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**IT'S BETTER THAN CATCHING FROGS:  
EXPLORING INCLUSION IN RELATION TO LOCAL  
CONTEXT AND KNOWLEDGE IN LAO PDR AND  
THAILAND**

**A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in the  
Faculty of Humanities.**

**2011**

**PETER JULIAN GRIMES**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

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## Glossary

Hope	A primary school in Bangkok, visited by the teachers from River Lane school in Laos, as part of the case study in Chapter Seven.
River Lane	A primary school in Laos, subject of the case study in Chapter Seven
Child Friendly School Initiative	An initiative by UNICEF to make all schools child-friendly
CSN	Children with Special Needs, a term used in the Lao PDR IE Project
EFA	Education For All, United Nations
EP	Educational Psychologist
ESRC	The Economic and Social Research Council
IE Project	The Lao PDR Inclusive Education Project
Lao PDR	The Lao Peoples Democratic Republic
Laos	The Lao Peoples Democratic Republic
Market	A school in Bangkok, research setting in Phase One
MoE / The Ministry	Ministry of Education in Laos
Leaf Lane	A primary school in Laos, referred to in Chapter Four, as part of the research for Phase One.
NGO	Non Government Organisation
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIDA	The Swedish International Development Agency
ROAL	Reaching Out To All Learners Project; a development of the UNESCO Teacher Education Project 'Special Needs in the Classroom'
UNICEF	The United Nations Childrens Fund
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## **Abstract**

**The University of Manchester, Peter Grimes, PhD, September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011**

**Title: 'It's Better Than Catching Frogs: Exploring Inclusion in relation to Local Context and Knowledge in Lao PDR and Thailand'**

This thesis examines the applicability of pre-dominantly Western theories of inclusive school development in countries of the Global South. Firstly, the findings of a review of research literature are used to develop a typology to describe the common features of inclusive schools, incorporating ways in which they might be supported. This typology was then used to explore the ways in which schools in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand developed inclusive practices. Engagement with school systems in these countries over a period of six years between 2003 and 2009 provided opportunities to work at several different levels with schools that in some way defined themselves as being 'inclusive'. Using data generated through field work with schools in an Inclusive Education Project in Laos and one school in Thailand, tensions were identified between the theoretical framework and my initial research findings. A revision of the typology was undertaken, drawing on a wider literature to take account of additional factors such as local and national culture and the impact of the policy context in these countries. The researcher often had the role of consultant, creating tensions in the way he constructed his position and also in the schools' response. Reflecting on these tensions became a productive process in terms of understanding the factors which effectively promoted the development of inclusion in these different contexts. In particular, the process highlighted the relatively neglected significance of local context and knowledge and the way in which these factors impact on inclusive school development. In order to explore these issues in greater detail, further research was then undertaken in one school in Laos, creating a case study developed over four years. This detailed engagement revealed more clearly the limits of typologies in general and of Western theories in particular. Whilst they may offer a lens for examining inclusive school development they do not 'adequately' account for variable factors rooted in the local context. In conclusion, policy initiatives designed to support the development of more inclusive schools must allow for the creation of space at local levels for meanings to be constructed which will support teachers in developing their own sense of agency and making changes in their practice of which they have ownership.

## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated with love, to my wife Barbara, my daughters Mei and Ani, my mother Elsie Grimes, and aunt Iris Steer, without whose support and understanding, it would not have been possible.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisors Andy Howes and Mel Ainscow for their support and encouragement. In particular my gratitude goes to Andy whose patience and guidance have enabled me to complete this thesis. In addition I would like to thank and acknowledge the support and inspiration of Geoffrey Court and Jeannette Weaver of The Circle Works, Maggie Balshaw and Jenny Corbett. Special thanks is due to Judy Durrant who kept encouraging me until I had finished.

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In memory of my father Ronald Grimes (1928 – 1971) and my friend Jeannette Weaver (1953 – 2007)

## Chapter One: Introduction

My thesis argues that theories about the way in which schools develop inclusive practice are predominantly western in origin, based on research in European, North American or Australasian schools. I will further argue that, in trying to understand the development of inclusive schools in South East Asia - specifically Lao PDR and Thailand - these theories are of limited use because they fail to account for the significance of local context and knowledge and the way in which these factors impact on school development.

