice?' (Conversation with Na, 13 December 2019)

I asked Na further on why teachers would reply with policies rather than with what actually happened. However, I think I touched a sensitive topic with this question. Na said, 'You know we have one party', she was not comfortable to finish that thought. We did not discuss the issue further. Na's reaction might however show how the political context in Vietnam influenced research activities. This will be explored further in the Discussion Chapter ('Chapter Nine', p. 205), which explored further how certain research methods might have increased a feeling of control and monitoring of what the teachers shared during the interviews. The discussion chapter also explored how Na and I were both bound by our own cultural background and how this made our relationship complex and enriching at the same time.

This conversation with Na happened at the very end of the research project. By this time, I had worked with Na regularly over the past five and a half years. We became personal friends and our conversations after the field missions ended became increasingly more open and in-depth. Still, there were topics which were difficult for Na to discuss with me. I was not able to develop such deep connections with the teachers at the case study schools. It is therefore likely that at school level there were even more reservations and carefulness when participating in research activities. It might have been more comfortable for teachers to respond to questions with policy guidelines than sharing personal thoughts and opinions.

Sarah, a foreign critical friend, related this incident with a need to contextualize research methods.

'Perhaps there is a challenge with focus group discussions as data gathering method in non-Western countries. I wonder if being in a group reinforces teachers to tell you what they 'should be saying''. (Sarah, Phone conversation, 1 December 2019).

This sense of monitoring and control was considered in the design of this study. The study design therefore included triangulation in data collection methods, field visits over an extended period

of time to build trust and discuss similar topics in different ways. Even though all these strategies were in place, this incident indicated that it was probably not sufficient to reach deep enough levels of trust to move beyond 'policy talk' in the case study schools. The incident indicated furthermore that not all participative activities to open critical and reflective conversations worked well. The teachers in both case study schools did not want to do the drawing activity. The activities were designed to provide a safe space for teachers to discuss opinions. It appeared however that these activities might sometimes have created barriers in data collection. The activities might have encouraged teachers to respond to questions in a politically correct way and at times, some of the activities could have been perceived as a form of monitoring. The need to contextualize research methods is discussed further in 'Openness' (p. 191).

Both foreign critical friends linked this incident with how teachers were trained in Vietnam.

> '*Ben:* Teachers in Vietnam are highly educated. Most of them have university degrees. They are however not trained in reflective and critical thinking. … We noticed it is however difficult for them *(e.g. teachers participating in projects of Ben's NGO)* to answer 'why' and 'how' questions. For example, how do children learn, and why do we teach the way we do? This is very abstract and difficult to reply. Perhaps that is why the teachers replied with policy guidelines?' (Critical friend meeting, 13 December 2019)

> '*Sarah:* I experienced similar issues when interviewing teachers in Ghana for my PhD. In Ghana, I think people are used from very early on to rote learning and repeating what they have been told. Sometimes in interviews, teachers repeated almost literately what they learned in a training course. I think teachers are not trained in critical thinking and individual opinions are not encouraged.' (Sarah, Phone conversation, 1 December 2019)

Na agreed mostly with these reflections. She believed teachers in Hanoi, who had more opportunity to follow in-service training would answer questions about 'what is a good teacher' differently. Limited training and encouragement for critical reflection combined with a tendency for policy adherence could potentially be problematic for inclusive education implementation. Collaborative and critical reflections on school values and practices have been mentioned as crucial elements for teacher development and sustainable implementation of education reforms (Ainscow, 2002, Grimes, 2013).

The incident might furthermore indicate a culture of policy compliance at the case study schools.

'*Ben:* The incident feels to me as a mechanic interpretation of values. The teachers showed that they know and comply with a set of top down indicators and standards, but in the incident, it is not clear if they made their own interpretation of what these indicators mean for them as teachers.' (Critical friend meeting, 13 December 2019)

A tendency to policy compliance and the impact on inclusive education implementation in the case study schools was a common theme in the critical incidents (see also 'Flexibility', p. 162, 'Teacher Assessment', p. 185 and 'Openness', p. 191). It appeared that the policy framework strongly shaped the teaching practice, the way the teachers behaved and the interactions in the case study schools. The education policies seemed not only to influence what happened at school, but also how teachers and their families were to behave within their community.

Implications

This incident indicated a strong influence of the political context of Vietnam on the research activities. As expected, there was a continuing sense of monitoring and control. The strategies in the research design might not have been sufficient to address the on-going lack of trust from the research participants. Although I was able to develop a deep connection and friendship with Na, also in this relationship there was a limit in what could be shared.

The way in which teachers gave meaning to their role pointed at some contextual challenges in implementing inclusive education. There appeared to be a culture of policy compliance in both case study schools, which influenced how teachers behaved inside and outside of school. There might be a culture of 'ticking the boxes' rather than deep reflection on teaching and learning. This could challenge meaningful and contextualized implementation of education reforms. This challenge is further explored in the critical issues concerning textbook-based teaching (Incident 4 and 5, p. 162 and p. 171), teacher assessment based on more traditional indicators (Incident 7, p. 185) and difficulties to have conversations about teaching and learning (Incident 4 and 8, p. 162 and p. 191).

Incident 4 – Flexibility

Incident

I observed a lesson from Ha, a teacher at the Hill School. Afterwards Ha, Van and I had a conversation about the lesson.

> '*Ha:* This lesson was longer, because I know you are interested in inclusive education. I spend more time on instructing Cong
>
> *Me:* Normally your lesson would look differently?
>
> *Ha:* The lesson would be the same, but I spend now much more time for Cong. … Normally the students work in groups. The group who finishes first can copy the exercise on the black board, so we can compare it with what the other groups did. Normally I finish on time. Today I gave more time for the group work because I wanted the group of Cong to have a good result and let Cong copy the exercise on the black board.' (Interview with Ha and Van, Hill School, 20 April 2017)

We continued our conversation with how Ha prepared her lesson.

> '*Van:* She has a textbook and she follows the exercises from the textbook
>
> *Ha:* Yes, I follow the textbook
>
> *Me:* Do you have to make sure you go through the full textbook by the end of term?
>
> *Ha:* We can be flexible. We can reverse the activities. We can introduce activity B before we introduce activity A
>
> *Me:* But you still need to do everything?
>
> *Ha:* I need to do everything of the textbook.
>
> …
>
> *Ha:* We can change the order of the textbook. That is ok. But we need to ask for permission from the head teacher if we want to change more. Sometimes the textbook gives us different options. The teachers can select the option that fits best with the context. … For example, the textbook has a writing exercise to describe a singer or a dancer. But my students, they don't have any chance to go to the theatre and see an artist, or performances or a dancer. So, the textbook describes that I can select another option. We don't need to ask permission for this, it is already in the textbook.

Me: You have some flexibility on what to write about. But imagine you've got a student in your classroom who has difficulties to write. Can you change the assignment?

Ha: Maybe. If she or he has a severe disability. (Short conversation in Vietnamese between Na and Ha. Na seemed to clarify the question) I understand your question. If the child has a severe disability, it has a certificate, in that case, we can change the activity.

Me: Can you give an example of an adjustment for which you need permission from the head teacher?

Ha: If we change the topic of the textbook, we need to ask for permission.

Me: Can you give me an example of when that happened?

Ha: It does not happen very often. (pause) For example, in science. If students need to observe blossoms, but there are no blossoms yet at that time, then I ask permission to change the topic of the lesson.' (Interview with Ha and Van, Hill School, 20 April 2017)

Selection of the Incident

This conversation raised questions about the methodology I was using and was therefore directly linked with research question three on undertaking research in Vietnam. The presence of the vice-director in the interviews and focus group discussions seemed to add a level of control and monitoring in the conversations. The conversation also encouraged me to reflect on the kind of questions I was asking, as it seemed the teachers and I might not have fully understood each other when talking about key educational concepts.

Based on this incident I explored further what flexibility meant in the case study schools. This led to conversations about textbook-based teaching and adjustments in content for children with disabilities. These issues were relevant to understand the perspective of teachers in both case study schools about education and inclusion, and to identify contextual factors which influence inclusive education implementation.

Initial Reflection

I wondered if the presence of Van, the vice director, affected the conversation. I noticed before that Van tended to dominate the focus group discussions at the Hill School. Therefore, I asked prior to the field mission to do the classroom observation and reflective interview without the presence of Van. When we arrived at the school, Van brought us to Ha's classroom. She did not show any intention to leave. I asked her if we could do the observation alone, but she stayed anyway. When we started the conversation with Ha afterwards, I asked Van again if we could do the activity individually with Ha. Ha overheard and said it wasn't a problem for her if Van wanted to stay. Van stayed for the entire conversation. This might have influenced Ha for example to emphasize that she normally finishes her lessons within the allocated time slot. As further explored in 'Teacher assessment' (p. 185), delivering the content of the textbooks within the designated times slot is an important indicator for the teacher performance assessment at the Hill School. Van seemed genuinely interested in the study and it was hard to ask her not to participate in the research activities. I informally talked with Van to explain why I asked her to leave the activities. Van positively reacted on the message. She seemed to understand that her presence in the research activities could influence the conversations. After this conversation, Van did not stay for individual interviews with Ha anymore. Van still joined the focus group discussions, but she did not stay for the entire conversation anymore.

Ha's explanation of what flexibility in the classroom meant for her helped me to understand some of the complexities in the conversations with teachers. Ha defined flexibility in a very different way from how I understood the concept. For me, flexibility for teachers meant that they had a certain degree of autonomy to analyse their classroom situation and the learning progress of their children to design appropriate activities to accommodate the learning of all students. Ha on the other hand seemed to place the concept 'flexibility' within the restrictive framework of the MoET textbooks and education policies. Van expressed earlier a broader vision on how to use the official textbooks.

> '*Van:* Teachers can adjust the content and the methodology. They can change how to organise an activity. They can however not adjust the amount of knowledge.
>
> *Me:* So, it means that at the end of the year, you need to be sure that the students know all the content to pass the exams?
>
> *Van:* Yes, the standardized knowledge as regulated by the Ministry of Education and Training' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 20 January 2017)

In this incident, Ha however indicated she follows the activities from the textbook strictly and understood flexibility as changing the order of the activities provided in the textbooks and adjusting activities only for children with a disability certificate.

I started to realize that we might have used the same words but attached a different meaning to it. This could possibly clarify why teachers previously said that they could be flexible or did implement elements of child-centred pedagogy, while I did not notice this in the observations, or it was contradicted in other conversations. Nguyen and Hall (2017, pp. 253-254) similarly noticed in their study on the willingness of Vietnamese teacher students to implement child-centred pedagogy that the students and lecturers used terms as 'student-centred', 'cooperative learning', 'active learning', 'peer learning' or 'group work', but attached a different meaning to these concepts. The researchers could therefore not find evidence of child-centred pedagogy as developed and defined in the Global North in the practice of Vietnamese teacher trainers and students. These misunderstandings may show some of the complexities of doing research in a cross-cultural context. I was aware that language barriers could affect the interviews (Kvale, 2007). I was however not aware that the language and cultural barriers could be this subtle. When the incident happened, we were talking for six months already about flexibility in the classroom before I asked the right questions that helped me to understand the teachers' perspective of this concept. As I assumed I knew what 'flexibility' meant, I did not ask the teachers what it meant for them. The discussion chapter (see 'Understanding of Key Concepts', p. 238) explores the cultural impact in the use of language and the implications for both research and international programme development further.

This incident encouraged me to explore the concept of flexibility in Vietnamese classrooms further. After this incident happened, and I read more policy documents about the use of the curriculum, my initial interpretation was that the teachers in the case study schools had very limited flexibility and this was a barrier to inclusive education implementation. There appeared to be a rather restrictive and rigid framework of how teachers used the textbooks provided by MoET. Guideline 896 (MoET, 2006b) prescribed in detail which exercises from the textbooks can be reduced or adjusted and how this should be done. For example, in Vietnamese, grade 1, lesson 'Observe the sky', teachers are allowed to change 'draw the sky' into 'talk about the sky'. The document appeared to be conflicting in how teachers should use these guidelines. Article 1 states

that teachers should follow to the provided guidelines to adjust in the curriculum, while according to article 2, teachers should see these guidelines as examples and have to be creative in using them. A teacher in the River School clarified how she uses Guideline 896 in in her classroom.

> '*Vy:* The teachers are empowered by the government to modify the content. We received the standardized knowledge for students and a framework on how to adjust it. We have a standardized book to compare the ability of students. So, if the student has low or high ability, we follow the instructions from the framework. … For example, adding or subtracting. There are four tasks. For those students we know cannot complete all levels of the exercises, we can reduce.
>
> *Me:* Ok. Can you decide yourself which exercise you reduce?
>
> *Vy:* We reduce based on the standardized framework.' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 6 February 2018)

As the vice director from the Hill School and the teachers at both case study schools seemed to have a different perspective on the flexibility in using the MoET textbooks, I discussed this further with Na.

> '*Me:* In your personal opinion, do you think the curriculum in Vietnam is actually very strict
>
> *Na:* Yes
>
> *Me:* Or do the teachers think it is strict?
>
> *Na:* Hmmm, I think both ways. Because the curriculum in Vietnam now is not very open but closed. And there is a lot of content in there. So, it's very hard for teachers. … The higher level *(I assumed Na meant education authorities)* provided the curriculum like this. It is very strict, and everyone needs to follow the curriculum. But I think the teachers also see the curriculum like that, very strict. They always follow the curriculum. And they think they don't need to create, don't need to be flexible. But, the guidance of the government for teachers who work with children with disabilities is that they can adapt all of the content, everything, the methodology, assessment for children with disabilities. But yeah, not all teachers can do this. … Maybe that is the truth, they don't know how to teach. They don't know how to meet the demands and the needs of the children. I mean they don't have much knowledge and skills to work with children
>
> *Me:* Why do you think so?

Na: Because they have been trained a long time ago, and did not have much training afterwards. … Mhmm (pause). They are not flexible people

Me: What do you mean?

Na: I mean, it is a new characteristic for teachers to be very flexible at school. They have not been trained for this. And the curriculum, it is so heavy, so very hard. … So, if you want to finish all your tasks, you don't have any time to be flexible, or to use other teaching materials. It is very easy to just follow the instructions of the textbook, and finish that. If you put more materials or more activities in your lessons, it will take more time. And you don't have time to finish your tasks.' (Conversation with Na, 13 June 2019)

Flexibility in teaching in the case study schools remained a complicated concept to understand. The concept of 'curriculum' and 'textbooks provided by MoET' were used interchangeably in the field conversations. The data indicated that being flexible in using the textbooks was not prohibited per se, but it was not encouraged either. As explored further in 'Teacher Assessment' (p. 185), covering the full textbooks within the dedicated timeframe was an important element in the teacher assessment procedures. Na indicated it was therefore safer for teachers to follow the textbooks strictly instead of experimenting with teaching innovations. The textbooks did not appear to be designed with lots of space for teachers to be flexible and adapt their teaching to the specific context of their classroom. Ha recognized in this incident that Cong, the student who experienced difficulties with learning in her classroom, needed more time and support in her lesson. She however expressed she did not have enough time to provide this additional support and instruction, as she had to complete the lesson from her textbook within a strict timeframe. This might indicate an important contradiction in terms of government requirements towards teachers. Na pointed out that being flexible is 'a new characteristic' for teachers. Teachers are expected to be flexible in adjusting their lesson towards the actual context and are required to implement inclusive education and child-centred pedagogy. At the same time, they are expected to implement the content-loaded curriculum within a limited timeframe and are assessed based on traditional criteria. These policy contradictions, within the apparent school culture of policy adherence (see also 'Where are the children with disabilities?', p. 147 and 'Policy talk', p. 155) can become a barrier for inclusive education in the case study schools.

In addition, comments from both the teachers and Na seemed to indicate that flexibility, as in adjusting teaching methodology or assessment techniques, is only accepted for officially identified and certified children with disabilities. This would, in my perspective, make inclusive education an 'add-on' to the existing education system, rather than a reform to ensure all children are learning and participating. This difference in understanding of inclusive education can be linked to the challenges with defining inclusive education. In its most narrow way, inclusive education is understood as placing children with disabilities in mainstream settings. In a broad understanding, inclusive education is defined as removing barriers within the school and community that prevent full participation and learning. This informs reforms in education policies, culture and practices (Ainscow et al., 2006). The narrow perspective on inclusive education seemed to be confirmed in how inclusive education is conceptualized at policy level in Vietnam. The inclusive education policy framework in Vietnam has been developed as a set of add-ons to the Education Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019). The Education Law remained the main framework, additional policy documents (MoET, 2006a, MoET et al., 2013, MoET, 2009) provided guidelines and strategies for teachers on how to teach specific groups of children, without changing the key principles of the Education Law. In addition, the Vietnam Disability Law strongly linked the concept of inclusive education with providing educational access for students with disabilities (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2010). Incident Two (p. 147) discussed how conceptualisation of inclusive education from both the research participants and Na included a mix of both a disability focus and broader elements linked to a rights-based discourse.

The way in which inclusive education is understood is significant, as it influences how inclusive education is practically implemented at school level. A narrow understanding of inclusive education can lead to individual interventions rather than system-wide reforms. This can be seen in Vietnam at policy level. The inclusive education decisions and circulars promote individual measures such as developing Individual Education Plans (IEP), reducing or exempting school fees for children with disabilities, reducing class sizes in inclusive schools (MoET, 2006a) and reducing or exempting parts of the curriculum for children with disabilities (MoET et al., 2013). Developing IEPs and reducing content and activities were also frequently mentioned by the teachers in both case study schools as main strategy to implement inclusive education. Linking inclusive education with children with disabilities only and implementation strategies targeted at individual children with disabilities could be problematic in different ways. Individualized approaches tend to reduce

complex barriers to access and participation in education to individual problems, to be addressed through individual interventions. In doing so, broader barriers and inequalities are not further explored and opportunities to improve access and quality of education for all are missed (Liasidou, 2015). Individual strategies to implement inclusive education have been considered as stigmatizing and may limit access to the same high quality curriculum on an equal basis with others (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Specific interventions for children with disabilities also imply that this group of children learns in a significantly different way and thus requires a different pedagogy or curriculum. It implies furthermore that the strategies to include children with disabilities in mainstream education would be different from strategies to include other groups of children who may experience barriers in accessing education. The necessity of a special pedagogy or curriculum for children with disabilities is contested (Norwich and Lewis, 2005, Croft, 2010). Researcher as Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) therefore suggest reforming the general pedagogy to ensure it is accessible to all. This notion of a 'pedagogy which is accessible to all', and what it might mean within the context of the case study schools is explored further in Chapter Nine (p. 205). The discussion chapter also explores further how my thinking evolved over time. I became more aware that, even though the teachers appeared to work within a restrictive framework, they did make small changes in their practice to implement more child-centred approached to teaching.

Considering the specific contextual factors in the case study schools helped to understand why teachers expressed throughout the conversations that inclusive education is very difficult. It appeared inclusive education was implemented as a set of individual accommodations, without reforming the general education system. In this incident, Ha indicated she was required to strictly follow the content-loaded textbooks and curriculum in a very limited time period. In addition to this already difficult task, she was asked to make accommodations for children identified as having learning difficulties. Ha might not have had the flexibility, time or support to provide this within the restrictive framework in which she was working. Teachers might have experienced inclusive education as an additional workload as it was not embedded in their daily practice. Ha said later in the interview:

> 'It is very hard for the teachers if there are children with disabilities in the classroom'.
> (Interview with Ha and Van, 20 April 2017)

This opinion was shared and explored further by her colleagues in later conversations.

'*Hong:* I agree with Ha, I do not have time for children with disabilities. If there is one child with disabilities in my classroom, that is ok. But if there are two children with disabilities in my classroom, it is very hard for me to follow the content of the curriculum.

Kim: It is very hard to help the other children when we have children with disabilities in our classroom. The content in the curriculum is huge. … The curriculum is a big barrier for teachers in inclusive education. We need to ensure quality teaching of all the children and of children with disabilities at the same time. There is no specific curriculum for children with disabilities. The teacher needs to adjust and accommodate the curriculum for children with disabilities. Teachers need knowledge and skills to do that. There are only a few teachers in this school who participated in training courses from the Department *(e.g. Department of Education and Training)* to learn how to adjust and accommodate the content for children with disabilities.' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 29 May 2017)

Implications

As expected in the research design, there was often a sense of monitoring or control in the research activities in the case study schools. This atmosphere was stronger in the Hill School, as the vice director often joined focus group discussions and classroom observations. It might have influenced Ha in the incident to give 'correct replies' when she emphasized that she normally finishes her lessons on time and that she strictly follows the textbooks when planning lessons. I had to be more explicit in asking Van not to join research activities with the teachers in the Hill School anymore. Individual interviews with Ha were more less restricted.

Realizing that there was a misunderstanding in what Ha and I understood as 'flexibility in the classroom', meant that I had to be aware of my own assumptions and not take those for granted. I had to be much more explicit in my questions and break down what teachers meant when they were talking about educational concepts such as inclusion, child-centred pedagogy or group work. This insight also emphasized the importance of triangulation that was built in the research design. I could not rely only on what teachers verbally shared in one conversation. It was important to

link conversations with observations and ask similar questions in both case study schools during different research activities.

The exploration of what flexibility meant in the case study schools was linked with the practice of textbook-based teaching. This is further explored in 'Teacher Assessment' (p. 185) and 'Openness' (p. 191). The textbook-based teaching, as in following strictly the content, exercises and lessons provided in the MoET textbooks, appeared to impact inclusive education in the case study schools. The textbooks were content-heavy and left limited space to adjust timing, type of activities or content to the actual needs and interests of the students. As flexibility in adjusting the activities for the textbooks appeared to be only possible for children with a disability certificate, this might indicate that inclusive education is understood in a narrow way. This might lead to individual measures towards children with disabilities when implementing inclusive education. It could clarify why inclusive education was sometimes considered as additional work. It did not seem to be embedded in the general practices, policies and cultures at both case study schools.

Incident 5 - Traditional Values in '*Innovative Settings*'

Incident

The River School was involved from 2012 until 2017 in a large-scale programme from MoET and World Bank, the Vietnam New School Model project (commonly known as VNEN, Vietnam Escuala Nueva). The 'Escuela Nueva' model was originally developed in the 1970s in Colombia to improve the quality of education in rural areas. MoET and World Bank adapted the model to Vietnam to improve quality of primary education through whole-school reforms (Parandekar et al., 2017). Key elements in the Vietnamese model included participative and collaborative learning, community involvement, active learning, play-based learning and connection between school and real life (Parandekar et al., 2017). The pilot schools, including the River School, received funding to implement school improvement plans and to organize bi-weekly teacher meetings for collaborative learning and problem solving.

After a few months of field visits to the River School, I was invited to observe a lesson from Vy, and see how the VNEN project influenced the teaching practice at the school.

'The children are sitting in groups of four. Vy stands in front of the classroom, behind her desk. Apart from quotes from Ho Chi Minh, the walls are decorated with examples of children's work. Vy starts the Vietnamese language lesson with a game. The topic of the lesson is 'connecting sentences'. Vy gives the first part of the sentence and the students need to complete it, for example 'when it rains … I cannot go to school'. The children are trying to complete as fast as possible as many sentences as possible. The children seem all engaged and are laughing. After the game, Vy introduces the content of the lesson. She bangs with a long wooden ruler on her desk to get the attention of the children. She continues banging her ruler on the desk with the rhythm of her instruction. She asks a few questions and the whole group replies, following the rhythm of Vy's ruler. It is very loud. Vy asks the children to complete a group assignment from their textbooks. She does not explain the exercise. All groups have active discussions and all children seem involved. The group leaders read the instructions, initiate the discussion and ensure all children shared their opinion before writing the replies on their small white board. When a group is finished, they hold a stick with a smiley face up. Vy briefly checks their work and provides some feedback. Vy explains me later that the groups have sticks with different symbols, to indicate when they finished a task or when they need more support. It helps her to balance between individual support and whole group instruction.

When all groups are finished, Vy bangs her ruler twice. The children seem to know what this means. The groups exchange their white boards and check what the other groups wrote. On the next bang of the ruler the groups return the white boards. Vy asks one child to give the correct replies for the exercise. Vy bangs her ruler again and the groups hang their work on a wire and return to their seats. Vy and the children select the best work. The student with the best work receives a flower, the student with most flowers at the end of the week is the winner. This procedure is repeated a few times to complete the next activities in the textbook. … The pace is very fast'. (Observation notes, River School, 20 April 2017)

Selection of the Incident

This incident encouraged me to reflect further on how educational reforms, such as the VNEN programme, were implemented, in how far this influenced the school culture and values concerning teaching, learning and knowledge and how it affected inclusive education implementation. The incident was relevant for research questions one and two as it might indicate how globalisation and involvement in programmes from international donors affected practice in local schools. It appeared that the reforms initiated by VNEN introduced new teaching techniques in the River School, but did not fully replace existing values and belief systems. This seemed to lead to a melting pot of sometimes contradicting practices and beliefs.