With these arguments in mind, I go on to explore the ways in which schools attempt to develop inclusive practices, with a particular focus on the countries Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos) and Thailand. Between 2003 and 2009, I visited India, Thailand and Laos several times a year, working with and supporting schools which, in some way, defined themselves as being 'inclusive'. During this period I was based in England, first as a teacher and then, from 2004 onwards as an academic in a University Faculty of Education. My roles in India, Laos and Thailand oscillated between consultant and researcher, creating a tension which had an impact both on the way in which I constructed my position and also on the way in which the schools I worked with responded to me. This thesis is in part a reflection on that tension.

### It's better than catching frogs

The thesis title - *'It's better than catching frogs: Exploring inclusion in relation to local context and knowledge in Lao P.D.R. and Thailand'* - arose out of an incident in Laos in November 2005. I was working as consultant to the country's Inclusive Education Project, employed by Save the Children. Part of my work involved developing a tool for schools to use on evaluating the quality and inclusivity of educational experiences (Grimes et al., 2007). A team of professionals from the NGO, Ministry of Education, and local advisors collected data in individual schools alongside the teachers, to be used in developing action plans. Each day we would meet parents, students and teachers and ask them a series of questions designed to help assess inclusivity, such as – *do you like going to school / does your child / student like going to school? Why – what do you / they enjoy?* Usually the responses would be positive followed by a set of reasons which started to become predictable – *we / they like to learn; we/they play with their friends;* etc. One morning, in the south of the country, near the border with Cambodia we visited a large primary school. Relatively few parents came to meet us as they were in the fields or selling goods at the local market, but a number of grandparents came, which was unusual. On this occasion, when we asked the question *'Why do your children like coming to school'*, one grandmother replied *'Well, it's better than catching frogs'*. At first I was not sure my translator had

made the correct interpretation, but on further investigation, it was clarified – as far as this participant in our group discussion was concerned, it was obvious why children liked going to school: if they didn't they would be sent out into the fields to catch frogs to sell in the local market. Therefore, the children liked coming to school because it was better than catching frogs.

This was a critical incident (Tripp, 1993) in my research in that it forced me to re-conceptualise the impact of local culture and context on the way in which local participants interpreted what were, to me, key theoretical positions. In this incident, what I had constructed as a relatively simple question and answer was locally re-interpreted to produce a perspective I could not have predicted. This experience and others similar, echoed Alexander's stark reminder to all of us who wish to study in other cultures and countries, that nobody should do so 'without being acutely aware of how little, despite their best endeavours, they end up knowing' (Alexander, 2001a, p3).

## **Research Questions**

During the course of my engagement with schools in India, Laos and Thailand, I came to understand that the theories regarding the development of inclusive schools which I had used to construct my position as a consultant would need to be re-constructed in the light of local cultures and contexts. This thesis aims then, to address the following questions:

1. How can, I (the author) theorize and understand the development of inclusive schools in countries of the South?
2. What difficulties will I face as a consultant / action researcher in supporting such theorising and development?
3. How can the issues addressed in Research Questions 1 and 2 be investigated?

I use the term 'countries of the south' because of the increasing frequency of its use within scholarly discourse (Miles and Singal, 2010, p2) in relation to countries which might previously have been termed as 'developing' or economically poor, and which tend to be in the geographical south. Although my research was focused on Lao PDR and Thailand, I believe that the findings of my research contribute to the understanding of how schools in economically poor areas of the world develop more inclusive practices.

The development of my approach to data collection in this field was rooted in several significant experiences, both academic and professional, during the period 1990 – 2002. I would like to briefly recount these, identifying the epistemologies which constructed the way in which I positioned myself as a researcher and consultant.

## **Constructing My Approach**

Between 1990 and 1996 I worked on a MA thesis by independent study (Grimes, 1996), which focused on an exploration of some of the issues around communication between teachers and learners in primary schools. The thesis used 'Circle Work', (a way of working with students which involves all members of a class, adults and students, sitting together in a circle to talk and reflect), as a vehicle to explore the argument that all learners need reflective space in which to work through issues which arise during the course of time in school. Learners in this sense referred to all members of the school community. Much of my thinking at this time was influenced by writers such as Rogers (Rogers, 1969, 1983) and the idea that teaching involved the facilitation of learning, rather than perhaps more traditional notions of transmission of knowledge. This led to the adoption of person-centred approaches to my work with schools and data collection based on ethnographic methods, which I explore in more detail in Chapter Three.

During the period in which I was researching and writing my MA thesis, I was working as a Specialist Advisory Teacher for Disability in East London, UK. I became involved in attempts to place disabled children in mainstream educational settings and began to engage with theories based around the social model of disability (e.g. Rieser and Mason, 1992). At the time, this was described as integration, in that professionals were 'integrating' disabled students into mainstream settings, the rationale being that placing them in segregated settings was in itself an act of disablement. My role was to coordinate communication between schools, health services and families in order that very young children identified as having physical or cognitive challenges would be offered places in mainstream schools. The previous practice had meant that health services tended to direct parents towards admissions into segregated special schools. I worked directly with families alongside a pre-school service to offer educational support at home. Once children were admitted into mainstream primary schools I assumed the role of an advisory teacher, working with the school and family to try and ensure that the child was 'integrated' fully into the school setting.



My experience of 'integration' was that it did not achieve some of the higher ideals associated with it, such as those identified by Booth (Booth, 1988) who argued that integration in this sense should be centred on linking changes in school policy and practice with social reform (Ainscow et al., 2006, p13). In order for disabled students to succeed in mainstream schools, more was required than placement and providing students with an individualised curriculum. UK integration practice during this period was referred to as 'dump and hope' (Buckley, 1993, p3) because, although students with disabilities were being placed in mainstream schools, there often appeared to be little support for them.

I understand now that much of my practice then had its roots in the medical model of disability. The thinking was that if we could identify the problems that children were experiencing in learning, for example, we could more fully 'integrate' them into mainstream settings by providing them with a different curriculum which responded to their difficulties. This seemed the correct approach at the time, because it focused on the students 'individual needs'. I worked with schools, encouraging them to develop 'Individual Needs' policies rather than 'Special Educational Needs' policies.

Whilst there were examples of the positive impact this could have on the lives of some students, I believe that as professionals, my colleagues and I did little to change the culture of the schools these students attended. Where placements were successful, students achieved in learning despite the inherently disabling nature of the educational environment. Integration, as a concept, seemed to encourage schools to focus on the child as an individual but not to analyse the systems in the schools in a unified way and to identify barriers to learning, participation and achievement for all children. The early 1990s, in my experience, was a time when schools still believed there were 'normal' children who received the 'normal' curriculum and there were a minority of 'other' children who needed something different. This idea is reflected in the first Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfEE, 1993) which was the UK government's first major policy directive in the area of SEN since the 1981 Education Act (DES, 1981).

Working with schools during this period, I became increasingly aware that, despite good intentions, 'integration' was not working for many children. Schools were not addressing the issues of developing curriculum and learning environments that met the needs of all children. Much of my work in schools seemed to be taken up by meetings where professionals and parents debated how much adult support a child should be receiving. These meetings were opportunities for discussion and sharing of the experiences that a single student was having in the school and yet I often felt that very little had been achieved. It was at this point in my career, in 1993, that I had the good fortune to train with

Gerda Hanko (Hanko, 1995, Hanko, 1999), a consultant and teacher trainer. This was, I now believe, a pivotal point in the development of my thinking on inclusive and reflective practice.

Hanko's starting point was a consideration of the role of the advisor or consultant in supporting schools to meet the needs of all students, but particularly those who had what she described as exceptional individual needs (Hanko, 1999). Hanko believed that advisors had, partly as a result of Special Educational Needs legislation (DfEE, 1993), become constructed as experts, whom schools expected to provide answers and solutions. This was an unhelpful position to assume since she believed that only through collaboration and sharing of information and possible ways forward, by all those involved in any particular case (including teachers, students and parents), could solutions be formulated. Hanko argued that advisors tended to ask 'closed' questions which were phrased so that they provided specific answers based on the advisors perspective of the problem. Her thesis was that the role of the advisor was to facilitate a collaborative problem solving process by asking 'answerable questions' which would encourage the group to develop their own educational answers. Hanko's work enabled me to shift the construction of my own role, so that rather than advising or directing schools, I began to ask questions which would 'empower and lead people to find their own way forward drawing from their own resources, knowledge and experiences' (Newton and Wilson, 2010, p2). This marked a realisation that the main focus should not only be on the student, but on initiatives which support staff development (Hanko, 1995).