Initial Reflection

In the reflection afterwards, Vy shared this was a typical lesson for her and she was happy with it:

> 'My lessons are similar to this one. … I'm happy with the lesson. The students were quite good today. They sat down and were very concentrated. Sometimes when someone else, or another teacher observes my lesson, the students can be very noisy and disobedient' (Vy, interview, River School, 20 April 2017).

Vy clarified how she designed the lesson.

> '*Vy:* I design the warm-up activities. But there are also some games in the textbook. It is all in the learning time. … Warm-up games motivate the students. It helps them to concentrate.
>
> *Me:* And the other activities were written in the textbook?
>
> *Vy:* Yes, I follow the textbook. However, before the instruction, I sometimes adapt the activities to my classroom. For example, when I think an activity is difficult in a group, I change it into an activity to do in pairs.' (Vy, interview, River School, 20 April 2017).

Immediately after the incident, I made the interpretation that after the closure of the VNEN programme, Vy continued to include VNEN key elements in her practice. The warm-up games, group activities, techniques to balance between individual and group support indicated active, collaborative, play-based and participative teaching styles. The groups seemed to have some

routines, which could mean they were regularly working in groups. All students seemed engaged and genuinely enjoying the activities. At the same time, more traditional elements such as collective replies, banging of a ruler, fast pace, textbook-based teaching and competition were part of Vy's practice. I discussed this mixture of teaching styles with my critical friends. Both Na and Ben thought the incident showed the teachers did not fully understand the child-centred pedagogy, which was at the basis for the VNEN project.

> '*Ben:* After the VNEN project, the teacher includes games because it is fun and motivating, but she doesn't see the game as a way of learning. After the game, the teacher goes back to teaching as usual. It seems like the teacher is using the games and other VNEN techniques to achieve knowledge in a more efficient way. The focus is still on knowledge, completing tasks given by the teacher and behaving well. The expectation seems to be that the children comply, not for them to challenge knowledge or to ask critical questions. The teacher wants to make learning fun, and the children seem happy. But I don't think this is enough to implement child-centred pedagogy.' (Ben, critical friend meeting, 13 December 2019)

> '*Na:* What we saw in the River School was not child-centred pedagogy. It was traditional teaching. … The problem is, the teachers don't understand deeply about the VNEN education reform. They just follow the VNEN guidelines, but they don't know why. In many other VNEN schools for example, the children and their parents complain that their children have backaches because they sit in groups instead of in rows and it is difficult for them to look at the teacher and at the blackboard. But, if the teacher would really understand VNEN and child-centred pedagogy, she would not stand in front of the classroom the whole time and use the blackboard, she would walk around. The children would do all kinds of activities and their backs would not hurt. … But you know, it is very difficult to implement child-centred pedagogy in Vietnam. Traditionally, students have to respect their teacher. The teacher speaks, the students write. The teacher asks a question and the students raise their hand to reply. That is how they show respect. That is not how to teach in child-centred pedagogy. It takes a long time to change how people are thinking.' (Na, critical friend meeting, 13 December 2019)

Based on Na's comment of how difficult it was to change traditional ways of thinking about teaching and respect, I looked backed at other conversations in the River School about the

perception towards knowledge and the role of teachers. In the following extract, Vy and Sang discuss how they help students to achieve their 'hopes and dreams for the future'.

'*Vy:* First of all, they *(e.g. the students)* need to have knowledge. And then, they need social skills. We help them to achieve their goals, their dreams.

…

Sang: Normally the teachers should provide knowledge to the students

Vy: Because the knowledge from the student is still limited. They don't have much. The teacher should provide them information and knowledge about new content … Parents find knowledge necessary. It belongs to the responsibilities of the teacher. So, the teacher should have knowledge to teach the student. If a student has a good ability, that can help them to reach another, a higher level of knowledge. For other students, with difficulties in learning, we should help them to reach the lower levels of knowledge.' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 6 February 2018)

The above conversations did indicate that the teachers in the River School perceived their role and responsibility as ensuring students reach as much knowledge as possible to support them in achieving their future goals and dreams. The teachers believed the purpose of education is delivering knowledge from the teachers to the students. This could indicate that the teachers did not fully adopt the underlying assumptions of the VNEN model, or as Na and Ben put it, did not fully understand about child-centred pedagogy. The focus on active, participative and child-centred teaching and learning, assumes a view of students as active participants in their learning process, who co-construct knowledge. The more teacher-centred perspective on knowledge seemed to confirm the influence of Confucian Heritage Culture on Vietnamese education. Knowledge is in CHC considered as a fixed set of information, rather than as constructed in dialogue and discovery (Nguyen et al., 2012, Tan and Chua, 2015). Teachers are expected to hold all knowledge and transfer it to their students. Students are not expected to question or challenge this knowledge (Thanh, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2006, Saito and Tsukui, 2008). The dichotomy between child-centred and teacher-centred perspectives was however not that straightforward in the River School. Vy's comments about the warm-up games do indicate that she reflected on the purpose of such activities and was aware of the importance to engage students through games. The conversation furthermore indicated that she was aware of the individual differences between students and the need to set different goals.

I wondered if Vy's practice with mixed elements of traditional teaching and education reforms inspired by the VNEN programme was an example of 'hybrid practices'. Several researchers (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Thanh, 2014, Tan and Chua, 2015, Nguyen et al., 2012) have described hybrid practices in Vietnamese schools, in which teachers combine both elements of traditional Vietnamese pedagogy and child-centred pedagogy. This could clarify why researchers as Thao and Boyd (2014) and Saito et al. (2008) found limited implementation of education reforms at school level in Vietnam. Both studies discussed how teachers were trained in child-centred pedagogy or play-based learning, but continued to use teacher-centred approaches in their classrooms. When assessing Vietnamese educational practice based on Western criteria of how child-centred pedagogy should look like, it might be difficult to notice these hybrid versions or local interpretations of education reforms.

The hybrid practice in the River School appeared to be an example of adjusting Western-based educational models to the Vietnam school context, rather than a combination of these models with authentic and already existing local approaches as suggested by Nguyen et al. (2012). The adjusted form of child-centred pedagogy seemed to work in the River School, as it still allowed to respect teachers as holders of knowledge, follow textbooks to meet the knowledge-based curriculum and straight-forward criteria to assess teachers (such as covering all content of the curriculum or implementing specific teaching techniques). There was no evidence that the VNEN programme thoroughly studied already existing practices which could support the same goals such as different ways to facilitate group learning or informal support outside the school context, as described by Nguyen et al. (2012). This could clarify why the pedagogical reforms supported by the VNEN might not be fully implemented and the programme was unable to address the underlying values and beliefs of the teachers at the River School.

Vy's lesson and the way the VNEN model was implemented raised a number of questions about the practice of developing hybrid versions of Western education reforms. I began to wonder how far Vy's interpretation of child-centred pedagogy was able to increase access and participation to learning for all, if some of her underlying values and beliefs seemed to contradict key elements of the approach. Several researchers mentioned the importance of school culture and values to create sustainable education reforms (Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Corbett, 2001, Kugelmass,

2004). The observations and conversations at the River School indicated that inclusive education and child-centred pedagogy had not entered the 'deep culture' of the school (Kugelmass, 2004, Corbett, 2001, Grimes et al., 2012, Howes et al., 2009a). It appeared there was at the River School an ongoing tension between traditional perceptions around teaching and knowledge and the growing interest in implementing child-centred pedagogy, based on government requirements and involvement in international education reform programmes. It has been argued that inclusive education implementation requires however fundamental changes in pedagogy and in the way in which education is organised (Armstrong et al., 2010, Graham and Slee, 2008, Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). The hybrid versions of Western education reforms might not be examples of such 'radical reforms'. There might be a tension between the need to recognize local interpretations of education reforms on the one hand, and the requirement to fully adopt inclusive values and make fundamental pedagogical changes to create sustainable inclusive practice on the other hand.

Implications

The observations in this incident indicated that while the teachers at the River Schools did include elements from the VNEN model in their practice, the programme might not have been able to address the deeper school culture, values and beliefs concerning the role of teachers in transferring knowledge. This appeared to have resulted in a mix match of both teacher- and child-centred teaching styles and practices. The child-centred pedagogy version of Vy did seem to work in her school context, as it continued to respect the traditional role of teachers, facilitated competition and quick teacher assessment and allowed teachers to meet the MoET requirements to deliver the heavy knowledge-based national curriculum.

The observations and reflections brought to the foreground a tension in implementing Western-based education reforms in a context-specific and cultural appropriate way. On the one hand, there is a need to recognize and respect local interpretations of education models, which work within the specific social, cultural and political context of the school. On the other hand, there is a concern that these local interpretations might not lead to necessary fundamental reforms in pedagogical thinking and might sustain contradicting values and belief systems. This tension

showed the complexities of contextualising education reforms and re-confirmed that hasty reforms and implementations of Western-based models might not lead to expected results in practice. This is discussed further in Chapter Nine (see p. 205), where my developing interpretation and potential implications for education programme development are further explored.

Incident 6 – Laughing with Silly Replies

Incident

This incident includes two parts. In the first part, Ha talks about a child with disabilities in her classroom. I linked this with another incident, part two, in which the teachers at the Hill School discussed a Photovoice activity. Both incidents showed a similar perspective towards disability. Together the incidents provided a richer understanding.

Part One – Silly Replies

When asking how the teachers in the Hill School defined disability, Ha talked about Zang.

> 'Zang is a very handsome boy. So, I thought he was just slower in learning. However, when teaching him, I noticed he had very low cognitive skills and that it was very hard for him to concentrate and to control himself. I asked Zang for example to repeat what I just said. He could not do that. So, all the students in my classroom laughed. Zang went crazy. He was frustrated and could not control the situation.' (Ha, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 27 November 2017).

Ha and her colleagues did not make a big issue about the reaction of the other children on Zang.

> '*Ha:* Laughing with wrong answers is normal in Vietnam. … . When it happens to normal children, it is not a problem. But Zang got really frustrated. …
>
> *Hong:* The students just noticed a silly reply. They don't discriminate or bully him, they just laugh because it is funny.' (Teachers focus group discussion, Hill School, 27 November 2017).

Part Two – Weaknesses in Children

Photovoice was introduced as a method to initiate focus group discussions. I gradually introduced more abstract and complicated assignments. For this incident, I asked the teachers at the Hill School to take pictures of issues that made it difficult for them to implement inclusive education. I expected this assignment would lead to a conversation about barriers in the implementation of inclusive education at the school level. When I came back to the Hill School to discuss the assignment, we had the following conversation:

> '*Me:* Do you remember what the last assignment was?
>
> *Hong:* Last month, the requirement from you was to find the weaknesses of the children.
>
> *Me:* Oh, maybe there was a misunderstanding. I was actually looking for things that made it difficult for you to implement inclusive education
>
> *Hong:* Yes, the difficulties, the weaknesses of the children with disabilities.' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 29 May 2017)

Although ethical issues in using pictures were thoroughly discussed in the field, I decided not to include the pictures of this activity in this thesis. The teachers all took close-up pictures of children. I did not feel comfortable to include these pictures combined with, what I experienced as, rather negative comments from the teachers. The teachers described their pictures as following:

> '*Ha, describing picture one:* I took this picture during the lesson. When other children were studying, this child was sleeping. He has low attention in the lessons. He is difficult to regulate. When he likes it, he studies. When he does not like it, he does not want to study. …
>
> *Hong, describing picture two:* He is one of the students with disabilities in my classroom. He has ADHD. He goes out of the classroom at any time, without asking permission from me. This picture was taken during a Vietnamese language lesson. But you can see on the table, you can see a mathematics textbook. And in his hand, you can see that he is holding a crayon. ... He is very hyperactive. And when I find out that he opened the mathematics textbook, I ask him 'Oh, why do you open the mathematics textbook?'. He closes it and takes it away. However, during the Vietnamese lesson, he is still playing with the crayon.

During the 35 minutes of the lesson, the first half he is good, and after that he cannot participate in the lesson. He is very hyperactive and does whatever he wants' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 29 May 2017)

Selection of the Incident

Part one of the incident was selected because I noticed this kind of 'laughing with silly replies' during classroom observations before, and I struggled to interpret this. In the reflection, the incident was linked with conversations about school values and mixed messages within these value conversations. It indicated methodological difficulties in talking about values, which were relevant for research question three.

Reflections on how the teachers conceptualized disability and how this influenced inclusive education implementation at the case study schools was important for research question one and two, as inclusive education is in Vietnamese policy and practice strongly linked with disability. Both parts of the incident indicated a rather individual perspective on disability.

The second part of the incident included a misunderstanding concerning a Photovoice activity. I included this incident, as I did not expect this to happen. It made me wonder how effective the activities to initiate discussions were as a method to collect data.

Initial Reflection

Immediately after the incident Na thought that 'laughing with silly replies' was indeed normal in Vietnamese schools, and she recalled how it often happened when she grew up. Later, in our last critical friend conversation, she appeared to have changed her mind and quite strongly disagreed that 'laughing with silly replies' was an acceptable reaction in the classroom.

'This is bullying. The teachers at the Hill School always said they love all children. But is this loving all children? You remember how the teachers at the Hill School made sure Zang

came to school every day? Yes, that is love. But is that enough? Did the teachers show love by adjusting their teaching methodology for Zang? Did they show love by encouraging friendships between Zang and other children? I don't think so. I'm very concerned about bullying of children with disabilities. I have seen it many times in other schools. The teachers don't see bullying and they don't react on it. So, other children might think it is ok to laugh with children with disabilities.' (Conversation with Na, 13 December 2019).

Na raised some important questions. When asked directly about the school values, the teachers at the Hill School provided mixed messages. On the one hand they identified love, friendship, belonging, participation and rights as key values. All of these values easily fitted under an inclusive value framework, as identified for example by Booth and Ainscow (2016). On the other hand, the teachers mentioned values as tolerance, forgiveness and patience, which I found more difficult to understand and link with a rights-based model of inclusive education. Hong explained tolerance as following:

'Teachers need to love and tolerate children. … Sometimes teachers should forgive the mistakes of children with disabilities. For example, Zang, he always tears papers and books from other students. Sometimes he stands up and disturbs the others. I told the other students that they need to forgive him, because he has some difficulties.' (Hong, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 14 December 2016)

The teachers in the Hill School seemed to have a complex value system which led to complicated attitudes towards children with disabilities and inclusion. While the teachers may have incorporated some values of a rights-based model of inclusive education, there were also elements which indicated a more individual perspective. In addition, as pointed out by Na, not all identified values by teachers were translated into practice in a way we would expect based on Western theory and models of inclusive education. Love was for example a common theme throughout value conversations at the Hill School. Booth and Ainscow (2016, p. 28) defined love as a 'deep caring for others, which asks nothing in return'. Love leads to creating a sense of belonging and participation for all and establishing caring communities (Booth and Ainscow, 2016). It has been argued that the value of love might be conceptualized through hierarchical relationships in Confucian Heritage Cultures. According to Burr (2014, p. 28) superiors, teachers, guide and love inferiors, students, who obey their superiors in return. The conversations about what love as a school value meant in the Hill school remained rather vague and was not always

visible in observations or sometimes contradicted in other conversations. When asked directly, the teachers in the Hill School referred to love as:

> '*Hong:* Not discriminate children with disabilities and educate them in the same way as other children. …
>
> *Van:* We focus more on children with disabilities, we provide more clear instructions for them and we have a positive attitude towards children with disabilities. … We have tolerance and patience to repeat instructions for children with disabilities. …' (Teacher focus group discussion, Hills School, 7 December 2016).

In an initial interpretation, I considered both parts of the incident as an indication of how disability was perceived at the Hill School. The comment from Ha seemed to indicate that she problematized the behaviour of Zang, his frustrated reaction, rather that the context, the laughing of the other children or the way in which she asked questions or gave instructions. The Photovoice activity indicated as well that the teachers situated difficulties in educating children with disabilities within individual children rather than in the school context. This might mean that disability was understood as an individual issue, rather than as a socially constructed phenomenon, as defined in the UNCRPD (UN, 2006). This individual perception on disability was expressed throughout several conversations. The teachers in the Hill school for example continuously referred to children without disabilities as 'normal children', and children with disabilities were introduced as 'not normal' to their class mates. Disability was often linked to health issues and it was regularly expressed by teachers that children with disabilities were 'weak'. There was a strong emphasis on 'appearance' when defining disability and teachers seemed to make quick judgements about disabilities based on observations, as indicated by Hong:

> 'Children with a visual impairment or hearing impairment, or, a mobility disability, we can immediately see that in their appearance. The other kind of disability comes from the inside, like intellectual disability or ADHD. We can recognize these children within the first days of school. Because children with ADHD are very active. … We can recognize intellectual disability, in a short time. For example, we teach them a very simple letter, like 'e'. We teach it again and again. The child cannot recognize the most simple letters of the Vietnamese alphabet, while other children can very easily understand and recognize it.' (Hong, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 27 November 2017).

The teachers seemed to highlight the differences between children with and without disabilities and focussed thereby on what children with disabilities were not able to do.

This individual perspective on disability might have informed how inclusive education was approached in the Hill School. As explored in incident 'Flexibility' (p. 162), the main strategies to implement inclusive education concerned individual measures such as reducing content, activities and assessment procedures for children with disabilities and developing individual education plans (IEP). There was not much evidence in the data of more general or whole-school reforms to ensure all children were learning and participating. The focus on individual measures towards children with disabilities seemed to be reinforced by inclusive education policies and in-service teacher trainings course. Policy guidelines as Decision 23 on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities (MoET, 2006a) and Circular 42 on Education for People with Disabilities (MoET et al., 2013) promoted mainly individual inclusive education implementation strategies such as reduced or exempted tuition fees for children with disabilities, allowing children with disabilities to start education at a later age, developing IEPs, and reducing or exempting subjects for children with disabilities. In-service teacher training initiatives from the local authorities and NGOs, as CRS, similarly focused on a more individual model of inclusive education. Topics for training for example included developing IEPs and 'how to teach students with each kind of disability, for example hearing impairment, visual impairment and intellectual impairments' (Van, Teacher focus group discussion, 30 November 2016). This indicated again that inclusive education was in the Hill School approached as an 'add-on' to the existing practice, rather than as a fundamental shift in pedagogical thinking and practice.

My initial interpretation about how disability was conceptualised in the case study schools changed over time. I realized that, perhaps due to the initial literature review, I thought quite strongly in dichotomies. After engaging more with the data, I became aware that the division between either deficit or medical model and social or rights-based model in thinking about disability was not that straightforward the case study schools. The discussion chapter (see 'Blended Discourses', p. 207) explores further how elements from both models merged and how the thinking about disability and education was influenced by a range of different contextual factors.

As in 'Policy talk' (p. 155), this incident showed challenges in using participative activities to initiate critical and reflective conversations. I had hoped at the start of this study that these activities would support the creation of an open atmosphere and help to discuss issues at a deeper level. As can be seen in 'Policy Talk', this was not always the case. In addition, this incident indicated that there might have been misunderstandings on the purpose of the activities. Perhaps I did not explain clear enough what I expected, or there could have been language barriers throughout the conversations. The effectiveness of the activities to start conversations is explored further in 'Openness' (p. 191) and discussed as a key theme in Chapter Nine (p. 205).

Implications

This incident provided an insight in the perspectives towards disability, and how this influenced the practice at the case study schools. This was relevant for both research question one and two. The incident suggested that the practice at the school was informed by a complicated and sometimes contradicting set of values. The teachers seemed to embrace values as love, friendship, belonging and participation. At the same time, they mentioned values as tolerance, forgiveness and patience, which were more difficult to place within a rights-based model of inclusive education. The values as identified by the teachers were not always translated into practice as expected from a Western perspective. It was therefore important to not to make quick interpretations and to triangulate data collection methods and perspectives.

The incident furthermore indicated an individual perspective towards disability. The teachers in the Hill School seemed to problematize individual behaviour, difficulties or impairments, rather than contextual issues such as reactions from other children, teaching style or expectations towards children with disabilities. Strategies to implement inclusive education consequently focused on individual measures such as developing IEP or reducing and exempting subjects and activities, rather than on whole-school reforms. The perception on disability and rather narrow interpretation of inclusive education could therefore become a barrier in implementing a rights-based model of inclusive education, which requires fundamental and system-wide reforms.

The incident questioned the effectiveness of using participative activities to initiate critical reflection. Language barriers, different expectations towards research and different perspectives on key concept seemed to challenge the use of such activities.

Incident 7 – Teacher Assessment

Incident

The teachers in both case study schools participated in a written test based on the Professional Standards for Primary School Teachers (MoET, 2007) the day before a field visit. The annual written test was only one aspect of the ongoing teacher assessment procedure.

> '*Sang:* As regulated by DoET, we receive every month a package with training materials. It includes a lot of exercises. For example, we need to write very clear and beautiful letters in the books.
>
> *Vy:* Once a month the school director checks if the teachers made lesson plans and if they regularly used the training materials.
>
> …
>
> *Sang:* And every month, the knowledge and methodology of the teachers are evaluated through observations. Twice a month we have to observe each other's lessons and share ideas. And of course, the head of the teacher group observes four times per month.'
>
> (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 24 April 2018)

Apart from the written test, the classroom observations and the performance rates of the students were also considered in the teacher assessment and ranking.

The ongoing assessment was not restricted to what happened inside the school. The teachers were also assessed on their political values and dedication to their job outside of the school hours.

> 'The political and ethical part is to test if the teachers follow political regulations from the government and if they contribute. Sometimes teachers do not concentrate on teaching, because they do many other things. They for example go to the market to sell things. They should not do other things outside school, they should concentrate their best efforts on teaching.' (Vy, Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 24 April 2018)

The stakes for the assessment procedure were high, as explained by Sang at the River School.

> '*Sang:* They rank us on one of the four levels, excellent, good, fair or poor. If you did not pass the assessment, you will not be considered for a promotion in salary. And at the end of the school year, you won't be accepted as a person who finished all of their tasks. … If we finish all of our tasks, we receive 330,000 VND at the end of the year. However, if you do not pass this exam, or you don't finish your tasks, you don't get this money. And DoET and the school will remind you that you should study regularly and that you should finish your tasks and pass the exam.' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 24 April 2018)

Na added in a later conversation that teachers who were ranked as an excellent teacher for three consecutive years could be ranked as 'very excellent teacher' and receive a bonus of 1,000,000 VND. Teacher who failed the written test or had a poor ranking for three consecutive years could be dismissed from their position.

'Finishing all of your tasks' seemed to be an important indicator in the teacher assessment, Na clarified what this meant.

> 'There is a questionnaire with a lot of criteria. For example, do you follow the Party? Do you not dispute party guidelines or decisions? And apart from political criteria, it has criteria like, do you teach enough periods? Do you make lesson plans? … And one of the main tasks and responsibility is to finish the textbooks and curriculum.' (Conversation with Na, 17 January 2019)

Selection of the Incident

I did not realize before this incident how deeply the teacher assessment procedure ran into the daily lives of teachers inside and outside of the school, and how much impact this could have on their practice. The discussions and reflections based on this incident seemed to confirm how inclusive education was perceived as an add-on rather than as fundament al part of the teacher's requirements. This was relevant for research question one, how inclusive education is understood at local level. Some of the criteria against which the teachers were assessed seemed to challenge

inclusive education implementation, which provided insights for research question two on contextual factors influencing inclusive education implementation. Lastly, the practice of constant teacher monitoring might have affected how teachers perceived me as a researcher and how they approached research activities. This was related to research question three on undertaking research in Vietnam.

Initial Reflection

According to Na, a basic monthly salary for beginning teachers was 1,450,000 VND (48 GBP)[4]. A bonus of 330,000 VND (11 GBP), and especially 1,000,000 VND (33 GBP) for 'very excellent teachers' might be significant additions to the teachers' income. Na emphasised how important teacher assessments were.

> 'Oh, we love achievement so much in Vietnam. We even have teacher contests. We grew up with it. Our parents and teachers find it so important. Achievement is encouraged by many policies. … Schools are assessed and ranked as well. If the students and the teachers are performing well, the authorities will recognize your school as a good or excellent school.' (Conversation with Na, 13 December 2019)

I wondered how far the teacher assessment procedure influenced inclusive education implementation at the case study schools. According to the teachers at the River School, inclusive education was part of the classroom observation criteria.