Central to this work was my own developing understanding of the importance of collaborative working practices. I began to realise that in order to change and develop classroom practice and also initiate institutional development, teachers, in conjunction with other significant adults in and around the school community, needed to work together to examine classroom practice and identify possible ways forward.

This has had a considerable impact on the epistemological approach underpinning this thesis. My view of the way in which participants in social settings construct and understand their actions, began to reflect a social constructivist paradigm, which in turn influenced the development of a methodology reflecting this, based on ethnographic principles, where the researcher portrays

'...people as constructing the social world, both through their interpretations of it and through actions based on those interpretations. Furthermore, those interpretations sometimes reflect different cultures, so that there is a sense in which through their actions, people create different social worlds.' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p10)

I explore this in more detail in Chapter Three.

Reviewing my work during this period, it seems clear that a common thread running through my academic research and professional practice was collaboration, problem solving and problem setting through reflective practice (Schon, 1983). The concept of reflection and reflexivity can be traced back as far as Aristotle's argument that, thinking about the development of society is central to the human condition (Guthrie, 1981). As I began to piece together the pathways that have led to this piece of research, I understood that reflection in the context of my own professional development and also as a core component of the way in which I worked with others, was a fundamental cornerstone of my thinking. As such it has had a significant influence on the way in which I have approached and conducted my research, from the design of the questions to the action of the research itself. In Chapter Two, I discuss theories in the field which have contributed to the development of my thinking.

From 1996 – 2003 I worked as Inclusion Manager in a primary school in Tower Hamlets, London. In 1999 / 2000, the school was invited to join two educational projects, both of which used the newly published 'Index for Inclusion' as a framework for developing more inclusive practices in schools. My role required me to work alongside the head teacher in leading both projects within the school. These projects provided me with the opportunity to work on whole school development within an inclusive framework, from the perspective of an 'insider'. This was invaluable in that I was exposed to new ideas and ways of working, but, crucially, I began to develop a better understanding of how schools could engage with project work and outsider consultants to develop more inclusive practices. The engagement with the two projects provided a continuum of different approaches to working with staff in schools. Some of these approaches provided a model I was later to adopt and adapt in the work described in this thesis.

## **'Reaching out to all Learners' (ROAL)**

The UNESCO project 'Reaching out to all Learners' was a development of a teacher education project initially funded and developed by UNESCO, beginning in 1988 and originally titled 'Special Needs in the Classroom' (Ainscow, 1994, 2004, p26). The project aimed to develop a set of materials which would support teachers and schools to

...'facilitate improvements with respect to meeting special needs in ordinary school(s)' (ibid).

The history of the way in which the project developed over time, mirrors the progression of thinking away from the concept of special educational needs and deficit models of student difficulty and low

achievement located within individual children, to one of inclusive education and the notion that changes to educational systems and organisations can be of benefit to all children in schools, because of the emphasis, amongst other things, on a more flexible approach to curriculum and classroom practice (ibid). I joined the project as a participant and later in 2003, became a project co-ordinator as the project was introduced to new cohorts of schools in both Tower Hamlets, London and, in 2005, in Kent, where I had moved to work at Canterbury Christ Church University.

The ROAL project enabled me to make crucial links between different elements of theory I had been engaging with over the previous ten years. In terms of inclusion I began to understand that developing inclusive practice meant identifying and then working to remove 'barriers to participation and achievement' (Booth and Ainscow, 1999, 2002). The project gave me a new language with which I could begin to articulate some of my dissatisfaction with the inherent tensions in the integrationist approach which many schools still had to work through. The dominant discourse which prevailed through the 1990s and upon which my school's practices were built was centred on 'individual learning characteristics' (Ainscow, 1994, 2004, p29); although we characterized these as individual needs, educational difficulties were essentially understood in terms of individual pupil characteristics. Therefore, the school was still caught in a deficit model when we tried to respond to pupil difference.

Through the engagement with the Index for inclusion, a school review framework, the project created a way of applying the principles of the social model of disability to school development. It also introduced a very specific method of thinking about the ways in which teachers develop their practice in classrooms. The assumption was

'that the development of practice occurs through a largely 'trial and error' process within which teachers extend their repertoires as a result of finding out what works for them. Their previous experience as students themselves may be very influential in shaping this developmental process, in addition to their observations of other practitioners - including those who lecture to them in teacher education contexts. In this way teachers create their own individual theories of teaching that guide their day-to-day practice. Such theories are largely unarticulated. They take the form of practical knowledge that has been created through what seems to be a mainly intuitive process of learning from experience' (Ainscow, 1999, p75)

This view of teacher development, led to the project trying to find ways to support and encourage teachers, to improve the ways in which they learnt from practice through reflective processes. This reflection was twinned with an emphasis on the importance of collaboration. Dialogue through discussion, observation of and with significant other members of the school community, was seen as a way in which to explore 'alternative perspectives that can help individuals interpret their experiences in new ways, not least by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions that may be influential in guiding their practices' (Ainscow, 1999, p76-77). The significance of this is that two key processes were seen

to be central to teacher development: reflection and collaboration. These ideas in conjunction with the project's overarching aim of developing more inclusive practices in schools, seemed to draw together key theoretical strands that had been informing my professional and academic development.

## **Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools**

The second project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's teaching and Learning Research Programme. A network was established involving researchers from three Universities, each working with schools from a different Local Authority, entitled 'Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools'. The aim of the researchers was:

'... to understand how, and how far, those schools set about developing inclusive practices, particularly in the context of a national policy environment that seemed indifferent if not downright hostile towards such development.' (Ainscow et al., 2006, p5)

The basis of our work in school was, again, through the use of the 'Index for Inclusion' (Booth and Ainscow, 1999, 2002) and as with ROAL, we were working as part of a network of schools within the Local Authority. This re-enforced my learning from the Reaching Out to all Learners project in two distinctly different ways. From a theoretical perspective, it supported the development of my understanding of the complex nature of inclusive school improvement, and enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which theories around identifying and removing barriers to participation could be applied to practice. From a practical perspective this project reinforced the importance of the processes of reflection and collaboration that were central to the ROAL project, but were not supported structurally through the ESRC project.

The two groups of schools – one set with ROAL and one set with the ESRC funded project, did not overlap, apart from my school which was the only one which was part of both projects. I noted that there was a marked difference between the developments of the schools within the different projects. The schools in ROAL had been engaged in a series of structured collaborative activities designed to enable a variety of reflective experiences, linking school based initiatives with project based activity. This had led to deep seated changes in the development of practice and also policy and school culture in the project schools. The schools in the ESRC project, by contrast, had not had the same 'project' experience and were, for the most part, working on applying the Index for Inclusion processes on their own without structured support for reflection and collaboration. My impression was that the 'changes' in practice within this second group of schools, were superficial and did not lead to deep rooted developments in policy or school culture. This led me to understand that not only the content of the

projects, but also the role of the project leaders as 'consultants' or 'critical friends', may be crucial to affecting changes in practice.

In 2003, I began working with schools in India, Thailand and Lao PDR<sup>i</sup>, as an educational consultant. . Reflecting back over the period of my professional development before I began to engage in consultancy work in international, cross cultural contexts, I started to formulate key values and beliefs that informed the way in which I approached working with these new schools which I set out below.

### **Key Values and Beliefs 2003**

Inclusive values should be at the heart of school development processes, based on the idea that every child has the right to participate, enjoy and achieve in their local mainstream school.

Practice in schools often develops as teachers identify what is working for them and is often not clearly articulated. In order to develop new ways of engaging students and to try and be more inclusive, teachers need to be supported in reflecting on different aspects of their practices in a variety of ways which enable them to examine themselves from different perspectives.

For this to be successful teachers need to work collaboratively with each other and other members of the school community in order to find new ways of evolving classroom practice.

These elements need to be combined in such a way that teachers and schools are facilitated in developing understanding for themselves rather than trying to impose an externally generated set of theories or policies.

These key values evolved into the theoretical framework which I developed through my engagement with wider research in the field and present at the end of the next Chapter of this thesis.