> 'For pedagogy, one of the criteria is: do teachers modify or adapt the lesson for children with disabilities? If another teacher observed that someone cannot meet the needs of children with disabilities, or cannot adapt the lessons for students like that, this teacher will not get a score of ten. Ten points is the best score.' (Teacher focus group discussion, River School, 24 April 2018)

Overall, the high-stakes teacher assessment combined with a pressure to cover the content-loaded curriculum however did not seem to support inclusive education. The teachers at the Hill

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[4] Exchange rate: www.xe.com, December 2019. The salary increases depending on the years of teaching experience and factors as teaching in 'difficult' areas (remote or with a large proportion of students from ethnic minority groups)

School for example explained that the exams scores of children with a disability certificate did not affect the teacher performance score. When asked what happened if a child did not have an official certificate, but still experienced difficulties in learning, Hang replied:

'It does influence the assessment of the teacher at the end of the school year, if the student has to repeat the grade. This is only if the teacher did not register this child. At the start of the school year, the teacher reviews the capacity and ability of the students. And they register which percentage of the students will pass the exam with the school director. ... If it *(e.g. the number of children who pass the exams)* is below the number you registered at the start of the school year, you don't meet the requirements as a teacher.' (Hang, Teacher focus group discussion, Hill School, 24 April 2018)

The impact of teacher assessment procedures on inclusive education implementation was discussed further with the critical friend group. Ben noticed the following tension:

'If these innovations *(e.g. inclusive education)* are not included in teacher assessment, they might never be implemented. It shows how important system-wide reforms are. Only focusing on capacity building of teachers does not take away barriers to actually implement new approaches.' (Ben, critical friend meeting, 13 December 2019)

Na did not fully agree that teacher assessment and contests in themselves were barriers to inclusive education. Until five years ago there were teacher contests specifically on inclusive education. Na believed these contests motivated teachers to focus more on the learning progress of children with disabilities. Since there are no more inclusive education contests, Na thought some teachers might prioritize the learning outcomes of 'good' and 'excellent' students (DoET terminology).

For me, one of the main barriers to implementation of inclusive education seemed to be the way in which the teacher assessment system encourages teachers to predict performance of students. This system might have been created to support inclusion of all children in a context where teachers were assessed partly based on the performance rates of students. In practice, it might however have had a different effect. Given the high stakes of the teacher assessment and pressure to cover the curriculum within a limited timeframe, there might be a tendency to focus efforts on those children who are likely to pass the exams, instead of on those whose exam results are not taken into consideration. The conversations with Ha in 'Flexibility' (p. 162), indicated that

she had to prioritize finishing the activities from the textbook above designing alternative activities or allocating time to ensure all students were making learning progress. The practice of registering children who might not pass the exam, could indicate that inclusive education was perceived as an 'add-on', not as part of the general requirements for teachers. Learning progress of children who might experience difficulties in learning was in this way not perceived as a basic right, but as a set of accommodations granted by others if time allowed. It also indicated that there might be an acceptance that some children will not pass the exams, rather than reforming the teaching practice and assessment procedures to ensure all children are making learning progress. This practice might furthermore impact the learning progress of those children who are registered as 'likely to fail the exams'. It might lower expectations of teachers towards these children, which is considered as a key barrier in ensuring quality education for all (Hart et al., 2004).

The pedagogical indicators of the teacher assessment procedures seemed rather superficial and intended to make quick and straightforward judgements about teacher performance. Indicators as 'making lesson plans', 'finishing the activities of the textbooks on time', 'writing clear and beautiful' might not be effective to monitor implementation of complex educational reforms such as inclusive education or child-centred pedagogy. These reforms require whole-school and whole-system reforms with multiple interventions at different levels (Booth and Ainscow, 2016, Ainscow et al., 2006, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Observing whether teachers make individual adjustments for children with disabilities as indicator for inclusive education seemed to simplify the education reform to a single technique. This way of assessing inclusive education might also not be fair for teachers, as it appeared to place all responsibility for inclusive education with individual teachers, without taking contextual barriers and challenges into account. The importance of the teacher assessment and ranking combined with the seemingly superficial and individual assessment criteria might encourage teachers to focus on 'ticking the boxes', rather than on making fundamental and perhaps risky changes in their practice.

These pragmatic and institutional barriers are likely to be significant in how far teachers are able to implement education reforms. It might show how conflicting government expectations, teachers performing well based on traditional indicators and at the same time including children

who experience difficulties in learning, can slow down education reforms. Several authors have argued how conflicting policies and assessing teachers based on student performance rates became constraints in developing inclusive practices in similar contexts (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Nguyen et al., 2012, Forlin, 2013). The pragmatic barriers in the impact on the practice in the case study schools are discussed further in Chapter Nine (see p. 205).

As it appeared teachers were constantly evaluated on their performance inside and outside the school, this might have impacted on how they perceived the research activities. The reactions of Ha to the observation in Incident 4 ('Flexibility', p. 162) showed for example she felt the need to emphasize she usually follows the textbook guidelines and procedures in her lessons. 'Policy Talk' and 'Openness' (p. 155 and p. 191), might show a tendency to give 'correct' replies. When I discussed this issue with Na, she did not agree with this reflection. She emphasized that teachers knew what my role was at the school. Presenting an overly positive picture of the school practice was according to her linked to Confucian culture to show what is going well. Na and I frequently had different perspectives, in which I often interpreted field events based on the local policy context, while Na used a post-Confucian culture framework. This is discussed further in Chapter Nine (p. 205).

Implications

This incident discussed the impact of teacher assessment procedures on inclusive education implementation at the case study schools. The way in which the procedure attempted to cope with the changing reality of inclusive schools, might indicate that inclusive education is at different levels perceived as an add-on, rather than a basic requirement for teachers. Teacher could register children who are likely to fail the exams, to ensure their test results did not affect their own performance assessment. This however indicated an acceptance that some children experience difficulties in learning, rather than a starting point to review and reform teaching and learning practices.

While inclusive education indicators entered the teacher assessment procedure, these criteria might have been insufficient to capture a complex education reform as inclusive education. The

indicators seemed to reduce inclusive education to single techniques to be implemented by individual teachers. The high-stakes teacher assessment could furthermore encourage teachers to focus efforts mainly on those students who are likely to pass the exams. It could discourage them to make changes in their practice which would affect completing their traditional tasks, such as finishing the textbooks on time and ensuring all registered children pass the exams. The teacher assessment procedure could therefore become a significant challenge for local inclusive education implementation. As in 'Policy Talk', 'Flexibility' and 'Openness', this incident indicated a strong influence from the one-party political context on how teachers were to behave inside and outside the school. This is discussed further as a key theme in Chapter Nine (p. 205).

The experience of teachers with classroom observations as monitoring and constant performance assessment might be important elements in the sense of control I expected at the start of this study. It is possible teachers tried to give 'correct' responses and emphasize how well they follow policy guidelines throughout the research activities. The next incident explores the need to contextualize research activities further.

Incident 8 - Openness

Incident

This incident happened during the last field visit to the Hill School. I planned to map out which teaching strategies the teachers were regularly using and how this supported inclusive education implementation. I adjusted an activity developed by UNESCO (1993) to guide teachers through individual and group reflection. The aim of this activity was to use generic inclusive terminology to encourage teachers to reflect and talk about what these concepts meant in their classroom. I selected this activity as I had tried it before in other countries as part of a consultancy assignment. It worked well in clarifying inclusive education strategies frequently used by teachers.

The activity included example teaching strategies and space to add more strategies (See Appendix Nine for a copy of the tool). I struggled with the discussions based on this activity. At the time, the conversation felt superficial to me. I noticed I was interpreting the reactions of the teachers

as defensive. I did not gather as much detail on the currently used teaching strategies as I initially had hoped for. According to the teachers, they used all the strategies I provided as an example and the teachers did not add any other teaching strategy.

> '*M:* Of all these teaching strategies, is there something that you did not try yet in your classroom?
>
> *Kim:* We use all of them. We use the strategies regularly over the course of the school year. We use a lot of strategies in one lesson. Instruction, clarify the content of the lesson, discussion with students, encourage students to collaborate with each other, praising the students, we do that already. We do all of that already' (Teacher focus group discussion Hill School, 24 April 2018)

Selection of the Incident

I selected this incident as I did not expect that until the last field visit I would continue to struggle with reaching deeper levels in conversations. The reflection based on this incident discussed some of the complexities I encountered in developing field relationships and the need to contextualize research activities. All of these issues were related to the third research question. The reflection based on this incident was also relevant for the first and second research question, as it provided insights in how inclusive education is understood and implemented in the case study schools.

The incident encouraged me to look at other conversations which I experienced as difficult. In doing so, I noticed difficulties in talking about how children learn and how to link this with appropriate teaching strategies. This provide an insight in contextual factors which might impact inclusive education implementation in the case study schools, which is related to the second research question.

Initial Reflection

I observed earlier some strategies provided in the UNESCO activity in the classrooms. The frequent use of group work and encouraging students to help each other could be an example of the

strategy 'Encourage your students to learn from each other'. Most of the observed teachers seemed kind and praised efforts of children by asking the group to applaud frequently for their classmates. This could be linked with the strategy 'Praising children's efforts and achievements'. Overall, however, the lessons in the Hill School seemed more teacher-initiated and based on the textbooks. The main teaching approach seemed to be instruction by the teacher, questions from the teachers with collective responses from the children and individual or group exercises. Although it might have happened when I was not observing the lessons, it was hard to see other strategies provided in the UNESCO activity, such as 'Use a range of different teaching approaches in the same lesson to accommodate different learning styles', 'Clarify the content of the lesson and discuss the expectations with your students', 'Regularly check if everyone understands you' or 'Link what happens in the class with the daily experiences of the students'.

At the time, I struggled to discuss more concrete teaching strategies or local challenges. I did not expect this to happen at the end of the data collection period. I initially experienced this incident as a 'set back' in the relationship building. I believed that the regular field visits over the past years helped to build trust and enabled to have more open conversations. This incident during the last field visit brought me back to the same questions as with the incident during the first visit (see 'Mass English lesson', p. 139). I wondered if the teachers still confused my role with that of a consultant or evaluator. It appeared as if the teachers still felt the need to give the 'correct' replies or present a positive picture of the teaching at the school. This made me rethink field relationships. At the start of the data collection period, I assumed field relationship building would go in a straight line, gradually leading to more trust and openness. This incident showed a more cyclic nature of the relationships. When re-reading the transcript and reflecting about the incident later, I however started to rethink my initial analysis. To start with, retrospectively, this might not have been the best choice of activity to initiate a conversation about teaching strategies in the case study schools. Given the specific context of the Vietnam, including the strict policy framework and regular high-stakes performances tests for teachers, this activity might have come across as an evaluation rather than as a tool to initiate conversation.

In addition, the teaching strategies I presented as examples where perhaps too vaguely worded and could have been interpreted in different ways. It may be that the teachers in the Hill School did implement all of the provided teaching strategies, only I did not recognize it as such. When I

asked for an example of how they prepare a variety of learning outcomes for the same lesson, Ha replied:

> 'For example, in mathematics, we have exercise 1, exercise 2 and exercise 3. The exercises go from easy to difficult. I ask students with higher competency to solve all three of the mathematics problems. However, the students with lower competencies can only complete question 1 or question 2' (Ha, Teacher focus group discussion Hill School, 24 April 2018)

She provides the following example of 'allowing students to show what they have learned in different ways':

> 'We accommodate and adapt to the learning abilities of the student. We reduce the questions to evaluate the student with lower learning capacities. … For mathematics we have standards of what all students should be able to reply easily. We have higher level questions for better students'. (Ha, Teacher focus group discussion Hill School, 24 April 2018)

For me, I initially interpreted these examples of reducing content for individual students, rather than general teaching strategies to support learning for all. When looking from a rights-based perspective, reducing the content might hinder the right of children with disabilities to access the same high quality curriculum (UN, 2006, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). The teachers in the Hill School might have perceived reducing of content and number of activities as the best way to address the needs of children with learning difficulties because they have learned to do so during NGO training courses, or perhaps because this is one of the few strategies they are able to use in the restrictive framework in which they work (See also 'Flexibility', p. 162). In my later analysis (see 'Blended Discourses', p. 207), I discussed how in the thinking and practice at the case study schools different discourses in thinking about disability and inclusion were blended.

This incident encouraged me to look at other conversations which I perceived as more difficult. These conversations were usually concentrated around teaching strategies. I struggled for example with the following conversation about how children learn and how to link this to teaching strategies.

> '*Me:* How do children learn?

Hong: Every student in my classroom can learn. I teach in grade one, so I teach about the letters. Everyone can learn this. Everyone can write, can read, can see. However, the child with disabilities in my classroom requires a lot more support. When I teach the letter 'e' or 'a', I need to watch her. I need to help her by holding her hand. Without support, she just sits there, she just sits down.

Me: How do they learn the letter 'e'?

Kim: It is in the textbook. We follow the textbook for the letter 'e'. And I help everyone to learn the letter 'e'.

Me: For someone who has never been in a school, or does not know about teaching, how do you explain what you do to make sure the children learn the letter 'e'?

Kim: For example, today I teach the letter 'e', and tomorrow I review the lesson about the letter 'e'.

Me: But what do you do?

Hong: The textbook has a content, a curriculum and a methodology' (Hill School, teacher focus group discussion, 27 September 2017)

Hong continued with a detailed explanation of all the activities in the textbook which help students to learn the letter 'e'. This snapshot of the conversation is however an example of many similar conversations in which the teachers seemed to bring back questions about learning and teaching to the textbooks they have received from MoET. It might be possible that is difficult for teachers to talk about teaching and learning as the textbook-based teaching style does not require or encourage them to reflect about learning or to design their own teaching strategies. I discussed the difficulties in talking about teaching and the textbook-based teaching approach with Na.

'*Na:* I observed a lot of classrooms. The teachers focus so much on the textbook. They use the textbook like a Bible, they strictly follow all the instructions of the textbook. … But I think it is not really the fault of the teachers or somebody else. The teachers are not the problem. They are not trained. They do not have knowledge or skills to deal with children with disabilities or to try new teaching approaches.' (Na, Interview, 13 June 2019)

Na expressed a similar view in previous critical incidents (See 'Flexibility', p. 162, 'Teacher assessment', p. 185 and 'Traditional Values in 'Innovative' Settings', p. 171). According to her, teachers used the provided textbooks strictly, because they did not know how else to teach and it was the safest way to ensure the full curriculum was covered by the end of school year. This

might limit inclusive education implementation, as the textbooks did not provide much flexibility to address different learning needs and styles (see also 'Flexibility', p. 162).

Implications

This incident showed that field relationships were complicated and needed work until the end of the data collection. I had hoped to be able to develop relationships with sufficient levels of trust which would enable open and in-depth conversations. While there was progress in the relationships, I did not reach this level of trust. The teachers remained careful with what they shared in the research activities. The continuing sense of control and monitoring did impact the research methods. The incident showed the importance of contextualizing tools.

The incident was linked to other conversations about teaching and learning, which were equally difficult. It appeared that the textbook-based teaching approach did not require teachers to reflect on how children learn or how to design appropriate teaching and learning strategies. As the MoET textbooks were not designed to allow much flexibility to adapt the lesson the specific classroom context, this could become a barrier in inclusive education implementation.

Emerging Themes from the Critical Incidents

This section briefly introduces some key themes emerging from the critical incidents, which will be further discussed in Chapter Nine (p. 205). As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter (see 'A Three- Staged Approach to Data Analysis', p. 104), the initial approach to analysis was to organise the data in key themes. Some examples of these themes included 'policy restrictions', 'engagement in international aid programmes', 'child-centred teaching' or 'community involvement'. As I started to organize the data around these themes, I noticed they were problematic in a number of ways. Firstly, the identified themes were strongly linked to the key themes I identified in the literature review. This meant that the analysis did not so much emerge from the data, but was instead strongly influenced by key concepts from international literature. Secondly, as I started to analyse the data, I noticed that the identified themes did not allow me to

reach further and to understand the perspective of the teachers. The analysis remained too descriptive and was mainly based on my perspective and the initial literature review. I therefore started to move towards a critical incident approach to data analysis. One of the selection criteria for the critical incidents was that they had to represent one or more of the key themes related to the research questions.

To develop the themes from the critical incidents, I re-read and discussed the incidents and reflections several times with my critical friends. I kept notes with reflections during re-reading and discussing. These included thoughts for further exploration, connections between the incidents, links with the initial literature review and initial codes. Re-occurring patterns and themes were filtered from these notes and reflections. After a while, three layers of understanding started to emerge. The first layer included initial interpretations, which were broadly based on the literature review and Western theory concerning inclusive education. The second layer of understanding emerged when looking beyond these initial themes and being more open to details and dissonance. The third layer of understanding emerged when I became aware of how the research methodology was challenged when exploring these deeper levels of understanding. This section provides an initial overview of the key themes per layer.

At first, when summarising the critical incidents, the more obvious themes started to arise. These themes were based largely on Western theory on the concept of inclusion. I started to notice for example that inclusive education was mainly understood in a narrow way, as placing children with disabilities in mainstream settings. I noted that disability was often approached as an individual issue and understood from a deficit or medical discourse. The main strategies to implement inclusive education therefore were individual measures rather than system-wide changes. I started to see the tension between more traditional, teacher-centred and textbook-based teaching and inclusive education implementation.

The more I explored these initial themes, the more I noticed political, cultural and pragmatic contextual factors which influenced the teachers' thinking and practice in the case study school. A second layer of understanding began to develop. Underneath the 'narrow vision on inclusion', 'medical perspective on disability', 'individual measures' or 'traditional pedagogy', I started to see a group of teachers who tried hard to make education reforms work within their context. This led

to a different set of key themes which included for example belief systems, values, conflicting expectations towards teachers and one-party political context, which in a way limited the agency and space teachers had to put education reforms into practice. I noticed how the practice and conceptualisations from the teachers were more complicated than I initially thought. I started to see how teachers blended, what I experienced as, more traditional elements in thinking and practice with more innovative elements into hybrid practices.

Finally, a third layer of understanding started to emerge. I experienced that in order to move beyond the initial, and perhaps rather superficial, understanding and interpretations, the research methodology was challenged. I continuously struggled to develop trust relationships in the field which would allow me to reach more in-depth conversations and understanding. The participative activities to initiate conversations did, given a range of contextual factors, not always lead to the expected outcomes. I became aware of the complexity of the language barrier, how it was not only a matter of speaking a different language, but also understanding key concepts in a very different way. I became conscious of how my own assumptions influenced the initial interpretation of the key themes. To reach deeper levels of understanding, I had to rely more on Na, the interpreter, and other critical friends. Along the way the methodology became more complex to respond to the complexities in the field. These issues formed the third set of key themes.

The key themes will be discussed and explored further per research question in Chapter Nine. However, before that, in Chapter Eight I provide a brief account of how the fieldwork was finalised as it has significance for the further analysis and discussion in the thesis.

Chapter Eight – Losing the Red Stamp – Leaving the Field

Introduction

As long as it took to obtain legal permission to undertake fieldwork, so abruptly I lost it again. This chapter presents an overview of why, how and when I ended the fieldwork. Several authors have argued that leaving the field is often neglected, but nonetheless significant to understand the research process (Delamont, 2002, Kindon and Cupples, 2014, Taylor, 1991, Coffey, 1999). The way researchers leave the field can provide valuable insights in the research context, field relationships and can lead to deeper understanding of what happened in the field (Kindon and Cupples, 2014). It is therefore important to be explicit and reflexive about the exit from the field (Delamont, 2002, Kindon and Cupples, 2014, Taylor, 1991). According to Coffey (1999), when researchers do write about leaving the field, it usually concerns practical guidelines. This does not do justice to how messy, difficult and emotional leaving the field often is (Coffey, 1999). This chapter first discusses how the fieldwork ended for me and then reflects on how I gave meaning to this process.

Leaving the Field

In publications about leaving the field, authors mention apart from pragmatic factors, 'theoretical saturation' as main reason to end fieldwork (Delamont, 2002, Kindon and Cupples, 2014, Taylor, 1991, Ely et al., 1991). It points towards a moment at which additional data collection does not lead to new themes or deeper levels of understanding (Taylor, 1991). In December 2017, months before the abrupt end of the fieldwork, my PhD supervision panel and critical friends asked when I planned to end the fieldwork. By that time, I visited the two case study schools regularly for a year and I started to have a fair understanding of the school context, identified key themes and had more data than I would ever be able to use in this thesis. Still, I did not feel ready to leave the field. As other researchers (Ely et al., 1991, Kindon and Cupples, 2014), I experienced anxiety that what I had was not enough. I had the feeling there were still questions left unanswered and most of all, that the field conversations did not yet reach deep enough levels. Kindon and Cupples

(2014) warned against striving for 'continuous coverage', and Taylor (1991) argued that fieldwork is never really finished. There are always more questions to ask, more perspectives to explore and deeper levels to reach.

While I started to understand that it was probably time to leave the field, there was one particular incident that motivated me to stay a little longer. The incident happened in April 2018, during what would become the last field visit. During the focus group discussion at the Hill School, Kim was called out of the meeting room. When she came back later she seemed very upset. With tears in her eyes she told me that there was a boy in her classroom whose behaviour she experienced as challenging. According to Kim, he did not listen, ran around the classroom, threw his pencils and hurt her and his classmates. Every time an incident happened, the school called his mother to calm him down. The boy was involved in a similar incident earlier that morning and Kim was called out of the meeting room to talk with his mother. Kim shared that she struggled to cope with the behaviour of the student. She also felt that by calling his mother every time something happened, she was not allowed space to learn how to deal with the behaviour herself. It was the first time one of the teachers showed a strong emotion and vulnerability during the research activities and it touched me as a person. We talked for a while about how teachers coped with behaviour they experienced as difficult in the classroom. I sensed a feeling of frustration and powerlessness amongst the teachers. Kim said, 'I yell at him, but he is not scared of me' (Teacher focus group discussion, 24 April 2018). It seemed the teachers had little support and strategies to fall back on and they asked me for advice. It was a difficult conversation, but it felt to me as a breakthrough. After months of trying different strategies, it seemed the teachers at the Hill School were finally opening up and shared more difficult stories and personal thoughts. The struggle of the teachers to make inclusion work and their genuine feelings of care moved me. As a consultant, I had worked with teachers in other contexts on behaviour management in the classroom and I could share some experiences and materials. I decided with my supervision panel, that for the next visit, I would prepare discussion activities around behaviour management and share the UNESCO Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments and the Specialized Booklet on Positive Discipline in Inclusive Classrooms, which was already available in Vietnamese (UNESCO, 2017a). This way, I could explore this topic further and give something back to the teachers at the same time.

Unfortunately, before any of this could happen, the decision to leave the field was made for me. It took me months to find out that I no longer had legal permission for research. The schools seemed interested in a discussion session about behaviour management. However, every time I suggested a date for the next visit, the teachers gave me a reason why it was not suitable to meet. There were the exams in May, teacher assessments and contests in June, teacher development in July and preparations for the new school year in August. While these all seemed valid reasons, I felt that the schools were avoiding my visit. When I called Na in September 2018 to talk about this, she told me that all the primary schools in Hoa Binh had merged with the secondary schools within their commune. The directors and vice-directors we worked with before, were not longer managing the case study school. Since the school management and structure changed, I had to apply for new legal permission to undertake fieldwork. As it took so long to obtain the first legal research permission and I had enough data already, I decided not to go through the process again. I tried to meet with the research participants informally to close the field relationships. From April 2018 until October 2018 I offered various options to meet with the teachers, including informal school visits, meeting over lunch or at a coffee shop. The teachers did not formally refuse any of the invitations. Again, in their responses it felt like it was never a good time to meet. They were always busy, either at school, with their families or with their side businesses. It started to feel what I called a 'Vietnamese no', refusing in a polite way, without actually having to say 'no'. After several months of trying, I decided not to pursue the last visit any further. I assumed that since I did not have legal permission anymore, it might have been difficult for the teachers to still be associated with me. Telling me they were busy all the time might have been a polite and culturally appropriate way of refusing the visit.