### **Chapter Structure**

In Chapter Two, I review research and policy relevant to the development of inclusive schools and present a typology which provided a theoretical framework for my research in Phase 1. The international work which forms the basis for this thesis covered the years 2003 – 2009 and Chapter Three sets out my initial approach to data collection. In Chapter Four (see Appendix One for a timeline of my research), I draw on my experiences in Thailand and Laos as I aimed to explore my

research questions, within the contexts in which I was working. I also used a typology of Inclusive schools, described in Chapter Two, as a framework for exploring my research questions.

The result of my experience as a researcher and consultant during this first phase of research led me to the identification of emerging tensions within my initial theoretical framework as I began to apply it. This necessitated a re-consideration of both my methodological approach and the theoretical basis for the study of inclusive school development in the contexts within which I was working. My research was re-designed as Phase 2, with a focus on a case study of a primary school in Laos including a description of what happened when the staff of this school went to visit the school I had been working with in Thailand. This enabled me to examine some of the tensions, challenges and opportunities through a close up lens.

The second half of the thesis relates to Phase 2 of my research, with a second literature review, Chapter Five, which examines the international context for inclusive school development and cultural issues affecting the application of western theory to inclusive school development. This concludes with a re-conceptualised theoretical framework. Chapter Six re-appraises my research questions and research approach in the light of the experience of Phase 1 with an emphasis on understanding my own role in research for educational change and the ways in which I had to develop my methodological approaches for the collection of data in the case study school. In Chapter Seven, I present the case study, followed in Chapter Eight by an analysis and discussion of the emerging themes and issues.

## Chapter Two: How Can Schools Become More Inclusive?

At the beginning of my research process, whilst I was aware of the importance of schools developing their own practice in relation to local context and culture, I was not experienced in working in other cultures, particularly those contexts formerly referred to as developing countries, from economically poorer regions of the world. Therefore the literature review in this thesis takes two parts. This initial literature review is structured around three sections with the aim of exploring certain theoretical aspects of my first research question:

*How can, I (the author) theorize and understand the development of inclusive schools in countries of the South?*

These three sections are: One - Inclusion; Two - What schools can do to become more inclusive; and Three - How can schools can be supported to change and develop more inclusively? This will be followed by chapters on methodology, and a presentation and discussion of my data collection from Phase One and the finding that I needed to explore some of the theories relating to the development of inclusive schools in international and local country contexts in more detail. This will then be discussed in a second literature review, preceding the final case study and informing the subsequent discussion.

Although the research project reported in this thesis is examining school contexts in South East Asia, the dominant theories on inclusive education can be broadly categorised as western, in that they have tended to have been developed by researchers based in Europe, US, Canada and Australia, (e.g. Ainscow, 1999, Booth, 1995, Allan and Slee, 2008, Florian and Rouse, 2001, Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004, Barton, 1997). Therefore the first section of this chapter will briefly consider the construction of inclusion as a paradigm, drawing on literature relating to the way in which it has developed multiple meanings over the last 20 years. The second section will build on the first, by examining research on what schools 'can do to become more inclusive' (Dyson et al., 2002, p1). And go on to examine some of the ways in which schools can be supported to change and develop more inclusively. The chapter concludes with a third section, summarising the findings, in the form of an inclusive school development typology which I used in the first stages of my research to inform my data collection and initial analysis.

At the outset of my research I was focusing on a definition of inclusive schooling which was related to School Improvement and Reform (Allan and Slee, 2008). Allan and Slee note the fundamental importance of researchers in inclusive education stating 'where they are coming from' (ibid, p1). As described in the introduction, my professional experience of working with disabled students and the



'integration' agenda during the 1990s had a significant impact on the development of my thinking. However, by 2002, when I began to plan the research which became the basis of this thesis, I had been influenced by my school's involvement in two projects briefly described in Chapter One. These both occurred during the same period 1999-2002: *Reaching Out to All Learners*, (Ainscow, 1994, 2004, UNESCO, 2004); *'Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools'* (Ainscow et al., 2006). A central premise of both projects was that for schools to begin to identify ways in which they could develop more inclusive policy and practice, the staff would need to pay attention to the fundamental role of school culture and the development of an ethos based on inclusive values. This idea was articulated in the *'Index for Inclusion'* (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) which provided the framework for both projects:

'At times too little attention has been given to the potential for school cultures to support or undermine developments in teaching and learning. Yet they are at the heart of school improvement ... It is through inclusive school cultures that changes in policies and practices can be sustained by new staff and students' (Ibid, p8)

I will discuss some of the important aspects of both projects in this chapter, Section Three entitled 'how schools can be supported to change and develop more inclusively?' This idea builds on the notion that local culture, context and conditions (Ainscow, 1999, p2) have a significant impact on the way in which individual schools may interpret or engage with practice, particularly practice and theory which they are introduced to through agencies external to the school (Fuller and Clarke, 1994). Fuller and Clarke refer to the product of this process as 'socially constructed meanings' (1994, p119) and differentiate between these 'universal remedies' which national policies often assume to 'hold constant meaning in the eyes of teachers and children across diverse cultural settings' (ibid). The significance of this view has grown in tandem with my developing understanding of the complexities of working with schools in South East Asia.

## **Inclusion**

In order to understand the way in which theories concerning inclusive schools have developed, it is important to clearly establish the definition of inclusion or inclusive education (two terms which I believe are used interchangeably) that informed this study.

Researchers have identified different typologies of inclusion which help researchers to construct frameworks which clarify differing perspectives. Both Corbett (2001, p9) and Slee (2004, p62) have noted that the term inclusion has come to be interpreted in a range of different ways, which has contributed to a lack of clarity. Clough and Corbett note that it is possible to argue that there is a 'historical sequence' to notions of inclusion (Clough and Corbett, 2000, p.xi). Although it began with 'a

psychological model dominating debates on special education' (ibid, p xi), other models began to have an impact on definitions, prompting further debate and problematising. These writers identify a typology of five perspectives on inclusion including: the psycho-social model emphasising a deficit, medical approach implying the need for special educational arrangements; a sociological response to the above, critiquing this and emphasising the social construction of special educational needs; curricular approaches which highlight the function of curriculum in meeting or creating educational difficulties; school improvement strategies which focus on school systems and organisation in relation to an ideal of comprehensive education; Disability studies critique which build on sociological responses to the psycho-medical model by politically analysing its exclusionary impact on individuals and communities (ibid, p8-9). Clough and Corbett argue that there is a complex and dynamic relationship between these perspectives and that it would be simplistic to argue that any one of them was particularly dominant at any given time. Farrell (2000, p154) notes that as perspectives and definitions of inclusion develop, it is important to ensure that meeting the needs of children, and particularly those with disabilities, are not forgotten. Theories of inclusion, then, draw from a wide range of disciplines and attempt to pull together a number of critical perspectives on how all children can best be educated.

This typology was further developed by (Ainscow et al., 2006, p15)) into one with six different ways of constructing inclusion. The first five of these included being concerned with disability and special educational needs; responding to disciplinary exclusion; responding to all those categorised as being particularly vulnerable to experiencing exclusionary barriers to participation and achievement; promoting a concept of a truly comprehensive school for all students to attend; being seen as part of the international 'Education for All' movement by aiming to address inequalities in education globally. These authors note that these first five definitions or ways of thinking, are constructed by 'different people in different contexts' (ibid, p22) and that often those who develop or create such definitions advocate that they should be adopted or applied more universally. They argue that it might not be possible to undertake research into the ways in which schools are trying to develop Inclusive practices without first being clear how inclusion might be supported or undermined. Therefore, they articulate as, a common starting point

'... a view of inclusion which involved a broad articulation of the values to which we saw ourselves as committed and which inclusive practices, we believed, should attempt to embody' (ibid, p23)

Their sixth definition of inclusion was to construct it as 'a principled approach to education and society' (ibid, p22) which demands transparency about the values and beliefs which underpin 'actions, practices and policies and learning how to better relate our actions to inclusive values' (ibid, p23). The values that Ainscow, Booth et al identified were 'concerned with equity, participation, community,

compassion, respect for diversity, sustainability and entitlement' (ibid, p23), although they acknowledge that their list of values is continually developing and evolving. They cite other values which were not included in their original list such as honesty, freedom, achievement and spirituality and question whether it is possible that these values are linked to others already identified. In this sense their work is a stimulus to others to consider the importance of particular values and to reflect on the way in which actions in schools are informed by inclusive values. Howes et al (2009) also note that different understandings of the word are prevalent in different countries. This position is significant in the context of the research approach described in this thesis.