The way I had to leave the field was very abrupt and caused some rather negative emotions for me. I felt as if my work was 'unfinished'. It seemed I reached a deeper level of trust at the Hill School and I wanted to explore that further. I felt upset I could not continue with these new developments. Most of all I felt guilty I did not have the opportunity to properly thank the research participants for contributing their time and effort, and for making this study possible. The continuing relationship with Na helped to cover some of the gaps. Although I met less frequently with Na, our bond grew stronger after the data collection phase. I shared transcripts, emerging findings and draft writings. Our conversations became deeper and I could ask some difficult questions on the political context of the case study schools. While Na could not reply questions

for the teachers, our conversations provided another, deeper, level of data. I kept in touch with Na until the end of the PhD process, and it is likely our relationship will not end there.

Critical Reflection

According to Coffey (1999, p. 109), the significance of leaving the field lies in what it symbolizes, 'leaving implies we were there in the first place'. The abrupt end made me wonder how much I was ever 'there', how far I had been able to develop meaningful and trusting relationships and what this meant for the collected data. For me, the way I had to end the field work and what happened afterwards reflected some important issues in this study. Firstly, it highlighted the challenging field relationships in both case study schools. Despites difficulties, I did manage to collect valuable and rich data through conversations, observations, individual reflections and reflections with critical friends. At times, the distance between me and the teachers became smaller and I got a glimpse of what was behind the 'policy talk' and 'ideal representation' of what happened in the school. For example, the incident discussed in this chapter, about dealing with challenging behaviour in the classroom, and the conversations in Incident 4 ('Flexibility', p. 162) in which Ha talked about the time pressure to complete the curriculum. These were 'break-through moments' for me. Albeit difficult, these moments showed that there was a certain level of trust which allowed participants to be vulnerable and talk about difficult topics. As discussed further in the next chapter (see 'Personal expectations', p. 229 and 'Trusting relationships', p. 234), these moments of vulnerability and emotion were crucial for me to gain a deeper understanding of the context. The process of leaving field, and how seemingly easily I was not part of the school anymore was however significant. It showed for me how it stayed with 'moments', which did not fully become 'relationships' yet. It is difficult to know if I would have been able to establish stronger relationships if I would have had more time in the field. The developments in the Hill School at the end of the data collection phase did indicate there was progress. At the same time, I became aware of the cyclic nature of field relationships and that I did not always know what influenced 'set-backs' in these relationships (see 'Incident 8', p. 191). I can therefore not be sure that the trust in the field relationships would have definitely increased with extended stay in the field. The field relationships and level of trust are further discussed in

the Chapter Nine (see 'Expectations within the case study schools', p. 226 and 'Trusting relationships', p. 234).

Secondly, the way the field work ended and what happened afterwards represented for me the evolving methodology in this study. After the field work ended suddenly in the case study schools, I continued to work with Na. I shared parts of transcripts and emerging findings, and we had reflective conversations about the data, what happened in the field and how we both processed this. Na did not always answer all questions. See for example in 'Incident 3' ('Policy talk', p. 155), in which Na did not feel comfortable to discuss political issues deeply. We however did have the kind of relationship where I could ask these questions. I felt questions about the political context and the Communist Party Vietnam were too sensitive to ask in the case study schools. Near the end of the field work and afterwards, I began to understand the complexities of the research context better. I started to rely more on Na and other critical friends to make sense of the data. This helped to reach deeper layers of understanding. Although the relationship with Na became important in the research methodology, it was not an easy relationship. Towards the end of this study I realized there were still some issues or tensions that had not been resolved. I had to rely on Na to connect with the case study schools and local authorities, as all communication happened in Vietnamese. It is possible that Na found out late as well that I did not have a research permit anymore. I however do not fully rule out the possibility that she knew earlier and waited for me to directly ask her about it. Initially I felt disappointed in our relationship and perceived lack of openness. Looking back at it now, it is likely Na and I had different expectations towards our relationship, each based on our cultural background. While I expected that the level of friendship and closeness would come with an openness towards each other, she might have interpreted our relationship differently. The evolving methodology and growing role of Na is discussed further in the next Chapter (see 'Trusting relationships', p. 234 and 'Contextualisation of research activities', p. 233).

Lastly, for me the abrupt end of the field work also reflected the cultural and political context of the case study schools. The decision not to continue the field work was made top-down, without any conversation with me. It emphasized the power of local authorities and red stamps. This resembled how decisions concerning teaching and learning at the case study schools were often

made for the teachers, without consulting them. The decision to include children with disabilities was for example based on policy guidelines and NGO projects (see 'Chapter Six', p. 123 and 'Incident 3', p. 155), the teaching largely followed textbooks provided by MoET (see 'Incident 4', p. 162 and 'Incident 8', p. 191) and teaching approaches were influenced by international projects or by policy guidelines and teacher assessment procedures (see 'Incident 5', p. 171 and 'Incident 7', p. 185). The next Chapter discusses how the teachers showed resilience and creativity in dealing with conflicting expectations based on policy guidelines, cultural norms and beliefs within the community and input from international programmes (see 'Factors Influencing Local Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education', p. 212 and 'Contextualisation of Education Reforms', p. 222).

Summary of Key Issues

In contrast with the long process to gain access to the field, the process of leaving the field happened very abruptly. Without much explanation my research permit was no longer valid. The abrupt end of the field work represented for me how I was never fully part of the field or at least accepted by participants in the field. I was able to develop 'moments of trust', which helped to collect in-depth data, however overall, I might not have been able to develop fully trusting relationships. The process of leaving the field and continuing to work with Na showed the evolving methodology of this study. As I understood the complexity of the research context better, I relied more on Na to make sense of what happened. Although this did not replace the field relationships, it helped to address some remaining questions. Finally, the processes of both gaining access to and leaving the field reflected for me the top-down bureaucratic culture in education, which also seemed to shape the practice in the case study schools.

The next chapter discusses the key themes and learning from the data presented in Chapter Six ('Access to the field', p. 123), Chapter Seven ('Data Presentation Through Critical Incidents', p. 138) and Chapter Eight ('Leaving the Field', p. 199) further.

Chapter Nine – Discussion

Introduction

This chapter further analyses and discusses the data presented through critical incidents ('Chapter Seven', p. 138). In re-reading and discussing the incidents with critical friends, a set of key themes emerged. These key themes are discussed against the research questions and initial literature review (see 'Chapter Two', p. 23 and 'Three', p. 43) to emphasize what I consider to be the main issues and learning from this study. The research questions are linked to each other. Therefore, some key learning points apply to different research questions. Where this happens, overlap is avoided as much as possible and references are made to similar key themes in different sections of this chapter.

The year I was finalizing this thesis, 2019, marked the twentieth anniversary of inclusive education implementation at both case study schools. I could not help but wonder how far the case study schools had come in their journey towards inclusive education. When applying Western theory on inclusive education to the data, one could argue that not terribly much has happened. It made Na somewhat disheartened in our last critical friend conversation:

> 'Twenty years of inclusive education implementation in the Hill and the River School. Twenty years of training and changing policies. And where did it get them? The River School does not even have students with disabilities and the teachers at the Hill School just realized now that students with disabilities should be allowed to join school excursions. The progress is slow, so slow.' (Conversation with Na, 13 December 2019).

What the key themes presented in this chapter have in common is a recognition that underneath the undoubtfully slow progress towards inclusive education implementation at the case study schools, there appeared to be a committed group of teachers who tried hard to make inclusive education work within their context. It has been argued throughout this thesis that inclusive education is a difficult concept, which is understood in many different ways. To implement inclusive education, it is therefore important to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities and realities of the contexts in which it is implemented. I argue that the main contribution of this thesis lies in a mapping of the contextual factors in the Hill School and River

School which have impacted the local conceptualisation and implementation of inclusive education. This helped to understand the slow progress towards inclusive education and to notice practices which may look different from inclusive education in the Global North, but nonetheless show how teachers are making sense of the education reform within their context. These influences are organized under research question one and two. In addition, this study contributed to the field of cross-cultural research on inclusive education by mapping challenges in undertaking research as a foreign researcher in Vietnam. These are organised as key themes under research question three.

A few of the key themes resonated throughout all of the research questions. A first overall theme was 'dissonance'. I noticed dissonance in different aspects of the study. In the collected data there were sometimes contradictions between 'what was said' and 'what was observed'. What appeared to me as contradictions pointed at complex conceptualisations of inclusive education, influenced by a range of different contextual factors. There was dissonance in the teaching practice in both case study schools. The teachers seemed to have developed 'hybrid practices', influenced by different, and sometimes contradicting, expectations. There was also dissonance in the applied research methodology. Field relationships were cyclic in nature, with moments of closeness and moments of distance. There were different expectations towards my role and position in the field. This dissonance was not easy to deal with, but also helped to reflect further and develop deeper levels of understanding. A second overall theme was 'misunderstanding'. Misunderstandings arose due to language barriers and due to different assumptions among the teachers, Na and myself, of what the key concepts underlying this study meant and what research involved. These misunderstandings affected how I interpreted field events and emerging data. Reflection with critical friends helped to become aware of these misunderstandings and analyse them from different perspectives. A last overall theme was 'complex research methodology'. It was difficult to develop trusting relationships in the field and reach deeper levels within conversations. I relied more on Na and other critical friends to uncover and understand some of the complexities of the research context. These struggles, reflection and voices of the critical friends are made visible in the critical incidents ('Chapter Seven', p. 138) and throughout this discussion chapter. I believed this helps to understand the complexity of this study for readers who have not been part of it and to understand how the key learning from this study emerged. The overall key themes are discussed with more detail under the three research questions.

Research Question One: How are concepts of 'education' and 'inclusion' understood at school level in Vietnam?

This research question aimed to explore how research participants in the two case study schools in Vietnam understood the concept of inclusive education. I wanted to place these local perspectives next to how inclusive education is defined internationally and addressed in national legalisation to identify potential tensions.

Blended Discourses

In responding to this research question, I initially interpreted the data in the same way as I used to do as a consultant, based on what I believed was the 'right way to do inclusion'. My personal perspective on inclusive education was mainly developed based on 'Disability Studies' and theory around 'School Improvement'. In disability studies, inclusive education is viewed as a moral choice, as it is argued that segregated forms of education have a long-term negative impact on people with disabilities (Oliver, 2000, Young and Mintz, 2008). Inclusive education is conceptualized as a 'political act' to 'realize more humane situations' and to 'fight oppression and unjust situations' (Van Hove et al., 2008, p. 136). I developed therefore an understanding of inclusive education based on values as 'social justice' and 'rights'. Inclusive education from a school improvement perspective on the other hand does not focus on specific groups of children. It is in its most simple form understood as good education for all children (Clough and Corbett, 2000). Booth and Ainscow (2016, p. 22) for example emphasized that 'it is not about an aspect of education to do with a particular group of children' and described inclusive education as a 'never-ending process concerned with the involvement of individuals, the creation of participatory systems and settings, and the promotion of inclusive values. … it involves increasing participation for everyone in the cultures, communities and curricula of local settings, and reducing all forms of exclusion and discrimination'. Based on these influences, I developed a broad vision on inclusive education, concerned with system-wide reforms of education policies, cultures and practices.

As a result of my own assumptions and beliefs I interpreted the way teachers talked about inclusive education and what I observed in the case study schools as 'disability inclusion'. I focused on how the inclusive education conceptualisation in the case study schools was concerned around individual measures to ensure children with disabilities were learning, rather than on system-wide reforms in the general pedagogy and in the way the school was organised. I considered how disability was understood in the case study schools as an 'individual problem' and interpreted this as a deficit model of disability. In looking at pedagogy, I focussed on the teachers-centred pedagogy and how teachers emphasized the importance of knowledge transmission. I believed all of this contributed to the conceptualisation of inclusive education as an additional task for teachers in an unchanged education setting. This formed the first layer of analysis (see also 'Chapter Seven', p. 196 on 'layers of analysis').

It was a difficult process to become aware of my own assumptions and how these influenced my early analysis, as they were so deeply engrained in my thinking. The more time I spent in the field and the more I discussed the emerging data with critical friends, the more I noticed small issues, details in observations or conversations, which did not fit neatly under this initial analysis. For example, while there was a strong focus on disability in how teachers at the cases study schools talked about inclusive education, the teachers mentioned in some conversations also rights and the importance of values of love, friendship and belonging. Van for example said, 'the goal of inclusive education is that children with disabilities go to the classroom'. She however added 'more importantly, children with disabilities become part of the school life and everyone accepts them.' (see 'Incident 2', p. 147). The teaching in both case study schools appeared to be mainly textbook-based and teacher-centred. Some observations also showed that teachers experimented with a more child-centred teaching style (see 'Incident 5', p. 171), or organised such activities after school hours (see 'Incident 1', p. 139). These smaller and less obvious issues to observe or notice formed the basis for the second layer of analysis.

I argue that globalisation processes did affect the practice at the case study schools, both through changing national policy frameworks and projects of international organisations. Since the mid 1980s, the education policy framework in Vietnam has undergone several reforms to meet international agreements and targets. Specific decrees and circulars have been developed in addition to the education law to increase educational access for targeted groups and to improve

quality of education by introducing elements of child-centred pedagogy (see also 'Inclusive Policies' in the literature review, p. 47). As can be seen in the data, this policy framework encouraged teachers in the case study schools to follow procedures to identify out of school children, to screen children for learning difficulties and to develop individual measures to support the learning of children with disabilities. Teachers in both case study schools for example mentioned how they followed the policy framework on Universal Primary Education to identify out of school children and encourage their families to enrol them in schools (see 'Incident 2', p. 147). Incident 4 discussed how teachers followed MoET guidelines in developing inclusive practices. Vy for example explained she received a standard curriculum and a framework from MoET, specifying how to adjust this curriculum for student who are either learning faster or slower than the average student (see 'Incident 4', p. 162)

In addition, international organisations worked directly with the case study schools. CRS Introduced inclusive education in both case study schools and the World Bank has supported the River School in improving the quality of education through the VNEN project (see also 'Chapter six', p. 123). Both schools perceived the CRS project as the start of inclusive education at their school. The teachers started to use techniques such as individual education planning and reducing content for children with disabilities. These techniques were later encouraged by the government through a series of decrees and circulars. While it can be argued that these techniques support a narrow and disability focus on inclusive education, it can also show that teachers became aware of and respond to the differences in learning between children. The VNEN programme from MoET and World Bank introduced a range of techniques and new textbooks, which are still used in the River School. The observations for example showed how Vy uses game to introduce the topic of the lessons, facilitates group work and has techniques to balance between individual, small and whole group instruction (see 'Incident 5', p. 171). These changes have introduced a more active teaching approach.

Although globalisation processes introduced new ideas and practices, I believe these have not replaced existing belief systems and practices. Instead, the teachers re-interpreted these new concepts and ideas based on their context and existing knowledge. For example, the teachers in both case study schools understood the concepts of 'education for all' and 'removing barriers to participation' in the framework of the policy requirements related to the Universal Primary

Education Law. There was an assumption that barriers to education could be reduced by visiting family three times per year and encourage them to send their children to school, as obligated in the policy framework (see 'Incident 2', p. 147). The teachers in the River School interpreted the knowledge and skills related to child-centred pedagogy, introduced by the VNEN programme, based on their cultural believes concerning the role of teachers as knowledge holders and delivers and the communist image of an ideal teacher, supported through various education policies (see 'Incident 3', p. 155 and 'Incident 5', p. 171). While Vy for example facilitate games and group learning, as introduced by VNEN, she also banged her ruler on the desk to keep authority, focussed on instruction and ensured she followed the provided textbook strictly (see 'Incident 5', p. 171). This re-interpretation of new concepts resulted in a blend of different discourses. The data indicated both elements of a rights-based and a deficit model on disability and inclusion, of a narrow and a broad vision on inclusive education and of teacher- and child-centred practices. I felt that the elements of the different discourses did not form a clear and coherent model. I noticed the dissonance, with contradictions in ideas, in practices and between what was said in the interviews and observed in the classrooms. As a researcher who was trying to make sense of the complexity in the context and the data, I found these contradictions unsettling. I however learned that engaging with these contradictions helped to develop a deeper understanding of the context and to value the different ways in which teachers in the case study schools made sense of education reforms.

The idea of blended discourses helped to understand why some inclusive education practices at the case study schools looked different than what I expected. Based on theory, pre-dominantly developed in the Global North, I had a certain image of how inclusive classrooms should look like. I expected to see for example diverse groups of students, teachers applying a range of different approaches to introduce concepts, students being active and engaged in different kinds of activities at the same time or collaborative learning. The teachers mentioned in the focus group discussions that their lessons were inclusive, they used different teaching strategies and had flexibility to adjust the curriculum and teaching approaches as needed. I however struggled to see this in the classroom observations. From my perspective, there was a continuous focus on individual children with disabilities, textbook-based teaching with very limited flexibility to adjust lessons to the actual context (see 'Incident 4', p. 162), emphasis on achieving the highest levels of knowledge (see 'Incident 5', p. 171) and learning games being separated from the main teaching

activities (see 'Incident 1', p. 139 and 'Incident 5', p. 171). I had to learn that the classroom practices I observed were the result of teachers who mediated new education concepts based on their cultural and political context. I also had to learn I could not always fully understand this, as my perspective was influenced by different social, cultural and political factors. Therefore, although we talked about the same concepts, we sometimes understood these differently (see also 'Understanding of Key Concepts' under Research Question Three, p. 238).

Engaging with the dissonance furthermore helped to understand why inclusive education was sometimes perceived as so difficult at the case study schools. The concept became loaded with a range of contradicting expectations from policymakers, international agencies who implemented programmes at the case study schools and community members and teachers themselves, who had different cultural beliefs towards their role. Some of these conflicting expectations are explored further in the next section.

Factors Influencing Local Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education

Policy Expectations

The education policy framework had a significant influence on the practice in the case study schools. This is discussed with more detail under Research Question Two (see 'Striving Towards the Ideal', p. 218). The Vietnamese policy framework however lacked clarity on what inclusive education is and how it should be implemented (see also 'Inclusive Policies' in the literature review, p. 47). Similar as in the case study schools, the policy framework included a blend of discourses. The main legislative framework for inclusive education, the Disability Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2010) and related decrees and circulars, for example included terminology linked with a rights-based model, such as a focus on inclusion and rights. It also included terminology linked to a deficit model, for example a categorisation of people based on impairments and an individual and deficit definition of disability. The legal framework promoted inclusive education and prohibited discrimination in terms of school access based on disability. At the same time, schools were allowed to refer children with disabilities to special centres based on their specific needs and abilities. When children with disabilities did find access to mainstream

education, the restrictive policy framework only encouraged individual measures in implementing inclusive education, such as developing IEPs, reducing curriculum content and reducing school fees.

In addition, the legislative framework and national education programmes included a range of conflicting expectations towards teachers. The government promoted inclusive education and increase of education quality through the implementation of child-centred pedagogy (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012). Teachers were however still expected to finish content-loaded textbooks within a limited timeframe. The conversations with Ha in Incident 4 ('Flexibility', p. 162) showed that these textbooks did not leave much space to provide additional support or alternative activities when necessary. Teachers were furthermore still assessed based on traditional criteria which supported a teacher-centred approach, and which simplified complex education reforms into singular techniques (see also 'Incident 7', p. 185). The data indicated that teachers in the case study schools appeared to juggle with these conflicting policy expectations, resulting in hybrid practices (see also 'Contextualisation of Education Reforms' under Research Question Two, p. 222). In a context with strict and far-reaching political control this could easily lead to a mentality of 'ticking the boxes', rather than engaging in difficult, risky and fundamental reforms in practice.

International Expectations

The human rights framework had a significant impact on education policy development in Vietnam. Since the mid 2000s, confirm with global targets and commitment as Education for All (EFA) (UNESCO, 2000), Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (UN, 2000) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (UN, 2015), the Vietnamese education policy framework focused on increasing quality of education for all and increasing educational access for specific groups of children (see also 'Inclusive Policies' in the literature review, p. 47). Since the Vietnamese government ratified the UNCRPD, it is legally obliged to implement inclusive education. The right to inclusive education has been formalised in the Vietnam Disability Law (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2010). A range of international organisations and NGOs supported the Vietnamese government in implementing international policy requirements on inclusive education.

There was a tension between how inclusive education was promoted internationally, and how it was understood locally, in the case study schools. The international framework, and especially the global education targets as the SDGs and EFA goals, conceptualised inclusion in a broad sense based on human rights, as supporting access and participation in quality education for all children (see also 'Defining inclusive education' in the literature review, p. 24). The UNCRPD (UN, 2006) did include a focus on children with disabilities. GC4 (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p. 3) however maintained a broad vision on inclusive education, as 'a fundamental right for all learners' and a process of reducing barriers to education for all, through changes in education cultures, practices and policies. The critical incidents showed a more narrow conceptualisation of inclusive education at the case study schools. Incident 4 ('Flexibility', p. 162) showed inclusive education was mainly implemented through individual measures. Adjustments in the curriculum and approach were only possible for children with an official disability certificate. Incident 7 ('Teacher assessment', p. 185) discussed how teacher assessment procedures encouraged these individual measures to implement inclusive education. Evaluation criteria for example focussed on the ability of teachers to make individual accommodations for children with disabilities. The exam results of children who experienced difficulties in learning were not considered in the teacher assessment procedures. This indicated that teaching these children was perceived as 'additional' and 'not part of the normal routine' (Incident 7, p. 185).

The individual or narrow perspective on inclusive education in the case study schools appeared to be influenced by a range of factors. Firstly, the national policy framework for inclusive education focussed on children with disabilities and other specific target groups (see also 'Policy Expectations', p. 211). Secondly, the narrow view on inclusive education appeared to be based on an individual perspective towards disability. Incident 6 (p. 178) showed how teachers in both case study schools seemed to problematize individual behaviour, difficulties or impairments, rather than contextual barrier in accessing and participating in learning. The teacher in the Hill School for example interpreted an assignment concerning difficulties in inclusive education implementation as 'finding weaknesses in children with disabilities' ('Incident 6', p. 178). Consequently, inclusive education implementation focussed on addressing individual difficulties, rather than contextual barriers.

Lastly, programmes supported by NGOs and international agencies appeared to be inconsistent in their conceptualisation of inclusive education. CRS was the main supporter of inclusive education implementation in the case study schools. The data indicated that while the CRS project included elements of a broad vision on inclusive education, it also reinforced a narrow and disability-focused approach. The project for example introduced IEPs and reducing difficulty levels of curriculum and assessment for children with disabilities as main strategies. There was a strong focus on disability in the teacher training initiatives organised by CRS. The project trained teachers to become focal points for different kinds of impairments and trained teachers in how to teach children with specific kinds of disabilities (see 'Incident 6', p. 178). Thereby, the project implicitly reinforced the idea that children with disabilities learn in a fundamentally different way, which is contested in the international literature (see also 'Pedagogy' in the literature review, p. 58). This is understandable, since CRS initiated the inclusive education project twenty years ago, based on theory which was available and dominant at that time. However, since the teachers have not received any training or support on inclusive education after the project closure, the CRS model of inclusive education, which could be argued to be outdated today, remained the main reference for both case study schools. This raised some important questions on how NGO support for inclusive education is traditionally organised. The CRS project supported the case studies schools for three years, a relatively short period of time. It assumed that a series of training courses for a limited number of teachers and authorities would be sufficient to change policies, practices and cultures in the concerned target area. This was problematic in a number of ways. The NGO model assumed that inclusive education theory is static, and that therefore, after a set of initial training courses no further support was necessary. It is however increasingly recognized that teacher development initiatives are likely to be more effective when based on continuous school-based and collaborative reflection to develop values and practice which make sense within the school context (for example: (Howes et al., 2009b, Forlin, 2010a, Grimes et al., 2015)). I argue furthermore that while NGOs and other international agencies can play an important role in supporting inclusive teachers, this needs to happen in a much more coordinated and systematic manner in which the national government and local stakeholders have a leading role. As NGOs projects tend to be limited in time, local stakeholders are in a better position to ensure continuous support for inclusive teachers.

Even when all of this is considered, teacher development remained complex. This was evident for example in the way in which the VNEN programme was implemented in the River School. In the VNEN programme, World Bank coordinated closely with the Ministry of Education and Training to increase quality of education by introducing child-centred pedagogy. A key implementation strategy was the establishment of regular teacher meetings to offer peer support in implementing education reforms. The data from this study however indicated that the VNEN programme was not able to fully address the underlying values and beliefs at the school concerning the role of teachers and the purpose of education, which contributed to contradicting value systems and practices (see 'Incident 5', p. 171). The programme also seemed to be unable to fully address other contextual factors, such as contradicting policy expectations and different expectations and experiences with collaborative peer reflection. Incident 3 (p. 155) discussed how Ben and Sarah argued that initial teacher training did not prepare nor encourage critical reflection among colleagues. In addition, the nearly constant monitoring by colleagues as discussed in Incident 7 (p. 185), might impact how the teachers perceive peer support introduced by VNEN. The challenges concerning teacher collaboration seemed to support the argument that NGOs and international agencies which aim to initiate education reforms should consider allocating more time to thoroughly study contextual factors which potentially limit the outcomes of such programmes and can lead to additional stress and complications for teachers who have to deal with a range of different expectations, values and practices.

Cultural Expectations

The values and cultural belief systems had a significant influence on how teachers in the case study schools conceptualised inclusive education. The data indicated influences from Confucian and communist value framework. A Confucian influence could be seen in how teachers in the case study schools understood the purpose of education as transmitting as much knowledge to students as possible to help them in achieving their dreams and hopes. The focus of the observed lessons appeared to be strongly on instruction from the teacher. The classroom observations however also indicated changes in these more traditional beliefs and practices. The teachers for example frequently used group work or learning games and the students were encouraged to be more active agents in their learning. Underneath, there was however a continuing believe of

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teachers as holders of knowledge and expectations towards students to follow directions from the teacher and to 'behave well' (see 'Incident 5', p. 171). These expectations towards the role of teachers and purpose of education were supported within the school community. Vy for example said, 'Parents find knowledge necessary' (See 'Incident 5', p. 171). There has been discussion in the literature whether these Confucian values are compatible with current education reforms (see also 'Traditional Values' in the literature review, p. 53). Similar to others (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Thanh, 2014, Tan and Chua, 2015), this study showed that teachers in the case study schools were able to develop 'hybrid' practices which allowed them to apply new teaching techniques, whilst at the same time maintaining respect towards teachers, follow textbooks and comply with government and community expectations towards education. Whether this hybrid version was sufficient in implementing inclusive education is discussed under the next research question (see 'Contextualisation of Education Reforms', p. 222).

Another cultural influence was that of the communist ideology. Throughout the conversations, the teachers in the case study schools expressed the importance of 'finishing their tasks' and 'fulfilling their responsibility of providing knowledge' (see 'Incident 7, p. 185). This resembled a communist ideology of individual contributions towards the greater good of the nation. This is included in the Education law with notions as 'to nurture one's patriotism, national spirit, loyalty to the ideology of national independence and socialism' and 'satisfying the demands of the construction and defence of the Fatherland' as education goals (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019). The data indicated that the communist cultural influence was translated in the case study schools into a strong emphasis on following government guidelines and procedures. Teachers were regularly monitored for their compliance with the education legal framework and party guidelines, both inside and outside the school. The conversations indicated that in doing so, complex educational phenomenon where sometimes reduced into manageable procedures to follow. The question of how to address barriers in accessing education for example was approached as following the mandatory procedures to establish Universal Primary Education Committees and visiting the families as obligated to 'mobilise' parents in sending their children to school (see 'Incident 2', p. 147). It is possible that in the context of the case study schools this was enough to reduce barriers in accessing education. On the other hand, it could be questioned if the culture of policy adherence left enough space for teachers to engage in deep reflections and

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discussions on broader education themes and how these could be addressed meaningfully within their context.

Comparing Models

At the start of the study, I expected that in responding to the first research questions, I would not only be able to provide an insight in how teachers in the case study schools gave meaning to concepts as 'inclusion' and 'education', but also to place these local perspectives next to how inclusive education was defined internationally and addressed in national legalisation and practice to identify potential tensions. Along the way, however, I realised there was little sense in doing so. The literature review showed that the term 'inclusive education' was from the start a contested concept, with a range a of different understandings and perspectives (see 'Defining inclusive education', p. 24). The data showed an equally complicated conceptualisation of inclusive education both at national policy level and within the case study schools. There was not one clearly defined understanding of what inclusive education meant or what this should look like in practice. There was therefore little meaning in focussing on how far the inclusive education model at the case study schools complied with international models. Instead, this discussion chapter focusses on the complex realities in which the teachers in the case study schools made sense of education reforms and the myriad of expectations towards teachers which shaped how these reforms were received and implemented.

Research Question Two - What contextual factors influence inclusive education implementation at school level in Vietnam?

This research question aimed to identify and explore critical factors in the socio-economic, cultural, historical or political context of the case study schools which impacted how inclusive education was implemented.

The data indicated there was a framework of both official and informal guidelines on how teachers ought to behave inside and outside the school. Incident 3 (p. 155) and Incident 7 (p. 185) for example discussed how criteria for teacher assessment did not only focus pedagogical skills and knowledge, but also included criteria referring to the personal life style of the teachers and how they followed guidelines from the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). These criteria were not restricted to how individual teachers behaved inside the school, but also to how teachers and their family members behaved in public, outside of the school context. Kim for example shared how it was important that she and her family were considered as a 'moral family', therefore, her whole family had to 'behave well' (see 'Incident 3', p. 155). The Resolution on Ideological and Moral Degradation (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016), although only applicable to Party members, provides an example of how far the CPV pushes an ideal image of how people are expected to behave and relate to others. It includes a long and detailed list of types of behaviour which are not acceptable, for example 'doubting and lacking confidence in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought', 'failing to be exemplary in work', 'only looking after one's own interests without showing concern for collective interests' or 'breaching the fine customs, practices, cultural traditions of the nation, or family and social ethical standards' (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016).

Similar guidelines exist for students. Selection criteria for the Small Star Pupils, the political mass organization for children from 6 to 9 years old, reflected an ideal image of students. The criteria included 'Having a good family background; Good school grades; Good behaviour and morality (self-discipline, no talking in lessons, no fighting in school, respect and obedience towards teachers)' (Valentin, 2007, p. 306) (see 'Community participation' in the literature review, p. 72). Vy expressed in an interview she expected similar behaviour in her lessons, which included concentrating, being quiet and obedient (see 'Incident 5', p. 171). Incident 7 (p. 185) discussed how teachers were almost constantly monitored for compliance towards the official and informal guidelines for being a good teacher. They were regularly observed and evaluated by colleagues and school leaders. The teachers had to complete exercise books provided by DoET and partake in written exams which tested their knowledge, pedagogical skills and ethical and political values. The literature review indicated furthermore a strong presence of the CPV at school level (see

'Socialist values' in the literature review, p. 55). Each school has for example a 'Communist Party Committee', which has the final say in all school matters (Truong and Hallinger, 2015). It is therefore likely that there is continuous monitoring on implementation of official guidelines and policies.

Striving towards the ideal was a common theme in many conversations. Based on various assessment procedures and contests teachers, students and schools were ranked and compared with others (see 'Incident 7', p. 185). The importance of this ranking and achievement was expressed in several conversations. Na for example said 'Oh, we love achievement so much in Vietnam' ('Incident 7', p. 185). Teachers often shared their achievements in conversations. Lynn for example said 'We are one of the most effective schools in terms of inclusive education in this district' in a conversation about out of school children ('Incident 2', p. 147). In introducing her school, Vy said 'The River School has the best child-friendly library' and Min shared the River School won awards several years in a row for being a 'clean, beautiful and green school' (See 'Chapter Six', p. 123).

Both education and non-education related guidelines provided an image of 'the ideal', how to present oneself at school and in public, how to behave as a teacher or as a student and how a school should look. There appeared to be limited discussion about this image of the ideal teacher, student and school. It was top-down decided based on Party guidelines and government policies. I believe what I called 'striving for the ideal' had an impact on how inclusive education was understood and implemented at the case study schools. In both case study schools there as an indication of a culture of policy adherence. Incident 3 (p. 155) discussed how teachers often replied to questions by referring to policy documents and procedures. For example, when talking about teacher collaboration, the teachers mentioned the required peer observations or conversations about teaching strategies were limited to what was suggested in the policy guidelines and textbooks. Overall, there appeared to be a focus on 'ticking the boxes'. The teachers emphasized how they complied with the policy framework. In doing so, complex education concepts and issues were sometimes reduced to straightforward and manageable policy guidelines to follow. Incident 2 (p. 147) for example discussed how the complex issue of access to education was reduced to establishing Committees for Universal Primary Education and visiting families at risk three time per year as required by the guidelines. There was little evidence

of deep and collaborative discussions on why families struggled to send their children to school and how this could be addressed meaningfully. Incident 7 (p. 185) explored how the policy framework encouraged this tendency for 'ticking the boxes' rather than engaging in more fundamental and 'risky' innovations. The teacher assessment procedures broke complex education reforms down to straightforward and simple techniques. Inclusive education was for example in teacher observation procedures addressed as 'making individual adjustments in the activities for children with disabilities'. When trying more fundamental reforms, teachers would risk not to complete the mandatory textbooks and have lower scores on the high-stakes assessment procedures. 'Striving towards the ideal' therefore challenged notions based on Western theory as 'creating a pedagogy for all'. This was not only a technical issue in the case study schools. For teachers in the case study schools to be able to develop and implement a 'pedagogy for all', would require strong policy support, removing all contradicting elements in the very complex policy framework, and ensuring cultural support from teachers themselves, students, local school leaders and community.

I argue under Research Question Three (see 'Expectations towards the research and researcher', p. 225) that 'striving towards the ideal' might have impacted the research activities. Teachers might have not only presented 'what is', but also 'what ought to be' in the conversations. This helped to understand some of the challenges I encountered in conducting the field work.

Teacher Agency in Developing Classroom Practices

It has been argued that in Vietnam the concepts of 'curriculum' and 'textbooks' are used interchangeably and that teachers have to follow the textbooks provided by MoET strictly (for example (Saito et al., 2008, Duggan, 2001)). Both the policy review and data collected for this study did not provide clear evidence whether or not teachers are required to literally follow the textbooks. Incident 4 (p. 162) explored how teachers have limited agency and flexibility to design their own classroom practices. The teachers believed they had to follow the textbooks strictly. They experienced significant pressure to deliver the curriculum content before the end of the school year. Following the textbooks strictly was considered as the safest way to ensure all content was delivered and students were prepared for their year-end exams. Incident 7 (p. 185)

showed how teachers were assessed on their ability to deliver lessons from the textbooks in the designated time period.

I argued throughout the critical incidents that the limited agency of teachers to design their own classroom practices can be problematic for inclusive education implementation. The teachers in the case study schools did recognize the need to offer a variety of teaching and learning approaches. They had however limited agency to design different activities. Ha for example expressed how she had no time and space to provide more support and adjust activities for a student who experienced difficulties in learning (see 'Incident 4', p. 162). Incident 8 (p. 191) explored how the textbook-based teaching approach did not require teacher to critically reflect about teaching and learning. This might limit opportunities to adjust lessons to the actual context of the classroom and increase quality of education for all. The restrictive teaching framework thus appeared to hinder both changes in the general pedagogy and implementing individual measures.

MoET is currently designing a new curriculum for primary education. It could be an opportunity to detach the textbooks from the curriculum and allow for more openness and flexibility. It has been argued in international literature that accessible and flexible curricula are essential in implementing inclusive education (UNESCO IBE, 2016, Hitchcock et al., 2002). It is more effective to reform the curriculum to ensure it is accessible to all, than to differentiate teaching, content and materials to make sure children with disabilities can access the general curriculum (Hitchcock et al., 2002). Just as the notion 'pedagogy for all', the notion of 'curriculum for all' was challenging in the context of the case study schools. Reforming the curriculum and ensuring more flexibility and agency for teachers is more than a technical matter in the case study schools. It also for example requires addressing the cultural role of teachers as holders and delivers of knowledge, reviewing policy frameworks for contradicting expectations towards teachers and supporting both teachers and local school education leaders in approaching the concept 'curriculum' in a different way. When Saito et al. (2008) concluded in their study that Vietnamese teachers, despite being trained in child-centred pedagogy, continued to teach textbook-based and teacher-centred, they might not have fully appreciated the complexities of reforming pedagogy and curricula in Vietnamese schools.

Contextualisation of Education Reforms

Incident 5 (p. 171) explored how Vy in the River School integrated both elements from a traditional, teacher-centred, pedagogy and elements from child-centred pedagogy. The lesson from Vy included, apart from teacher instruction and collective questions and replies, also short games and independent group work. She used a range of techniques to help her balance between whole group, small group and individual instruction and support. Incident 1 (p. 139) discussed how teachers in the River School also organized learning games and quizzes after school hours. This kind of mixed practices were less obvious to observe in the Hill School. The teachers in the Hill School used the traditional MoET textbooks, whereas the teachers in the River School used textbooks updated in the VNEN project, which included more activities. Even though the textbooks at the Hill School encouraged more teacher-centred practice and focused heavily on instruction, teachers in the Hill School also included for example short group activities and made teaching aids to visualize the learning content.

These examples of practices which mixed elements from different education models resembled what some authors called 'hybrid practices' (for example (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Thanh, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2012)). It allowed teachers in the case study schools to begin to implement education reforms, whilst at the same time comply with other, contradicting, requirements. Teachers were for example able to meet the traditional criteria for teacher assessment (see 'Incident 7', p. 185) by following the textbooks strictly and organised games and group work at the start of the lesson or outside the school hours. Following the textbooks as main structure of the lesson also ensured the students were well prepared for the summative assessment procedures based on these textbooks. This was important for parents and contributed to the ranking of the teachers and the school. Maintaining a focus on teacher-initiated instruction allowed the teachers to be respected as knowledge holders, a role which was culturally important for them and within their community.

The hybrid practices at the case study schools appeared to have grown organically, as a result of teachers mediating education reforms encouraged by policies and through engagement with international programmes based on the specific context of their school. There was no evidence of structured planning to develop a coherent model which combined elements of different

education models. Rather, teachers individually picked up elements from training courses and policy guidelines and found a way to make these elements work in relation to other requirements. Thereby, the focus was mostly on techniques, for example using symbols to help balancing between individual and group work or knowledge flowers to summarize learning (see 'Incident 5', p. 171). There was less emphasis on underlying assumptions and beliefs of the education reform. As discussed in incident 5, the teachers in the River School for example continued to believe their main role was to support students in acquiring a fixed set of knowledge. I have argued in the initial reflection of Incident 5 that this might point at a tension between the need to recognize local and contextualized interpretations of education reforms and the need for fundamental changes in pedagogical thinking and practices to create sustainable inclusive learning environments.

I believe therefore that instead of letting hybrid practices develop ad hoc, it is necessary to invest time and effort in supporting schools to discuss locally what the intended education reforms actually mean and how it can work within the school community. In my initial analysis I believed that deep and collaborative discussions within the school community about pedagogical reforms had a potential to develop 'hybrid practice' or adjusted pedagogical frameworks which would make sense within the context of the case study schools. I was thereby inspired by literature around the role of collaborative reflection in developing inclusive learning environments and increasing quality of education for all (For example: Ainscow (2002), and {Booth, 2016 #429@@author-year}). While I do believe there is value in collaborative reflection, this approach still imposed an external, Western, pedagogical framework on the case study schools. I became aware this was a neo-colonial conclusion from my part. The work of Nguyen et al. (2012) reminded me that hybrid practices should not simply adjust education models developed in the Global North to different contexts, but thoroughly study which existing practices can contribute towards the implementation of education reforms. This has important implications for powerful international institutions such as UNICEF or UNESCO and international NGOs working in the field inclusive education and education reforms. Very often such organisations use a 'blueprint' approach and implement education programmes based on the same pedagogical frameworks, which are often pre-dominantly based on Western theory, all over the world. I believe that international institutes and NGOs need to think further and make efforts to develop pedagogical frameworks in partnership with local policy makers, educational leaders and field workers. This requires more time and effort to understand the specific contextual factors which shape educational thinking

and practices in schools, to understand what actually happens in school and why, and to notice small differences and changes in practice, which make sense for local practitioners but are not always easy to notice from an outsider perspective.

Pragmatic Barriers

The data indicated a number of pragmatic barriers in the implementation of inclusive education at the case study schools. These barriers were mostly linked to contradicting expectations towards teachers. The policy framework for example encouraged mainstream teachers to include children with disabilities and promoted individual measures such as individual education planning or reducing curriculum content to enable this. The teachers in the case study schools however reported that the rigid and overloaded curriculum combined with the limited time allocated per lesson did not allow to make such individual adaptations (see 'Incident 4', p. 162). Teachers assessment procedures which continued to favour traditional teaching (such as finishing lessons on time or covering the full content of the textbooks) did not support more fundamental and general changes in the pedagogy to ensure all children were participating and learning (see 'Incident 7', p. 185). Teachers who did experiment with more participative and student-orientated approaches risked scoring lower on high-stakes teachers performance tests. In addition, some measures to support inclusive education seemed to have created barriers to learning and participation. Incident 7 (p. 185) for example explored how teachers can register children who are likely to score low at or fail the exams. This measure was implemented to ensure teachers would accept children who experienced difficulties in learning, while being partly assessed based on student performance rates. Given the high stakes of the teacher assessment and the limited time to deliver the content-based curriculum, it is likely teachers focus efforts on those children who are expected to pass the exams, instead of on children who need more support in learning.

These pragmatic barriers and contradicting expectations towards teachers are likely to slow down or limit education reforms in the case study schools. Institutional barriers and conflicting expectations create significant barriers, especially for teachers in the Global South who are trying to make inclusive education and other education reforms work while dealing with a range of different expectations (Forlin, 2013). This confirms again how inclusive education implementation

requires a holistic and 'whole-systems' approach with simultaneous interventions at multiple levels with a range of stakeholders (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Such complex and holistic approaches to education reforms require time and investment in local research on how to implement these reforms in a meaningful and contextualized manner. The pressure to meet international education targets and to comply with international agreements might not allow for this to take place.

Research Question Three - In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?

The third question intended to look at the process of collecting and analysing data for research question one and two. As I expected the research context to be difficult, I aimed to map the key challenges and learning points of undertaking research as a foreign researcher in Vietnam. Therefore, the data for this study did not only include what was said in interview, observed in the schools and written in the field notes about school practices, it also included how this data was collected. The data for research question three is embedded in the critical incidents in Chapter Seven ('Critical incidents', p. 138) and in the accounts of finding access to and leaving the field, Chapter Five ('Searching for red stamps – Access to the field', p. 115) and Chapter Eight ('Losing the red stamp – Leaving the field', p. 199).

Expectations Towards the Research and Researcher

Expectations within the Case Study Schools

At the start of the study I expected that teachers in the case study schools might confuse my position as researcher with that of a consultant. I visited the Hill School in March 2016, before I knew the school would be selected as case study school for this study. During that visit, I was guiding a Philippine delegation around Vietnamese inclusive schools as a consultant. The perception of me as a consultant might have furthermore been reinforced, as I negotiated access

to the field through the Hanoi University of Education (see also 'Positionality' in the methodology chapter, p. 85 and 'Chapter Five' on finding access to the field, p. 115). I therefore intended to be very open and explicit about the purpose of my visits to the schools through the informed consent procedure and by regularly checking the teachers' understanding about the aim of the field activities. When asked directly, the teachers indicated they knew I was at their school as a researcher. Hong for example said, 'You want to research everything about children with disabilities' (See 'Critical incident 1', p. 139).

Observations, conversations and reflections throughout the field visits in both case study schools indicated however that my position remained unclear. Firstly, the teachers in both case study schools tended to present an overly positive picture of what happened in their school. The teachers in both schools for example claimed that 100% of the children in their commune were going to school, although there was indication that in the River School at least one child with disabilities was not going to school. When discussing the reasons why some parents would experience difficulties in sending their children to school, Hong felt the need to emphasize that this 'never, never happens in the Hill School' (see 'Incident 2', p. 147). Incident 3 (p. 155) discussed how teachers in both case study schools tended to reply questions by quoting from or referring to policy documents. Incident 2 (p. 147) discussed how the teachers at the River School might have overemphasized the presence of children with disabilities at their school, as they believed this was what I wanted to hear. I interpreted that how the teachers presented their school in a positive way, showed their compliance with the policy framework and tried to tell me what I wanted to hear as an indication that they perceived me as an evaluator rather than as a researcher. At some occasions I was asked for direct advice. The teachers in the Hill School for example asked me how to deal with, what they understood as, challenging behaviour in the classroom (see 'Chapter Eight', p. 199). This might show I was sometimes seen as a consultant.

Na and I had a different perspective on how I was perceived in the field. Na believed my position as researcher was clear in the case study schools. She interpreted the kind of replies teachers gave in research activities as an expression of Confucian culture. According to her, it is considered as culturally appropriate in Vietnam to show visitors (both Na and myself) what was going well and to hide issues that would reflect negatively on the host (the schools) (see 'Incident 1', p. 139). I on the other hand placed the way teachers reacted to field activities in the framework of the

political context of the schools. Incident 7 (p. 185) discussed how teachers in the case study schools were nearly constantly monitored inside and outside school for their compliance with the policy framework. The teachers had earlier experiences with classroom observations for evaluation purposes and high-stakes teacher assessment procedures. Combined with the apparent culture of policy adherence and 'striving towards the ideal', I believed this influenced how teachers behaved in the research activities. Although it might have been clear for the teachers I was at the school as a researcher, it is possible they had a different perspective on what research was and what would happen with the collected data. The next key theme 'Methodological challenges' (p. 232) discusses further how some of the research activities could have been perceived as a form of control or monitoring.

The different perspectives of Na and myself of what influenced the level of depth in the conversations showed for me the value of my critical friend relationship with Na. Kugelmass (2004) noted the concept of 'deep culture' within a school refers to deeply held core values and forms the foundations for belief systems and actions at the school (see also 'School culture' in the literature review, p. 51). This deep culture at the case study schools might be strongly influenced by socio-political factors, which were difficult to fully comprehend from my Western perspective (Nguyen et al., 2009). Both Na and I were bounded by our own background in how we interpreted field events. Our collaborative reflections therefore helped to broaden my understanding.

The reflections of both Na and myself showed some of the complexities of undertaking research activities in the case study schools. A range of factors, both cultural and political, challenged the methodology. A deeper understanding of the research context helped to comprehend the difficulties I experienced in moving beyond, what I perceived as, more superficial conversations. In presenting the school in a positive way and emphasizing compliancy with the policy framework, the teachers probably did not only present the actual situation, but also the 'ideal', how they thought the school should look like, teachers and students should behave, and inclusive education should be implemented. Based on my Western and perhaps linear conceptualisation of 'the truth', I initially struggled with this more fluid presentation of what actually happened in the case study schools. Literature on social constructionism (for example (Burr, 2003, Hammersley, 2013)) helped to value these different versions of the truth. Not only what happened in the case study schools in terms of inclusive education, but also how the teachers perceived this and chose the

communicate this with me provided valuable insights in contextual factors which mediated policy implementation at school level.

Expectations from Na

Incident 1 ('Mass English lesson', p. 139) discussed how also Na had different expectations towards my position and this study. Her comment on how this study would 'help inclusive education for Vietnam' might have placed me in a consultancy role. Based on her own research experiences at the Hanoi University of Education (HNUE) she had a different view on research. An email conversation near the end of the study indicated for example how Na and I had different ideas about how to analyse data and on the outcome of the study. Na preferred to look at the data based on a set of pre-defined criteria on how she believed inclusive schools should be implemented, while I preferred and open approach in which analysis emerged from the data. Na expected the analysis would lead to a set of concluding findings and practical recommendations on how to improve inclusive education implementation in Vietnam. This was understandable, as her position at the HNUE required her to advice MoET on education reforms. Based on the explorative and indicative nature of the research design, I was not able to generate conclusive findings and recommendations. I believed that since inclusive education implementation requires local contextualisation, such general recommendations on 'how to do inclusive education in Vietnam' would not be very useful or meaningful. Instead I aimed to develop a deeper understanding of contextual factors which impacted local conceptualisation of inclusive education at the case study schools. This could possibly help to understand the complexities and challenges in developing inclusive education policies and programmes, but it would not lead to recommendations which would work in every school in Vietnam.

Na and I had frequent conversations about the research design and methodology. Before the start of the data collection phase I had several meetings with Na to talk about the study and prepare for the field visits. Na was part of the Research Support Group (see 'Partnerships and relationships', p. 95), in which we discussed different ways of collecting and analysing qualitative data. Before each field trip, Na and I had meetings to prepare the activities and ensure we had a shared understanding of the purpose of the of the visit and how to facilitate the research

activities. Na's continuous critical questions about the research design challenged my own assumptions about doing research and encouraged me to be much more explicit about the design and expectations. This helped to reflect on the challenges we encountered in the field and understand which activities did not work well and why (see further, 'Methodological challenges', p. 232). Na expressed in the interviews after the data collection phase how these conversations also helped her to learn about qualitative research, which she could apply in her own PhD study. After years of close collaboration and mutually beneficial conversations, our assumptions and expectations towards research did not entirely align. At some level we might not have fully comprehended each other's cultural, educational, social or political backgrounds which shaped us into the researchers we became.

Personal Expectations

In reflecting about the field events, I noticed I was sometimes conflicted myself about my role in the case study schools. At times I felt myself judging education practices at the case study schools, as they were different from what I expected to see in an inclusive school (see 'Incident 1', p. 139). At other moments I felt somehow disappointed or frustrated when research activities did not work out the way I anticipated (see 'Incident 6', p. 178 and 'Incident 8', p. 191). I often worked as an inclusive education consultant for various projects within and outside of Vietnam. It required time and personal growth as a researcher to step out of my usual role as consultant. This involved moving from evaluating to understanding, from describing to exploring, from searching clarity and solutions to problematising and exploring challenges and tensions. My position on this researcher – consultant continuum shifted throughout the data collection phase and was not always well defined for myself and for others involved in this study. With time and reflection with critical friends I learned to avoid quick judgments and interpretations of field events. I was for example initially disappointed when the Photovoice activity to take pictures of what challenged inclusive education implementation at the school did not work out as I had planned it. Instead, the teachers took pictures of 'weaknesses of children with disabilities' (see 'Incident 6', p. 178). I decided the activity did not work and I had to try something else. I failed to see the richness and learning in that moment. Later, when I tried to understand rather than assess, I noticed how important that moment was to gain insights in how the teachers perceived disability and inclusion. Not only did

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I need time to grow as a researcher and appreciate the complexities of the research context, I needed to step out from time to time to allow space to reflect, discuss and develop new perspectives. Due to the school calendar and other commitments and consultancy work, there were sometimes longer gaps between field visits. I however continued to work in the field of inclusive education with different assignments in different contexts and I engaged with the data for this study through ongoing analysis and discussion with critical friends. This allowed me to process what happened in the field.

As I was anxious to move towards a research role instead of a consultant role, I noticed I tended to avoid answering direct questions from the teachers. When they asked for example for advice on how to support the learning of a specific child, I would throw that question back to the group rather than replying it. I realized later this might have created a certain distance between me and the teachers. I might have appeared disconnected or uninvolved. It took until the last conversation until personal emotions entered the field work. The teachers shared how difficult it was to deal with 'challenging behaviour' in their classroom, and this touched me as a professional and as a person (see 'Chapter eight', p. 199). I experienced that through acting upon these emotions, the conversation became less formal. I allowed myself to express my concerns and share some practical ideas. This motivated the teachers to talk more openly about similar difficulties they experienced in their classrooms. In hindsight, this was perhaps the most deep and vulnerable conversation I had in the field. Kim was very open about the difficulties she experienced. She cried while telling her story. Considering Confucian cultural influences and how the teachers so far focussed on a positive representation of their school and their work, this must have been difficult for Kim. It was also vulnerable for me. I had to show the person behind my researcher position. I shared how the story of Kim touched me and how I experienced similar situations. I learned in that moment that being vulnerable and expressing emotions are important aspects of relationship building, which helped to collect deeper level data. I however also learned that it required a long process to reach a point in the relationships where we could both be openly vulnerable. It was therefore not only a matter of personal growth. Unfortunately, as my research permit was no longer valid, I could not explore this further. I believe longitudinal field work, which allows for such slow relationship building and gradual understanding of the complex research context, is crucial.

In the critical incidents I combined the roles of 'consultant' and 'evaluator' together. However, given the experience of teachers with high-stakes monitoring and control, it is necessary to refine these roles further in order to understand how the teachers reacted to research activities. In the table below, I summarized the different roles and how this might have influenced the field activities. It needs to be acknowledged that these roles overlapped and were more complex in reality. This table was developed based on the roles and reactions I experienced in this study, it might therefore not be applicable as such in other research contexts.

	Researcher	*Consultant*	*Evaluator*
Goal	Understand practice	Analyse and/or improve practice	Assess practice
Focus	Explore and problematize challenges and tensions	Search for clarity and concrete solutions	Evaluate and report to authorities or decide on scoring and ranking
Expected reaction in the field	Share personal opinions, experiences and reflections	Share experiences, share difficulties, ask for advice	Present optimal image of practice and show compliancy with policy framework

As a researcher, my aim was 'to understand', therefore I tried to focus on 'exploring and problematizing challenges and tensions'. I expected that participants would 'share personal opinions, experiences and reflections'. In practice however, different involved stakeholders, including myself, placed me in a consultant or evaluator role. Especially at the start of the field work, I sometimes searched for 'clarity and solutions'. I made quick judgments and searched for clear data, which I could easily interpret. In doing, so I moved more towards a consultant position. Both the directors of the case study schools and Na expected that I would 'improve practice' and the participants sometimes 'asked for advice'. These were for me indications they perceived me as a consultant. Often, I was placed in an evaluator position. There was indication that the

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teachers perceived some of the activities as 'assessment', and schools were obliged to 'report' about the research activities with the local authorities. I believed therefore, the participants presented 'an overly positive image of their school and showed compliance with the policy framework'.

As I started to understand more about the political context of the case study schools, I became aware that some of the research activities might have been perceived as evaluation activities or tests (see for example 'Incident 8', p. 191). In the next key theme 'Methodological challenges' I discuss further how some research activities became barriers in data collection and which strategies I adopted to copes with this.

The positions of 'researcher', 'consultant' and 'evaluator' often blended in practice. I gradually accepted that, although it remained important to be reflexive of my positionality, I remained as a researcher, similar to the research participants, a person with a complex identity. Trying to almost mechanically neutralizing my potentially other roles and how research participants would perceive me, was not supportive for the research process. I learned to reflect and be open about my position and how this affected data collection and interpretation.

Methodological Challenges

Contextualisation of Research Activities

I frequently used short, participative, activities at the start of focus group discussions, to introduce the topic of the conversation and encourage the participants to reflect and share about their experiences. These activities included visualizing ideas through mind maps, schedules and drawings, association games or Photovoice assignments (see 'Interview' in the methodology chapter, p. 99). I experienced previously, as a consultant in Vietnamese schools, that direct questioning did not work very well in focus group discussions with teachers. Often the 'leaders', managers or senior teachers, would reply. Other participants would confirm this reply or repeat the same reply in a slightly different way. In developing the introduction activities, I was also inspired by literature on Confucian culture influences in education. Nguyen et al. (2006) for

example argued that group members in CHC tented to avoid direct confrontation to prevent losing face by sharing a different opinion or to maintain group harmony. The group activities to open focus group discussions for this study aimed to create a safe space for teachers to discuss and reflect about the main topic of the conversation, without losing face or disrupting harmony when talking with me. I believed this approach would increase trust and encourage more dynamic conversations.

The data presented in the critical incidents indicated these activities did not always work well. Incident 6 (p. 178) for example showed that the teachers sometimes misunderstood the assignment. This questioned whether I communicated the assignments and expectations clear enough. Incident 3 (p. 155) showed that the teachers were not always interested to complete assignments, such as 'draw a picture of an ideal teacher'. It took time and deeper understanding of the research context to understand that the activities could instead of providing a safe space for reflection, have created a space for peer control and monitoring. It is possible that teachers used these, often untranslated, discussion moments to formulate the 'correct reply'. These were responses which were either in line with Party and government guidelines or presented a positive image of the school. Incident 8 (p. 191) for example discussed how an activity on mapping teaching strategies could have been perceived as an evaluation tool. These challenges emphasized how important it was to contextualize research activities. Even though I had previous experience in doing focus group discussions in Vietnamese schools, it still required deep reflection with critical friends and long-term engagement in the field to fully appreciate the complexities of the research context and the different factors which impacted how teachers reacted to research activities.

I tried a range of strategies in attempting to reduce the sense of control and monitoring in the research activities. I asked the vice director of the Hill School not to join the teacher focus group discussions anymore (see 'Incident 4', p. 162). In the focus group discussions, I tried to work without opening activities to reduce peer control. As with previous consultancy experiences in Vietnam, this did not work very well.   When asking a direct question either no one would reply, or the most senior teacher would give a very short reply. I therefore used activities again, but tried to design activities which could be done, at least partially, individually. In both schools I suggested to organise individual interviews in addition to the focus group discussions. I believed this could

decrease peer pressure to formulate politically and socially acceptable replies to questions. In the Hill School I met with Ha individually. This created some break-through moments in which Ha's replies helped me to understand deeper about the restrictive framework she was working under and how my own assumptions about education concepts restricted how far I was able to understand with happened in the school (see 'Incident 4', p. 162). I did not manage to undertake individual interviews in the River School. In the second year of the data collection, two teachers with whom I connected best, Lynn and Min, retired. Especially Lynn was very open, responsive and critical in the focus group discussions. I invited her many times for individual interviews, suggested I would visit her at home or in a coffeeshop of her choice. She agreed to meet with me, but never accepted any of my invitations. After a few months I stopped trying, as I assumed it might be difficult for Lynn to participate in the research outside the school context. My research permission only applied to the two case study schools. Instead, I tried to meet with Vy individually. She however always insisted that one of her colleagues joined her, as she felt comfortable with colleagues.

Trusting Relationships

In order to obtain quality data, it was important to establish trusting relationships. Without such relationships, the research participants often relied on 'policy talk' or positive representation of the school rather, than sharing personal thoughts, opinions and experiences (see for example 'Incident 3', p. 155). Establishing trusting relationships and achieving open and deep conversations in the field remained key challenges throughout the study. It made me re-think the nature of the field relationship. Initially I thought field relationships would go in a straight line towards increasing levels of trust. With the benefit of hindsight, these expectations might have been too simplistic. I however needed to be in the field to comprehend the complexity of the field relationships and the many factors impacting these relationships, including language barriers, different assumptions, political context of monitoring and Confucian culture influences. The incidents (for example 'Incident 8', p. 191) showed a more cyclic nature of these relationships. There was certainly progress and at moments some teachers were more open and critical. At other times however, there would be unexpected 'set-backs', in which teachers appeared to be more closed and careful with what they shared. I am aware that I might not fully comprehend

what the reasons behind these set-backs were. While there were 'moments' of trust which allowed for critical and open sharing, these moments did not fully develop into 'trusting relationships' (see also 'Chapter Eight', p. 199).

Trust could not be taken for granted and needed work until the end of the data collection phase. I used different strategies to encourage trust at field level. The data collection was undertaken over a long period of time, to allow time for relationship building. I took time at the start and end of each visit to engage in personal conversations, learn about the families of the teachers and share personal details about my own life. I followed local customs and brought culturally appropriate gifts for important celebrations such as teacher day, lunar new year and child day. The developments in the Hill School at the end of the data collection phase, with more open and vulnerable conversations about challenging behaviour in the classroom (see 'Chapter Eight', p. 199), indicated there was progress in the relationship building. A longer stay in the field could have allowed to explore this further. However, given the previous set-backs and cyclic nature of the relationships, I cannot be sure a longer stay would actually lead to trusting relationships which would encourage deeper conversations and understanding.

While it remained difficult to establish deep and trusting relationships at the case study schools, I was able to develop such connection with Na. It might have been easier to connect with Na, as the language barrier was less problematic, she had more international experiences and we spend much more time together in preparing the field visits, the long trips to and from the case study schools and when having conversations about the emerging findings. Our relationship was not easy and remained problematic in different ways. Although we reached a level which allowed for open and critical reflection, the data indicated that Na was not comfortable to share everything (see 'Incident 3', p. 155 and 'Chapter Eight', p. 199). The relationship with Na however allowed me to ask difficult questions for example about the Party and political influences on school practices. These questions would have been too sensitive to ask in the case study schools. The relationship with Na did not replace or 'even out' the challenging relationships in the field. It has however been crucial for me to gain deeper insight in the context of the case study schools. Therefore, as I understood the complexity of the research context better and tried different strategies to navigate these complexities, the research methodology became gradually more complex as well. The data was not only collected at school level, but also through reflections with

Na and other critical friends. The position of Na as critical friend was important, as she was involved in the full research process and she offered a perspective from a Vietnamese peer researcher. This more complex methodology allowed me to gradually explore different layers of interpretation.

Language

Working with an Interpreter

Working with Na as an interpreter was both a strength and a challenge in the study. The growing role of Na as critical friend and in helping to navigate some of the challenges in undertaking research in the case study schools is discussed in previous section. Na was however not a professional interpreter and her English was not fluent. She often struggled to find words, was not very fast and her sentence constructions were sometimes difficult to understand. She often summarized what one or more research participants shared and provided her own interpretation of what was said, rather than an exact translation. To facilitate the reading of this thesis, I decided to 'clean up' the quotes for the transcripts.

For example, in Incident 2 (p. 147), I quoted Min's perspective on inclusive education as following:

> 'Children do not only go to school for learning, but also to join and participate in different activities, and to play with friends, and this is the right of children with disabilities.' (Min, Teacher focus group discussion, River School, April 2017)

What Na actually said and was written in the transcript:

> 'Na: She said that, ehm, not only the children go to school, not for learning, but also for join and participate into different activities, and, ehm, play with friends, and this is the right of the children with disabilities'

The cleaning up of the transcripts was not an easy process. After living in Vietnam for a long time and working closely with Na, I probably got used to her 'Vietnamese English'. I noticed that I sometimes assumed too easily that I understood what Na translated. Therefore, we sometimes listened to the audio recordings together and discussed translations. We focused on sections in the conversations where I was surprised about a particular response or choice of words, where I

did not fully understand Na's translation or where I noticed an irregularity with my rudimentary level of Vietnamese. During the conversations I triangulated ways of asking questions about the same topic, summarized what the research participants shared and check my understanding. The teachers would then either agree, elaborate further on the issue or correct my understanding. While these strategies where in place, I am aware that particular details or nuances might inevitably got 'lost in translation'.

Na did not only translate, she also filtered and changed conversations based on her own understanding and cultural background. As my understanding of Vietnamese language was developing, I started to notice small differences in what I said and what was being translated. When I said for example 'Please introduce yourself', it was translated into 'Tell Marieke about your family and in which grade you are teaching'. According to Na, it was difficult to provide exact translations. Some words were not translatable in either English or Vietnamese. Na felt she had to provide a cultural translation as well, since the way in which conversations were held in English and in Vietnamese were very different.

> 'People go around and around when they speak in Vietnamese. They use a lot of words
> to say very simple things. I need to wait and analyse what they actually say. It does not
> make sense if I translate exactly what they say.' (Na, Car conversation, 7 December 2016)

The same applied for translating English into Vietnamese. Na had to be culturally sensitive. She sometimes chose to alter what I said, to make it culturally meaningful and appropriate.

> 'In Vietnamese for example, you don't ask 'how are you?'. You ask, 'How is your family?'.
> And then you ask a lot of other questions. So, you know how the person is feeling, without
> directly asking about his or her feelings or status.' (Na, Car conversation, 7 December
> 2016)

It is well recognized by other researchers (for example (Turner, 2010)), that working with interpreters is complex as they, just as researchers, bring their own subjectivity into the research (see also 'Relationship with the interpreter' in the methodology chapter, p. 96). Interpreters are not neutral, and this inevitable affects the collected data. It can be argued whether data can ever be collected 'unaffected'. Taylor et al. (2016) for example described a continuum with on the one end qualitative researchers who believe the reality can be objectively known by unbiased researchers and at the other end those who claim objective reality does not exist and all

knowledge is subjective. My own position is somewhere in the middle. While acknowledging that both the research methods and the translations of Na were not fully neutral and value-free, I did develop some strategies to cope with this. The most important measure was to encourage Na to be reflexive about her experiences while translating. After each visit we reflected on our experience and interpretations of what happened. These reflective conversations grew into a critical friend relationship. Working with Na was undoubtfully challenging. It is likely that since she was not a professional interpreter and her English was not fluent, I missed parts of the conversations. Her cultural reflections however provided an important second layer of data ('Trusting relationships', p. 234), and therefore working with Na was also a strength.

Understanding of Key Concepts

Some of the misunderstanding in the field was not only a technical matter of translation. It took me a long time to realize that even though the teachers and I used the same concepts, we understood them in a very differently. Incident 4 ('Flexibility', p. 162) for example discussed how Ha and I understood the concept 'flexibility in the classroom' in very different ways. For me, it meant that teachers had a certain degree of autonomy to design their classroom activities and arrangements to accommodate the actual learning needs of their students. For Ha it meant that she could change the order of the activities in the MoET textbooks and that she could make individual adjustments for some students with disabilities, using official MoET guidelines. This insight helped to understand why I perceived sometimes contradictions between what the teachers said and what I observed in the classrooms. In several conversations the teachers shared they had enough flexibility in the design of their lessons to include children with disabilities. In practice I could not see this based on my Western conceptualisation of 'flexibility'.

These misunderstandings became a common theme within the collected data. I cannot fully rule out that some of the misunderstanding had to do with language issues. Some concepts did not have a clear equivalent in Vietnamese. Some of the misunderstanding might also have been caused by unclear translations. There were however indications that different cultural backgrounds of the teachers, Na and myself might have affected how I interpreted conversations and observations. The key themes under Research Question One 'Blended Discourses' (p. 207)

and 'Factors Influencing local Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education' (p. 212) discussed how it was difficult for me to understand and observe how inclusive education was understood and implemented in the case study schools, as the teachers and I used a different framework when looking at inclusion. 'Contextualisation of Education Reforms' under Research Question Two (p. 222) discussed how the teachers in the case study schools developed 'hybrid practices' which incorporated elements from both traditional and innovative teaching approaches. It was not easy to recognize these hybrid practices as local versions of child-centred pedagogy, as for me 'child-centred pedagogy' had a different meaning. Incident 6 (p. 178) discussed how we might have interpreted values in a different way. 'Love' was for example regularly mentioned as key motivation for inclusive education. Hong for example said, 'a good teacher loves the students as her own children' (Incident 3, p. 155). This opinion was shared by different teachers in both case study schools. I initially interpreted these statements about love as a deep and unconditional caring towards the students. Others (for example (Burr, 2014)), argued that relationships in Confucian Heritage Cultures mirror family relationships. This could clarify the frequent reference of students as 'sons and daughters' in both case study schools. Burr (2014) added that these relationships are hierarchical. Teachers, at a hierarchical higher level, guide and love students. Students, at a lower hierarchical level, obey their teachers in return. The conceptualisation of 'love' remained rather vague in the Hill School. Hong and Van clarified that it meant for them that children with disabilities were not discriminated, and that teachers should 'tolerate' and 'have patience' towards children with disabilities (Incident 6, p. 178).

The 'cultural misunderstanding' was significant and had implications for both the research methodology and for government or international programmes aiming to implement education reforms. In terms of the research methodology, these 'cultural misunderstandings' meant that I had to be aware of my own assumptions and be more explicit in my questions. Incident 8 (p. 191), discussed how an activity to discuss frequently used teaching strategies did not work as expected. This was partly due to differences in understanding between me and the teachers about what the teaching strategies I provided as examples meant. The cultural misunderstandings also showed the importance of triangulation of data collection methods. I could not only rely on what was shared verbally to ensure good understanding. Only by adding classroom observations, reflections with critical friends and discussing the concepts in different ways during different conversations, I became aware of the different conceptualisations of key concepts.

The cultural misunderstandings also indicated it is equally important to be explicit in programme or policy design and implementation. Often, education programmes from international agencies or national governments do not define the key concepts of their programmes clearly. There is an assumption that there is a universal understanding of concepts as 'inclusion', 'child-centred pedagogy', 'group work' or 'teacher collaboration' across different contexts. This ignores how a complex interplay of contextual factors mediates how teachers understand these concepts in practice. Failing to clearly define education concepts and expectations towards schools and teachers is likely to slow down education reforms and to create confusion and stress for teachers who are trying to deal with a range of different and contradicting political, social and culture expectations. As argued earlier (see 'Contextualisation of Education Reforms', p. 222), it is important to create space and agency at local level to collaboratively discuss what these concepts mean within the school community.

Ethical Challenges

This section looks back at some of the anticipated ethical challenges (see 'Research Ethics' in the methodology chapter, p. 110) and reflects upon what actually happened in the field.

Gaining Informed Consent

Based on literature concerning similar studies in Vietnam (for example (Graham et al., 2014, Morrow, 2013)), I expected that some participants would be reluctant to sign informed consent forms. In both case study schools, the teachers and vice-directors shared that they did not feel the need to sign informed consent papers, since I already received legal permission. Van for example said: 'You have permission from the district government. So, you can carry out the research in a very legal way. So, don't worry about that' (see Chapter Six, p. 123). All research participants however signed the consent papers without further problems or questions. This did not mean that I had free and full access to the field. While all the required paperwork from Canterbury Christ Church University and from the local authorities and in Vietnam were obtained, teachers did show at times more subtle constraint to participate in the study. Sometimes teachers

for example avoided certain questions or replied in a more superficial way (see 'Incident 3, p. 155). Incident 1 (p. 139) discussed how the purpose of the field visits was not always clear. This emphasized the need to approach gaining informed consent as an ongoing effort, especially at the level of the teachers. This required me to regularly discuss and remind the purpose of the research and what would happen with the data and to re-confirm willingness to participate.

I expected furthermore that the way in which I gained access to the field, by collaborating with HNUE to obtain legal permission from district authorities for field work, might have left limited space at the school level to refuse participation. It was unavoidable that I requested official permission from the local authorities before contacting the case study schools. The above comment from Van might indicate the school managers and teachers indeed had no choice but to participate, to ensure compliance with decisions taken at a higher level of authority. This re-confirmed the need to approach gaining informed consent as an ongoing process and provide participants the opportunity to withdraw from the study. I recognized that while I frequently offered this option, it might still have been difficult for teachers to stop participation without consent from school managers and local authorities. Therefore, I felt it was important to respect the boundaries which both the teachers and Na set themselves. Incident 3 ('Policy talk', p. 155) for example discussed how Na was not comfortable to continue a critical reflection about the Party. When I noticed similar sensitivities, I did not push further to reply questions. This might have limited the data collection at some occasions, I however considered this as the ethical right way to handle.

Benefits for Participants

At several points in the process to gain access to the field I was asked for financial contributions. The Hanoi University of Education (HNUE), who negotiated access to the field, did not have a formal policy concerning payments or gifts for research participants. It is however customary for HNUE researchers to pay an initial fee for the schools in which they undertake research and to pay participants 50,000 VND (1,7 GBP) per written questionnaire and 100,000 VND per interview (3,5 GBP). Circular 58/2011 of the Ministry of Finance on Cost Norms in Statistical Research (MoF, 2011) stipulated cost norms for research conducted by government institutes. After long

negotiations with the case study schools, the researchers at the HNUE and my supervision panel, it was agreed by all stakeholders that I would contribute 1,000,000 VND (35 GBP) to the social fund of both case study schools, as a one-off, initial gift. Given the cultural importance of gifts (Waldmann, 2000), I also brought a small gift for the school (for example books or school supplies) and a small gift for the teachers participating in the interviews and focus group discussions (for example notebooks or local delicacies).

As discussed in Chapter Five (p. 115), I was also asked to pay a relatively large approval fee 4,000,000 VND (140 GBP) to the local authorities in order to obtain a research permit. This fee was in a legally grey zone. It was mentioned in policy documents (for example (MoF, 2011) and (MoF, 2012)). It was however not clear if these fees were applicable for this study. The authorities were not able to provide a written acknowledgement of receipt, which made me wonder how legal and official the requested fee was. After further discussions in the field and with my supervision panel, I decided to also pay for this fee. Based on the discussions, I assumed that if I did not pay the fee, I would not receive the research permit and similar fees would be requested in other provinces.

In addition to material benefits, the vice-directors of both schools expressed, at the start of the data collection phase, that they hoped teachers would learn about inclusive education by participation in this study. Although the methodology for this study was not based on action research and I was not visiting the schools as a consultant, I did expect that some learning could happen. I believed the focus group discussions with participative reflection activities could become spaces for collaborative reflection and increased awareness, which could potentially lead to better understanding about inclusive education. Ainscow et al. (2006) considered these 'principled interruptions', moments in which teachers 'stop and think' about the what is happening in the school and are crucial in developing inclusive schools. Based on the available data, there is no clear evidence whether this kind of learning actually took place in the case study schools. As expected, it was difficult to monitor what happened in between the visits and how the teachers communicated about the focus group discussions with their colleagues. The critical incidents did provide some insights in possible factors which could have limited learning and change processes based on participation in this study. The restrictive policy framework might for example not have provided enough space to reflect on how inclusive education could be

implemented differently than how it was prescribed in policy documents and introduced by international programmes (see for example 'Incident 3', p. 155). Contradicting expectations towards teachers might limit or slow down education reforms. Incident 7 (p. 185) for example discussed how teacher assessment procedure continue to favour traditional, teacher-centred practices. Lastly, as discussed in 'Methodological challenges' (p. 232), the continuing struggle to move beyond superficial conversations and develop trusting relationships might have limited learning processes based on participation in this study.

The data indicated however that Na changed her perspective on certain issues throughout the study. At the start of the data collection phase she for example trusted that the case study schools identified all children with disabilities and that they were all going to school. At the end of the data collection, she was however very critical about the low number or absence of children with disabilities at the case study schools (see 'Incident 2', p. 147). Similarly, immediately after the field visit, Na agreed with the teachers that 'laughing with silly replies' was common in Vietnamese classrooms and not a big issue. Later Na strongly linked this kind of behaviour with bullying (see 'Incident 6', p. 178). It is possible that Na changed her opinions due to our close collaboration and engagement in critical reflections. It might also show that with time and as our personal relationship grew, our conversations reached deeper levels and Na might have felt more comfortable to be openly critical.

Confidentiality

While I took measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants (see 'Confidentiality and anonymity' in the methodology chapter, p. 113), these concepts remained difficult in a one-party communist state. In a visit to the Hill school, outside the framework of this study, three participants for example introduced themselves as teachers, but were actually members of the Department of Foreign Affaires (DoFA), tasked to monitor the school visit of the foreign delegation (see 'Confidentiality and anonymity', p. 113). There was no evidence of such extreme examples of control during the field visits for this study. There was however always a sense of control and monitoring. In the beginning I was quite focused on this and noticed I was rather suspicious myself. In the Hill School there were for example two men in suits who were

always present at the school when we visited. They would come in and out of the meeting room with documents to sign and to ask the meeting participants questions. Their role at the school remained unclear for me. I asked Na if these men could be members of the local authorities who controlled the research activities. Na replied:

'They were not there, but they know what you did' (Na, car conversation, 30 November 2016)

Na explained that the vice-directors regularly had to report about the research activities with the local authorities. The constant sense of control and monitoring likely affected how much the participants shared with me. I believed that this was not fully within my control. It was an unavoidable part of the research context. I was mindful not to provoke teachers to be openly critical towards the authorities and the Party. I had to trust that research participants decided for themselves what they were able to share. I decided not to continue probing if research participants were clearly uncomfortable to talk about certain topics.

While I expected this kind of 'control from the outside', I did not fully realize there would be 'control from the inside' as well. 'Contextualisation of Research Activities' (p. 233) discussed how some of the activities in the focus group discussions aimed at initiating reflection and discussion, could have reinforced teachers to formulate 'the right response', in line with the directions of the school management, government and Party. I therefore included individual interviews and designed activities which included individual reflection.

Summary of Key Issues

This chapter discussed in detail the key themes which emerged from the critical incidents per research question. For research question one, 'How are concepts of 'education' and 'inclusion' understood at school level in Vietnam?', it was discussed how the understanding of inclusive education at the case study schools was influenced by earlier experiences, policy expectations, cultural values and involvement with international programmes. This resulted in blended discourses and a complex conceptualisation of inclusive education.

In addressing research question two, 'What contextual factors influence inclusive education implementation at school level in Vietnam?', this chapter discussed the political influence on school practices. An ideal image of teachers, students and schools appeared to influence how teachers behaved inside and outside of the school. It was discussed how limited space teachers had to develop their own practice, but how they nonetheless managed to create classroom practices which navigated conflicting social, cultural and political expectations.

In relation to research question three, 'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?', a range of challenges in undertaking this study and strategies to address these challenges were discussed. These included shifting positions between 'research', 'consultant' and 'evaluator', developing trusting relationships to allow for in-depth conversations, contextualisation of research activities and language and cultural misunderstandings with affected how I interpreted field events.

The next chapter will conclude this thesis with an overview of the key learning, contributions of this study, implications, limitations and concluding remarks on my personal research journey.

Chapter Ten – Conclusion

Introduction

This study aimed to explore how teachers in two primary schools in Vietnam conceptualised inclusive education. It intended to develop a nuanced understanding of the complex realities and contextual factors that shaped inclusive education implementation at the two case study schools. The study furthermore aimed to identify specific challenges when undertaking research in Vietnam as a foreign researcher and to map strategies which supported navigating these complexities.

In order to investigate the research questions, I undertook a qualitative, ethnographic case study research in two primary schools in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam. The Hill School and the River School, the two case study schools, were introduced in Chapter Six (see p. 123). The data was collected through a series of focus group discussions, interviews, classroom observations and reflections with critical friends. The methodology is discussed in Chapter Four (see p. 80). The data was presented through critical incidents in Chapter Seven (p. 138) and discussed per research question in Chapter Nine (p. 205). Chapter Five (p. 115) and Chapter Eight (p. 199) provided brief accounts of the complicated processes to gain access to and leave the field. These chapters were added to provide an insight in the research context and process. The chapters are also considered as part of the data presentation, as they are directly linked to the third research question on challenges in undertaking research in Vietnam as a foreign researcher.

This final chapter starts with a summary of the key learning which emerged from the data. The chapter continues with discussing the main contributions of this study to the field of cross-cultural qualitative research on inclusive education. The implications for inclusive education development and undertaking similar studies in Vietnam are discussed. In the next section I reflect on some of the limitations of this study. At the end of the chapter, recommendations for further research are made.

Summary of the Key Learning

Crucial in exploring all three research questions, was an understanding of 'dissonance', which resonated through the collected data. As discussed under research question three, there was also a certain dissonance in the way the teachers responded to research activities and in the applicability of the designed research methods.

In the first research question *'How are concepts of 'education' and 'inclusion' understood at school level in Vietnam?'*, this dissonance was reflected in how inclusive education was conceptualised based on 'blended discourses'. Globalisation processes introduced new ideas and practices in the case study schools. The data indicated that the teachers in the case study schools re-interpreted these new concepts based on the specific cultural, social and political contexts of their schools, their existing knowledge and earlier experiences. This resulted in a blend of different discourses, which did not seem to form a new or coherent model. There remained a certain dissonance in the way teachers conceptualised inclusive education, with elements of both a broad and rights-based model of inclusive education and from a narrow and disability-focused model of inclusive education.

The concept of inclusive education became overwhelmed with a range of contradicting expectations towards teachers from policy makers, international agencies, community members and teachers themselves. This made it difficult for them to understand and implement inclusive education at field level. The policy framework for inclusive education also remained vague and appeared to be influenced by different discourses. The government promoted inclusive education and an increase of quality education for all through the implementation of child-centred pedagogy. At the same time, teachers were still assessed based on criteria which encouraged more traditional, teacher-centred and textbook-based teaching approaches. The data also suggested that CRS, an NGO who introduced inclusive education at both case study schools, had not been consistent in their conceptualisation of inclusive education. CRS introduced inclusive education from a rights-based perspective. Their implementation strategies and teaching development initiatives however encouraged a disability focus and individual measures rather than more general and systematic reforms to make learning and participation accessible for all. Lastly, the complicated conceptualisation of inclusive education was influenced by cultural beliefs.

The education reforms required teachers to view knowledge as dynamic and constructed in collaboration with students, to encourage active and critical participation from students and to develop close relationships with students. While the teachers in especially the River School began to experiment with these new roles, there also appeared to be a strong belief from both the teachers themselves and the community that the primary role of teachers was 'knowledge holders' and the purpose of education was to transmit as much knowledge as possible from teacher to student. The data indicated furthermore a culture of policy adherence in both case study schools, which was underpinned by a communist ideology. In trying to meet policy and political expectations, complex education reforms where sometimes reduced to manageable procedures and techniques, rather than deeply engaging with the underlying values and analysing local factors which potentially limited access to learning and participation for all.

In the second research question *'What contextual factors influence inclusive education implementation at school level in Vietnam?'*, a similar dissonance emerged. In their everyday practice, teachers appeared to manage the merging of conflicting cultural, government and international expectations. The teachers implemented more active and collaborative teaching and learning styles or organised such activities after school hours. At the same time, they complied with policy expectations by following the textbooks strictly and with cultural expectations by maintaining a role as knowledge holder. In doing so, the teachers created local versions of education forms. Others (for example (Thanh and Renshaw, 2015, Thanh, 2014, Nguyen et al., 2012)) have called this 'hybrid practices'. While I recognize the need to contextualize education reforms, I believe that this localised version simplified complex education reforms to single techniques. The limited engagement with underlying values and belief systems of the education reforms and limited critical and collaborative reflection on how to give meaning to these reforms within the local context might slow down or limit the reform processes.

Another key theme related to the second research question was 'striving towards the ideal'. The data indicated a comprehensive framework of formal and informal guidelines on how teachers and students were to behave inside and outside of the school and what schools and classrooms should look like. This reflected an 'image of the ideal' which was largely decided top-down, based on government and Party guidelines. The presence of the Communist Party of Vietnam in the school, the continuous teacher monitoring system, the significance of the teacher and school

ranking and the culture of policy adherence contributed to how far this ideal image influenced the teaching practice at the case study schools. As a result, the teachers in the case study schools appeared to have limited agency in designing their own practice. It was more beneficial for teachers to follow government guidelines, which continued to encourage traditional teaching, than to engage in risky and more fundamental reforms towards inclusive education. The restrictive framework and limited agency of teachers challenged notions as 'pedagogy for all', 'inclusive pedagogy' or 'curriculum for all', which are based pre-dominantly on theory developed in the Global North (for example (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011, Hitchcock et al., 2002)). These concepts are likely to be more than a technical matter in the case study schools. It would also require strong political support, reviewing contradicting elements in policies, encouraging cultural support and supporting school leaders and teachers in approaching concepts as 'curriculum' in a fundamentally different way.

Much of the dissonance I noticed in the third research question, *'In what ways might researchers successfully navigate the challenges and complexities of undertaking research in a country such as Vietnam?'*, was related to inconsistency between conversations and between 'what was said' and 'what was observed'. Reflecting on this dissonance helped in developing a better understanding of the research context and why I sometimes struggled to develop trusting relationships and move beyond, what I sometimes experienced as, superficial conversations. I noticed that my position was not always clear for everyone involved in this study. Based on previous experiences of the teachers, Na and myself, my perceived role shifted between that of a researcher, a consultant and an evaluator. The position of consultant or evaluator might have motivated teachers to present an overly positive image of the school or to quote from policy documents when replying questions. As expected there was a certain level of control and monitoring in the research activities. The data indicated that this control came both 'from the outside' (local authorities) and 'from the inside' (amongst teachers). Some of the activities aimed at initiating conversations in focus group discussions might have encouraged teachers to formulate the 'correct' reply, based on cultural and political norms. The tendency to 'strive towards the ideal' might furthermore have impacted how teachers replied my questions. Due to cultural and political factors, the teachers might not only have presented 'what is', but also 'what ought to be'. This challenged my own conceptualisation of 'the truth'.

There were at times misunderstandings in the data collections. Some of these misunderstandings were related to working with an interpreter. While strategies were in place to reduce the impact of interpretation, some of the data and nuance inevitably got lost in translation. Some of the misunderstanding was however also linked to different cultural understanding of what key concepts as 'child-centred pedagogy' or 'flexibility' meant. This was significant, as I became aware of how my own assumptions influenced how I interpreted field events.

As I struggled to develop trusting relationships, I experienced that field relationships were 'cyclic' in nature, rather than 'linear'. There were moments of closeness between the teachers and myself, which led to 'break-throughs' in understanding. These moments however did not fully develop into trusting relationships. Unexpectedly, moments of closeness were followed by moments of distance. Emotions and vulnerability from both sides helped the research participants and myself to come closer and have deeper conversations. It took however a long time before these emotions and vulnerability were possible. The relationships with critical friends helped to cope with some of the challenges. This is especially true for the relationship with Na, my interpreter who became my main critical friend. Collaborative reflections with Na were crucial in developing deeper understanding of what happened in the field and brought a Vietnamese perspective into to the data analysis. The relationship with Na was however not easy. We were both bounded by our personal and cultural backgrounds, which might have limited in how far we understood each other.

Contribution

It is widely recognized that there are challenges and limitations in transferring education reforms, as inclusive education, which are pre-dominantly based on theory developed in the Global North to other contexts (Nguyen et al., 2009, Srivastra et al., 2013, Mitchell, 2005b, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). There is less literature available on the specific factors which affect local implementation of inclusive education (Armstrong et al., 2010, Singal and Muthukrishna, 2016). One of the main contributions of this study is the provision of a detailed account of the contextual factors through which the teachers in two primary schools in Hoa Binh, Vietnam, mediated local enactment of global and national inclusive education policies and trends. The findings showed a

complex interplay of social, cultural and political factors, which challenged the applicability of notions as 'flexible design and practice', 'inclusive pedagogy' and 'curriculum for all', which are developed pre-dominantly based on theory from the Global North. The deeper understanding of the complex realities in which the teachers at the case study schools gave meaning to inclusive education can provide insights for inclusive education policy and programme development in similar contexts.

The study built further on the concept of 'hybrid practices', or local versions of global education trends, as mentioned for example by Thanh and Renshaw (2015), Thanh (2014) and Nguyen et al. (2012). The discussion chapter (see p. 205) looked closer at how these hybrid practices developed at the case study schools, what the underlying assumptions and belief systems were and how it translated into practices which allowed teachers to comply with a range of different and contradicting expectations. The thesis suggested ways in how the development of such hybrid practices can be approached in a more systematic manner, which avoids oversimplification of complex education reforms.

This study furthermore provided a detailed mapping of the challenges I experienced in undertaking qualitative research in Vietnamese schools as a foreign researcher. The strategies developed to navigate the difficulties related to finding access to and leaving the field, shifting positionality, developing field relationships, contextualisation of research methods or reaching deeper levels within conversations, can be helpful for other researchers who are interested in undertaking longitudinal qualitative research in the field of education in Vietnam. Specific attention was given to the evolving role of the interpreter, Na, into a research assistant and critical friend. This built on the work of for example Turner (2010) and Pui-Hing and Kwong-Lai Poon (2010) on working with interpreters. These authors argued that translation is not a neutral process and the subjectivity of interpreters affects the collected data. This study confirmed that reflexivity of the interpreter can enrich the understanding of the data. The voice of Na was made visible throughout this thesis and brought a Vietnamese perspective in the data analysis. Although crucial in the evolving research methodology, the relationship with Na was not unproblematic. Reflexivity and openness about our relationship are important contributions to the field of cross-cultural research.

Implications

Implications for Inclusive Education Development in Vietnam

The data indicated that even though the teachers in both case study schools worked within a restrictive framework, they did exercise some agency in developing hybrid practices which allowed them to navigate various cultural, political and social expectations towards teaching and learning. I believe such hybrid practices have the potential to contextualize education reforms. For such practices to move beyond the 'cut and paste' of techniques pre-dominantly developed in the Global North, this would require a different mindset amongst policy makers, international organisations and local education leaders. As Singal and Muthukrishna (2016) noted, I believe that inclusive education initiatives should move away from viewing teachers as a homogeneous group, whose lack of knowledge and skills is an obstacle to overcome in the implementation of education reforms. Rather, initiatives could start from a fundamental respect for teachers and appreciation of the complex realities in which they engage with such education reforms and a willingness to form equal partnerships with local education stakeholders to collaboratively develop pedagogical frameworks which make sense in a specific education context.

This thesis provided a detailed account of the contextual factors which impact local conceptualization and implementation of inclusive education. It showed the complexity of education reforms inspired by international models and policies, and how teachers re-interpret and adjust models based on a range of local factors. This is an important implication for global education reforms. Too often, there is an assumption of a universal understanding of inclusive education and related concepts, such as child-centred pedagogy, flexibility, curriculum or participation. The findings of this study showed that the teachers in the case study schools developed a complicated and sometimes contradicting understanding of these concepts, based on cultural beliefs, community expectations, contradicting policy expectations and pragmatic factors. This shaped their practice and resulted in 'hybrid practices'. When looking from the outside, these hybrid practices did not fully resemble the original concepts. Very often in these situations, teachers are blamed for not fully understanding the reform processes, lacking capacities or having limited motivation. There is rarely a reflection on how the reform processes took place and what the key concepts meant at local level. There is often not enough time or

understanding to notice small changes teachers are making or to be aware of subtle differences in understanding. This has implications for how international education programmes are designed. Often there is a 'blue-print' approach. Specific guidelines on how to implement education reforms are shared across different contexts. It is important to create space, time and support to collaboratively discuss education reforms at the local level.

This also points at the need for a different implementation strategy and activities for NGOs and international agencies. The data indicated that in the past NGOs introduced inclusive education at both case study schools through a series of training courses which presented a fixed body of knowledge and skills on inclusive education for a limited number of teachers. Acknowledging the need for contextualised versions of inclusive education implementation however requires a more dynamic and ongoing approach. It has been recognized that continuous and school-based models of teachers development can lead to sustainable education reforms, which takes the changing local resources and barriers into account (for example: (Howes et al., 2009b, Forlin, 2010a, Grimes et al., 2015)). While NGOs and international agencies can play a role in local capacity building, it might be important to form strategic partnerships with education authorities at different levels as well. As NGOs projects tend to be limited in time, local stakeholders are in a better position to ensure continuous support for inclusive teachers. The pragmatic barriers and conflicting expectation towards the teachers in the case study schools furthermore seem to confirm the need for a holistic approach to inclusive education development and implementation (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Implications for Education Research in Vietnam

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research designs are often emergent, developing as the researcher collects data and gains insight in the context. The findings related to the third research question indicated that such evolving research design was crucial in navigating the challenges in undertaking research in Vietnam as a foreign researcher. During this research journey I encountered some anticipated challenges, including difficulties in working with an interpreter, bureaucratic processes in gaining access to the field or a sense of control from the local authorities over the research activities. In addition, I came across a number of unforeseen challenges, such

as control and monitoring of the research activities from within the case study schools, cultural misunderstandings, the cyclic nature of the field relationships and a continuous struggle to move beyond the surface in field conversations. While navigating these challenges, also some unexpected support and resources arose. The partners at the HNUE and NIEM, and their connections in Hoa Binh province were very supportive in finding access to the field, and the group of both foreign and Vietnamese critical friends was fundamental in helping to develop a deeper understanding the research context and making sense of the data.

The flexible design of the study allowed to explore challenges and resources and to develop appropriate strategies to respond to the encountered difficulties. It is unlikely that these strategies are universally applicable for all foreign researchers undertaking similar studies in Vietnam. Many of the challenges I was confronted with were unpredictable, specific to the research context in the two case study schools and the type of partnerships I established. There were however a few approaches which helped me to cope with complexities throughout the entire study and are likely to be helpful for others as well. A reflexive attitude and not taking anything for granted was central in understanding and navigating challenges. I gained a richer understanding of what happened in the field by constantly challenging my own assumptions. Sometimes I needed support from critical friends to recognize and question my own blind spots. It was not easy to recognize that some of my very basic assumptions of the key concepts of this study, how I understood 'truth' or defined key values influenced how I interpreted conversations and observations. I experienced furthermore the value of strong local partnerships in for example coping with legal and bureaucratic requirements related to undertaking research in Vietnamese schools. Lastly, having a trusted companion throughout this research journey was invaluable for me. The relationship with Na was at times difficult. We sometimes had opposing perspectives and there was some indication that Na felt sometimes restricted to be fully open and her translations were not fluent. However, for me, this was outweighed by the richness of being able to undertake this study with a peer Vietnamese researcher, who understood the field very well, was genuinely interested in the study and was reflexive about her experiences. I believe therefore that developing partnerships with and involving local peer researchers more closely in all the phases of the study has potential to develop more context-specific research approaches and to gain richer understanding of the data.

Limitations

As discussed in the previous chapter ('Chapter Nine', p. 205), there was an ongoing struggle in this study to develop trusting relationships and move beyond more superficial conversations. It could be argued that a full immersion in the field for a period of time could have helped to develop these trusting relationships and cultural understanding of the of the research context faster (Ely et al., 1991). This was for several reasons not possible. It would have been more difficult to obtain a research permit and find an interpreter who could work alongside with me for an extended period of time in the field. In addition, with two young children at home, it was difficult for me to be away for a longer period of time. The applied approach of regular short visits was however in a different way beneficial. The gaps in between the visits allowed to process field events and emerging data with critical friends. The ongoing reflection and data analysis allowed to address emerging challenges and informed the evolving methodology.

The developments in the Hill School at the end of the data collection period indicated that there was progress in the field relationships. An incident in which one of the teachers shared about her experiences with challenging behaviour in the classroom brought us closer. There was space for emotion and vulnerability, which could have developed into stronger relationships (see also 'Chapter Eight', p. 199). Unfortunately, my research permit was no longer valid, and I could not explore this potential change in relationships further. While it appeared that a longer stay in the field could have improved trusting relationships and therefore collecting more in-depth data, there was no guarantee this would actually happen. The data indicated there were 'ups and downs' in the level of trust. At the time I was not always aware of what motivated the cycles in the relationships. Only after the events I heard through Na that there were changes in the management of the schools or heightened government control over the research activities. This made it difficult to predict how the relationships would develop further (see also 'Trusting Relationships', p. 234).

The key themes discussed under Research Question Three (see 'Chapter Nine', p. 205) showed some additional limitations of the applied research design. While strategies were in place to minimise the effect of working with an interpreter, it is inevitable that some nuance and

understanding got lost in translation. In additional, there was a certain cultural misunderstanding, as the teachers and I interpreted key concepts in different ways. This affected field conversations, but also provided opportunities for further reflection and understanding of the context. The data furthermore indicated a need to contextualize the applied research methods. Some of the activities might have been perceived as an evaluation of the teaching practice and might therefore have encouraged to focus on what was going well, rather than an open sharing of experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings showed that teachers exercised some agency in developing hybrid practices to navigate different and conflicting expectations from the government and community towards education. The data indicated the importance of collaborative and critical reflection to develop contextually meaningful ways to implement education reforms, without losing the deeper values and complexity underneath these reforms. It was argued in this thesis that such conversations might be challenging due to a range of contextual factors. The discussion chapter ('Chapter Nine', p. 205) mapped out some of these difficulties, including previous experience with high-stakes teacher assessment which might limit open and critical discussion, limited training, experience and support of teachers to engage in reflective discussions about school development, a restrictive framework for teaching and developing their own practice and a fixed 'ideal' of teachers, students and schools based on top-down government and Party guidelines. It would be interesting to study further how teachers in these complex realities can be supported better to develop local versions of education reforms in a more systematic manner.

Another area for further research is in the impact of community perspectives on the local implementation of education reforms. The research questions and methodology of this study were designed to gather data on how teachers in two case study schools gave meaning to inclusive education. This 'guerrilla focus' on one group of stakeholders in two case study schools allowed to explore the complexities of inclusive policy development and pedagogy in-depth (Corbett, 2001, p. 16). In some conversations the teachers discussed common perceptions towards education within their community. While these were valuable discussions, it only provided the perspective of the teachers on their surrounding community. As discussed in the previous chapter

(see 'Chapter Nine', p. 205), a set of guidelines did not only regulate the behaviour of teachers inside the school, but also how teachers and students were to behave in public, outside the school were expected to behave. It would be interesting to explore community values and perceptions regarding 'how do we live together' further, as this is likely to influence how inclusive education is conceptualized inside the school (Graham and Slee, 2008).

Concluding Remarks

At the very end of this study, I am looking back at what was at times a problematic research journey. The challenges are discussed in detail throughout this thesis and it was in these moments that most of my learning happened. The challenges did not only encourage reflection about the research questions, but also about how I behaved in the field and made sense of what happened. I slowly became aware that I was a neo-colonial subject myself in this study. It took time, reflection with critical friends and engaging with critical and sometimes difficult situations to realize how I was bounded by my personal socio-cultural background in understanding what happened in the field. I realized that in my initial interpretations I sometimes made rather quick judgements based on my Western framework, what I learned in the literature review and what I believed was 'the right way to do inclusive education'. This was at times confronting, as it challenged my own beliefs, values and assumptions on what good quality education is or how to ensure participation for all. I had to be open for different perspectives and notice that the reality of the case study schools was far more complex than some of the dichotomies presented in the literature review, such as a narrow versus a broad understanding of inclusive education, medical or social model of disability or teacher- or child-centred pedagogy. This process of understanding my own assumptions and how these affected data collection and interpretation allowed me to move past describing the practice at the case study schools towards understanding better how that practice and pedagogical thinking developed based on a range of complex and interacting contextual factors.

I learned also learned who I was as a researcher. At the start of this study, I probably had a rather linear and European perspective on how this study would progress. I expected that after gaining access, trusting relationships would gradually develop and with each visit I would be able to gather

deeper level data. I was used to carefully planning and anticipating what was about to happen, and liked going straight from point A to point B. Nothing that happened in this entire study was ever linear. From the methodology, the process to getting access to and leave from the field, developing relationships, making sense of the data to writing the thesis, everything went in circles and much of what happened was unexpected. I needed time to process what happened and needed to accept that I did not understand everything immediately. When I got lost and found myself going in circles, the work of Ely et al. (1991) often helped me to see the value of the side tracks and hurdles to overcome. I learned along the way that in allowing messiness, tensions and imperfections, most of my learning happened. I had to build trust and confidence to jump into the process, not always knowing how I would get from point A to point B and sometimes not even sure if I would ever arrive at point B. I learned to trust that I would make sense of what I was doing when I was in the middle of it. Even though, or because it was a challenging research journey, it was an incredibly rich experience. I feel that I am now a more confident qualitative researcher, less afraid of acknowledging the significance of emotions and better equipped to deal with messy and complex realities which are probably inevitably part of qualitative cross-cultural research.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Glossary

This glossary includes Vietnam-specific terminology which was frequently used throughout the thesis.

Doi Moi – Mo Cua	The Doi Moi (Recovery) and Mo Cua (Open door) were a series of economic policies issued in 1986 to address the steep economic crisis Vietnam faced after decades of independence struggles and wars. The policies gradually reformed Vietnam's centralised and subsidized economy to a more market-based economy and allowed for international re-integration. The policies brought significant economic growth had immense impact on all policies domains. In terms of education, the policies led to enormously progress in educational access throughout the 1990s. The Mo Cua policies allowed to the Vietnamese education system to draw from Western-based education models.
Ho Chi Minh	Ho Chi Minh was the first president of North Vietnam. He headed the revolution against the French Colonial powers and established the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which was after the war against the Unites States of America united with the South of Vietnam into 'Socialist Republic of Vietnam'. Ho Chi Minh passed away in 1969, his thought and ideology are however until today massively influencing Vietnamese politics.
Kinh	Ethnic Vietnamese and majority ethnic group in Vietnam
Mass organisation	The political mass organisations represent the Vietnamese civil society. Civil society organisations, as defined in the Global North as independent, non-state and not-for-profit organisations, are relatively new and small in Vietnam. The mass organisations have a strong link with the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and aim to

	mobilise public support for implementation of Party and government guidelines and policies.
MoET – DoET - BoET	Ministry of Education and Training, represented at provincial level through the Department of Education and Training (DoET) and at district level through the Bureau of Education and Training (BoET)
Muong	Third largest ethnic minority group of the 53 minority groups in Vietnam. Most Muong live in the Northern highlands, in Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa and Phu To province.
Province – District – Commune	The Vietnamese administrative system is divided into three tiers. The first tier are the provinces and central cities. Each province or central city is divided into a number of districts, which form the second administrative tier. The last administrative tier is formed by the communes.
Satellite school	Each commune has a primary school. In mountainous areas, some schools have one or more 'satellite schools' to ensure easier access to school for mainly younger children from remote villages. The satellite schools are under the management of the director and vice director of the main school.
Tet	Vietnamese lunar new year
Trade Union	Political mass organization for labourers. Each school in Vietnam has a Trade Union division which represents the teachers
People's Committee	Executive political power at province and district level. The People's committees are responsible for implementing policies.
Women's Union	Political mass organisation for women. The Women's Union supports the CPV and the government and represents women in policy development and implementation.
Viet Minh	Full name in English: 'League for the Independence in Vietnam', commonly known as 'Viet Minh'. The organisation merged different smaller groups who all fought for the independence of Vietnam from France.

Vietnam Fatherland Front	Umbrella organisation of all Vietnamese mass organisations. The Vietnam Fatherland Front coordinates the activities of all mass organisations and supports the CPV and government. It aims to ensure political and ethical alignment between the CPV, government and mass organisations, and ultimately among the Vietnamese people.
Young Pioneer	Division of Youth Union for younger children (9 to 15 years old). Membership of the Young pioneer is necessary to obtain membership in the Youth Union and later the CPV.
Youth Union	The full name is Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, it is commonly known as 'Youth Union'. It is the political mass organisation for young people (15 to 30 years old) and organizes activities centred around the teachings of Ho Chi Minh. It prepares young people for membership within the CPV.

Appendix Two: Research Participants

All the names in the thesis, including the names of the schools, are pseudonyms. This appendix provides an overview of the regularly used pseudonyms to facilitate the reading of the thesis.

Case study schools	Hill School
	River School
Hill School participants	Van, Vice Director
	Ha, Teacher
	Kim, Teacher
	Hong, Teacher
	Ta, Teacher
River School participants	Tam, Director
	Lynn, Teacher
	Vy, Teacher
	Min, Teacher
	Sang, Teacher
	Ann, Teacher
National level partners	Na, Interpreter and lecturer and the Hanoi University of Education
	May, Training and Development Centre on Special Education
	Lan, National Institute for Education Management
	Thi, Provincial contact person
Critical friends	Na, interpreter
	Ben, education advisor for an international NGO
	Sarah, PhD candidate Education

Appendix Three: Field Visit Preparation Example

Preparation field visit 3

14 December 2016

Purpose

- To continue the activity on what it means to be an inclusive teacher (gingerbread man)
- Introduce timeline activity to identify key events in the process towards inclusive education
- Clarify issues from previous meeting

Materials to prepare

- Flip charts with matric
- Markers
- Tape

Activities

Clarify issues from previous meeting

- Hill School: How does the system with 'core teachers for inclusive education' work?
- River school: What is the procedure to obtain a disability certificate and what does it mean in practice?

Part 1: Continue gingerbread man: what does it mean to be an inclusive teacher?

Hill school:

- Knowledge: what do you have already – what is still difficult?
    Possible further questions:
    - Examples

o What happens if you don't have these skills/knowledge?
o How are teachers prepared to work in inclusive classes and acquire the identified knowledge, skills and attitudes?
o What helps teachers to acquire these attributes?

Both Hill and River school:

- Attitudes: how does it translate into the classroom?
  Possible further questions:
    o Examples
    o What if teachers don't have these attitudes?
    o What if parents/community members don't have these attitudes?

Part 2: Introduce time line

- Show example timeline

- Ask teachers to fill in events

- Rate impact

Impact on IE

Positive

No

Negative

Events

Bac Kan Example:

- 2000: Establishment of Special School for children with disabilities
- 2002: Handicap International built a new campus for the special school
- 2003: National Action Plan on Education for All

- 2006: UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
- 2006: National Action Plan on People with Disabilities
- 2006: MoET Decree on education for children with disabilities
- 2009: MoET Decree on inclusive education
- 2009: Start of Handicap International/Save the Children inclusive education project
- 2009: Teacher training on inclusive education (traditional, cascade model)
- 2009: Parent training on disability
- 2009: Purchase of equipment
- 2009: Large scale awareness raising events
- 2010: Vietnamese Law on Persons with Disabilities
- 2010: Establishment of the inclusive education support team
- 2010: Change in teacher development approach for inclusive education (towards school-based training model)
- 2010: Change in parent support (micro credit)
- 2010: Small scale commune awareness raising events
- 2011: Development of home-based rehabilitation books
- 2011: Authorities and teachers notice progress
- 2011: Introduce collaborative problem solving approach with inclusive education support team
- 2012: Decree on establishment of Inclusive Education Resource Centres
- 2012: End of Handicap International/ Save the Children project
- 2013: MoET circular on inclusive education

Date and time:

School:

Grade:

General description of classroom situation
(Number of children, topic of the lesson, …)

Item	Observations	Reflections

Classroom environment		
Seating arrangement (can all children understand and contribute to the lesson? what is the seating position? Noise? Light? …)		
Use of the room (desks in rows towards black board? Learning corners? Flexible arrangements? …)		
Accessibility of all resources and corners in the classroom		
Use of a variety of teaching and learning aids, accessible to all		

Display of children's work		
Overall atmosphere		
Other		
Interactions		
Dynamic of interaction (From teacher to students? Mutual? Among students? …)		

Instruction style (Whole-group? Individual? Small groups? Child to child? Combination? …)		
Additional adults (Role? Tasks? Communication with students? …)		
Overall emotion and atmosphere		
Other		

Teaching style		
The teacher ensures all children understand the purpose, content, instruction, …		
The teacher is using a range of different teaching and learning aids and approaches		
The teacher differentiates in teaching style, instruction, content, where needed		
Other		

Appendix Five: Example of Field Notes

Memo

Document: 301116\301116 Field notes Hill school

Linked codes

Code
Cloud

Title: Memo 489

Author: Marieke   Last changed 04/03/20 16:34

Type

Type label

Helvetica   12   **B** *I* U S

011216: I keep on thinking about this incident. I felt so uncomfortable standing in front of all the children and teachers, not sure what was expected from me. Did the teachers consider this as an English lesson? What does this mean for the teaching at the school? Is this an indication of collective and teacher-centred teaching? How does this link with inclusive education?

251019: Did I make a too quick judgement about the teaching here? I had not seen any classroom yet at that point

achers and Van. They agree we leave now for the River School and return in the oup discussion with the teachers.

eeting room, all 413 children of the school are lined up on the playgroup. They do quite common in Vietnamese schools. A teacher beats a hige drum. The child do s from side to side and wave their hands in the air. I stop for a few minutes to her tells me that the children are now ready to talk with me. I do not understand om me. 413 children are standing neatly in lines. I gave the English teachre a ne children, gives a sign and they all shout together 'Hello, how are you?'. I reply: ne children standing close to me reply I'm fine'. The whole group goes on. Whith ther they shout another question. 'What is your name?', 'Where are you from?', the questions and try to ask some questions back. There is an uncomfortable silence. I ask what they want to do next and seem to have created further confusion. After some conversation between the teachers and Na, the English teacher shakes my hand and thanks me for the lesson. I wave at the children and thank the teachers. Na and I get in the car and leave the Hill School.

3   Na gives directions to the driver. He drives, again, too fast over bumpy roads. We have to hold ourselves and I get seriously afraid. We make it to the main road. We get lost and don't know how to get to the River School. Na calls the school for further directions. I'm worried we will arrive too late and won't have enough time for the conversations. We finally arrive at the school and go up to the director's office.

4   The director and vice director are waiting for us. The welcome is friendly, but less warm as in the TN school. Neither N or me have been at this school before. The director will stay with us for the entire visits. She seems interested, takes notes during our conversation. She doesn't appear very confident about her knowledge about inclusive education. She tells us a few times she is only at the school for 2 years, and doesn't know much

211216 Teachers Hill par...   7
141216   149
  141216 Field Notes Hill S...   0
  141216 Field Notes River...   0
  141216 Teachers River   61
  141216 Teachers Hill a...   83
  141216 Teachers Hill par...   5
071216   118
  071216 Field notes Hill a...   0
  071216 Transcript Hill a...   118
301116   29
  301116 Field notes Hill...   2
  301116 Transcript Hill an...   27
Sets   0

3   0   0   0

Simple Coding Query (OR combination of codes)

Memorandum of Understanding
between
Canterbury Christ Church University
and
Hanoi National University of Education

2016-2019

THIS Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is made on the 2nd June 2015 between CANTERBURY CHRIST CHURCH UNIVERSITY of Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU (henceforth referred to as CCCU) of the one part and Hanoi National University of Education, 136 Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Hanoi (henceforth referred to as "HNUE") of the other part, and together referred to as "the Parties".

1   The Purpose of the MoU

I.   The Parties wish to affirm the establishment of a special relationship between them with the intention of promoting their common interest in advancing education in general and Higher Education in particularon the basis of friendly cooperation, mutual respect, mutual benefit and mutual enhancement.

II.   In establishing this relationship, the parties recognise that they share a common interest in exploration and development of learning and teaching, research and scholarship, academic exchanges and cooperation, and cultural activity.

2   Range of Activities

I.   The parties will promote links between members of staff with common interests, and operate together as appropriate to further general education and cultural interests in their shared academic areas. In particular they will seek to co-operate in the following areas of mutual interest:

a.   Encourage mutual visits and collaboration between the institutions;

b.   Support the exchange of faculty who desire to teach, study and conduct research at the other institution, dependent upon institutional availability of lecturers and professors, funding, and specific instructional needs, as determined by the senior administrative staff and academic officers at the respective institutions;

c.   Support the exchange of academic and administrative staff for developmental purposes, as determined by the senior administrative staff and academic officers at the respective institutions;

d.   Support the exchange of visiting students who wish to study at either institution in accordance with each institution's established admission policies and procedures;

e.   Explore partnerships and joint collaborations for all levels of students including undergraduates, Master's, and doctoral candidates.

f.   Consider the hosting of cultural events and academic programs from the other institution that may enrich or expand the educational understanding and experience of students, faculty and staff.

3   Administration of the MoU

   I.   The persons responsible for the management of links made under this
            Memorandum of Understanding will be Dr Yang LIU, Senior International
            Partnership and Recruitment Officer for CCCU and Ms Dao Thi Bich Thuy, Director
            of the Training and Development Centre on Special Education.

4   Further Agreement

   I.   This Memorandum of Understanding sets out the overall terms agreed between
            the parties. However, It is intended that:
       a.   in the event of the development of an agreement to run a programme
            collaboratively, a specific Memorandum of Agreement will   underpin that
            arrangement;
       b.   each party will abide by its respective equal opportunity policy in sending and
            hosting students, faculty, and staff.

5   Duration of the MoU

   I.   It is intended that the relationship between the parties will be long-term and that
            this MoUwill be reviewed after one year.

6   Signature of the Parties to the Agreement

Professor Rama Thirunamachandran (name) ___ Vice-Chancellor, Canterbury Christ Church University(title) _____ Date_____Date_____	**Professor Nguyen Van Minh** President of Hanoi National University of Education Date_____Date_____

4   Further Agreement

    I.   This Memorandum of Understanding sets out the overall terms agreed between the parties. However, It is intended that:
        a.   in the event of the development of an agreement to run a programme collaboratively, a specific Memorandum of Agreement will underpin that arrangement;
        b.   each party will abide by its respective equal opportunity policy in sending and hosting students, faculty, and staff.

5   Duration of the MoU
    I.   It is intended that the relationship between the parties will be long-term and that this MoU will be reviewed after one year.

6   Signature of the Parties to the Agreement

Professor Rama Thirunamachandran Vice-Chancellor, Canterbury Christ Church University Date 5/8/16 Date_____	Professor Nguyen Van Minh President of Hanoi National University of Education Date_____ Date_____

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

Appendix Seven: Map of Vietnam

Hanoi, Capital

Hoa Binh province

Appendix Eight: Professional Standards for Primary School Teachers

This appendix provides a full overview of the professional standards for primary school teachers, as stated in Decision No. 14/2007/QD-BGDDT (MoET, 2007 Art 5 - 7)

Article 5. Requirements under the domain political qualities, ethics, life-styles

1. To be aware of political ideology in the role of a citizen, an educator towards the tasks of developing and defending the nation. This includes the following criteria:

   a) To participate in social activities, developing and defending the country, contributing to developing the community cultures, helping local residents who meet with misfortunes in their life;

   b) To love and dedicate to for their job; be ready to overcome difficulties to satisfactorily accomplish the tasks of educating students;

   c) Through teaching activities, to educate students to love and respect grandparents, parents, senior people; to maintain good traditions of Vietnamese people; to raise the sense of protecting independence, freedom, national pride, patriotism, love for socialism;

   d) To participate in studying Resolutions of the Party, guidelines and policies of the State.

2. To abide by the laws, policies of the State, including the following criteria:

   a) To fully observe the regulations and rules of law, guidelines and policies of the Party and State;

   b) To seriously practice the local regulations;

   c) To relate to realities in teaching students to observe the rules of law and maintain social order and security in the general public;

   d) To encourage families to observe guidance and policies, rules of laws of the State and local regulations.

3. To observe the regulations of the sector, school and disciplines at work, including the following criteria:

   a) To observe regulations and rules set out by the sector, with investigations and solutions for implementation;

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b) To make contributions to developing and seriously implementing operational regulations of the school;

c) To have a correct attitude at work; complete the assigned tasks; improve student management in teaching and educational activities;

d) To maintain working days; teach punctually, not leave classes or sessions arbitrarily; assume responsibility for the teaching and educational quality in classes taught.

4. To display the healthy and pure attitudes, personality and life-styles of an educator; a sense of combating negative signs and symptoms; a sense of striving for promotion in their professions; trustworthiness given by peers, students and community, including the following criteria:

a) Not to conduct any behavior that violates virtues, honors, prestige of an educator; not to outrage virtues, honors of colleagues, the people and students;

b) To live in an honest, healthy, simple, exemplary way; to have trustworthiness of colleagues, the people and students;

c) Not to conduct any negative behaviors in their daily life, teaching and educational activities;

d) To have a sense of self-studying, strive for enhancing qualities, ethics, political and professional qualifications; practice health on a regular basis.

5. To be honest in work; united in peer relationships; serving the people and students, including the following criteria:

a) To be honest in reporting teaching outcomes and students assessments and implementation of assigned tasks;

b) To unite with other people; share work with colleagues in their professional and operational activities;

c) To serve the people with correct attitudes, meeting proper aspirations of parents;

d) To teach and educate students with all heart, love, equality and responsibility of an educator.

Article 6. Requirements under the domain knowledge

1. Basic knowledge, including the following criteria:

a) To grasp firmly objectives, basic contents of curriculum, textbooks of subject matters assigned to teach;

b) To have deep knowledge and ability to systematize knowledge of the whole educational sub-sector in order to increase teaching effectiveness regarding the subject matters assigned to teach;

c) To ensure sufficient, accurate and systematic basic knowledge in teaching periods;

d) To have ability to guide peers some deep knowledge in a specific subject matter, or ability to nourish talented students, or support weak students or those with lots of limitations to get better.

2. Knowledge of pedagogical psychology and developmental age psychology and primary education, including the following criteria:

a) To have a firm understanding of psycho-physiological characteristics of primary age students, including disabled and disadvantaged students; and apply such understanding to educational and teaching activities in line with each type of students;

b) To grasp knowledge of developmental age psychology, use such knowledge to select teaching methods, pedagogical manners in education to match primary-age students;

c) To have knowledge on education, effectively utilize approaches of ethics, knowledge, cosmetic, physical education, and in-classroom teaching patterns;

d) To effectively implement educational approaches for abnormal students.

3. Knowledge on testing, assessing learning outcomes of students, including the following criteria:

a) To participate in learning and studying rationale of testing and assessment as regards educational and teaching activities at primary level;

b) To participate in learning and studying regulations on contents, methods and modalities of testing and assessing learning outcomes of primary students in the spirit of renovation;

c) To implement the testing, assessment and ranking students in a correct and education-oriented manner and in line with regulations;

d) To have ability to develop testing items subject to the fulfillment of requirements of professional direction, knowledge and skills standards of subject matters and matching specific type of students.

4. General knowledge on politics, society and humanity; knowledge related to applying IT, foreign languages, minority languages, including the following criteria:

a) To foster professional and operational knowledge in line with regulations;

b) To update knowledge of inclusive education for disabled students, environmental education, rights and obligations of students, school health, traffic safety, prevention and control of drug and social evils;

c) To know and use several popular audio-visual equipment to aid teaching activities such as TV, cassettes, projectors, videos;

d) To have an understanding of IT, or foreign languages or minority languages of regions where teachers work, or have thematic reports on improving professional and operational quality.

5. Local knowledge on political, economic, cultural, social tasks of the province, district, commune where teachers work, including the following criteria:

a) To fully participate in fostering sessions on political, economic, cultural, social situations and various Resolutions of the locality;

b) To investigate and study status and developmental needs for primary education of the locality;

c) To identify impacts of family and community on learning and ethical practice of students from which to have practical and relevant methods for educating and teaching students;

d) To have an understanding of customs, practices, sporting, cultural activities, and local traditional festivals.

Article 7. Requirements under the domain pedagogical skills

1. To be able to produce teaching plan; know how to prepare lesson plan in an innovative manner, including the following criteria:

a) To be able to develop annual teaching plan that shows teaching activities aiming at specifying curriculum of the MOET subject to characteristics of school and class assigned to teach;

b) To be able to produce monthly plan based on annual plan including curricular and extra-curricular activities;

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c) To have weekly teaching plan in place that shows schedule for teaching periods and educational activities;

d) To prepare lesson plan in an innovative manner, which shows active teaching and learning activities (preparing full lesson plan for the first time taught subject matters, using lesson plan adjusted based on experiences after a year of teaching).

2. To organize and implement in-classroom teaching activities that promote activeness and creativity of students, including the following criteria:

a) To appropriately select and use teaching approaches that promote activeness and creativity of students; manage the class; build cooperative, child-friendly learning environment, creating confidence for students; guide students to self-study;

b) To ask testing questions in a way that is suitable to specific types of students and promotes learning capacity of students; mark and correct the tests carefully in order to help students get better in their learning;

c) To use teaching aids and equipment, including self-made teaching aids; know how to make use of available conditions to serve teaching periods, or apply teaching software or produce teaching aids of high practical values;

d) To have a clear, coherent speech without a lisp when teaching and communicating with others in school; write according to sample scripts; know how to guide students to keep their notebooks clean and write nice scripts.

3. Leading the class; organizing extra-curricular activities, including the following criteria:

a) To develop and implement senior teacher work plan linked to teaching plan; have specific educational and student management measures that are suitable to students in the class under his or her leadership;

b) To organize group work teaching in an authentic, not artificial manner; to introduce specific measures to develop learning capacity of students and educating abnormal and gifted students;

c) To collaborate with school and mass organizations in the local community to keep track of and educate students;

d) To organize appropriate extra-curricular sessions or study tours and collective activities; collaborate with the person-in-charge to create conditions for the Youth Team, Young Stars, to implement self-managed activities.

4. To implement two-way information in managing educational quality; behaviors in communication, to behave in an educational way, including the following criteria:

a) To regularly talk with and consult students on learning status, joining extra-curricular activities and measures for improving learning quality after each term;

b) To observe peer's class as per regulation or participate in giving lectures at school, district, province level; fully attend professional briefings and give comments to the professional group/team to make it a united and strong entity;

c) To hold parents teachers association meeting as per regulation, have records to inform parents of students performance, not to criticize students in the whole class or all parents; listen to and collaborate with parents to adjust measures to make students get better;

d) To know how to address specific situation to educate students and apply the same into educational experience consolidation; communicate with colleagues and community in an educator's style.

5. To develop, maintain and effectively use educational and teaching profile, including the following criteria:

a) To develop full profile to manage learning process of students; properly maintain the tests performed by students;

b) To effectively store teaching profile including lesson plan, documents, and reference materials relevant to subject matters assigned to teach;

c) To manage profile in a manner that is scientific, realistic and of high use value;

d) To store all tests performed by retarded and disabled students to report on outcomes of education towards progress of students.

Appendix Nine: Classroom Strategies Chart - Inclusive practices

Use a range of different teaching approaches in the same lesson to accommodate different learning styles	Encourage your students to learn from each other	
Clarify the content of the lesson and discuss the expectations with your students		Praising children's efforts and achievements
	Allow students to show what they have learned in different ways	Involve parents or other community members in your lessons
Encourage collaboration among your students	Monitor how involved the children in your class are in all activities	Link what happens in the class with the daily experiences of the students
Regularly check if everyone understands you, provide additional support when needed	Design an accessible and flexible classroom set-up	
	Prepare a variety of learning outcomes for the same lessons, to accommodate the different levels of the students	Know your students (know their interests and which support they might need for example)

Activities:

- <u>Individually</u> read the examples in the chart. Mark any strategies that you personally use in your classroom practice. Add any further examples that you find effective in helping to make your classroom more inclusive in the blank boxes.

- Draw a star in the three most important strategies in your classroom

- <u>In your group</u>: tell each other about the teaching strategies your are using, discuss what you have in common

- As a group, agree on the three favourite/most frequently used strategies.

- Write these 3 favourite strategies in the table on the next page

- Provide for each strategy at least 1 example of an actual lesson/situation to illustrate the strategy

- Additional discussion points:

  - How do these teaching strategies support the learning of all children in your classroom?

  - Which strategies have you not yet tried? Why?

  - Have you learned a new strategy in the group discussion?

Favourite strategies	Why	Real classroom examples
1. _____ _____ _____		
2. _____ _____ _____		
3. _____ _____ _____		