The above typologies and perspectives give an indication of the way in which use of the term inclusion developed away from a focus on disability and towards a broader view encompassing not only the notion of values but also international responses to inequality and lack of quality in education around the world. The context of Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) and the impact it has on policy makers and development agencies is important to acknowledge. However it should be noted here that internationally the concept of inclusion is becoming increasingly linked with both ensuring that children are enrolled in school and that the quality of education provided in school is good enough to meet all their needs.

## **What can schools do to become more inclusive?**

Whilst defining inclusion is important, understanding how to move towards more inclusive schools is significant in that it underpins the practical work which can take place in educational settings to enable all children to participate and achieve. An important starting point for my initial literature review was the review conducted by the Inclusive Education Review group for the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI), 'A Systematic review of the effectiveness of school-level actions for promoting participation by all students' (Dyson et al., 2002). The aim of the review was to identify and evaluate

'the empirical evidence around the question of what schools can do to become more inclusive, in the particular sense of maximising the participation of all students in their culture, curricula and communities.' (ibid, p1)

In order to engage with my first research question, I needed to explore the basis of my own applied theorising. As someone exploring the inclusive development of schools in cultures other than my own it was important to try and be as clear as possible about the empirical basis for the theoretical constructs that informed my own position. The review initially identified 325 reports which were likely

to meet the criteria set on the basis of their title or abstract. 27 of these were finally included in the review but the team identified six reports:

‘... judged to be key in terms of their methodological quality and centrality to the review question. These six went on to form the basis of the findings and recommendations [in the final report]’ (ibid p3)

The conclusions of the report were that whilst the empirical evidence about the relationship between school action and student participation was limited, there were some significant conclusions to be drawn. These conclusions became a starting point for the development of my own theoretical framework around the development of inclusive schools. I have taken Dyson et al’s summary of findings and expanded upon them so that this section will examine inclusive school culture generally and then focus in more depth on shared values, teaching and learning, pedagogy and collaboration. I will then examine the fields of inclusive leadership, working with parents and community and the importance of local and national policy context.

### **Inclusive Cultures**

The term ‘culture’ has been noted as being one of the more complex words in the English language, in terms of its meaning and the way in which it can be interpreted. (Eagleton, 2000, p1). ‘Culture ... can be seen to be concerned with ‘questions of freedom and determinism, agency and endurance, change and identity, the given and the created’ (ibid, p2). This is of significance as it indicates that culture must be seen as fluid and developing, affected by many different factors. This definition also indicates that the notion of culture is complex – in terms of school cultures, it reflects the idea that schools are socio-political communities and that any study of school culture needs to acknowledge questions concerning which activities are undertaken and why; the ways in which certain ideas and approaches to activity dominate, and the way in which cultural activity is subject to shifts and changes. Within this thesis, the term ‘culture’ is used in relation to both national and local culture and context, and also in relation to school cultures. In this chapter, my discussion relates explicitly to school culture.

School culture is widely referred to in both school improvement literature (e.g. Hopkins, 2007, Muijs et al., 2005, Hargreaves, 1997, MacGilchrist et al., 2004, Angelides and Ainscow, 2000) and research on the development of inclusive schools (e.g. Ainscow, 1999, Corbett, 2001, Kugelmass, 2004). However, it is noted that it can be problematic as a concept (Muijs et al., 2005, p100), partly because of different interpretations. For example, school ethos and culture have tended to be used interchangeably within research in the field (Hargreaves, 1995). Hargreaves identifies different ways in which school culture can be understood (1995). For example, an anthropological definition of

culture might be interpreted 'as the knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, morals, rituals, symbols and language of a group' (ibid, p.25). This view of culture within a school is helpful, in that it acknowledges that culture as a concept is more complex than just being about the 'ethos' of the school, which tends to describe the 'general atmosphere and tone of a school' (ibid, p25). Hargreaves also argues that it is through school culture that teachers can begin to understand what they do and how they relate to their school environment. He links this to what he notes as 'a problem solving function' (ibid, p25) and argues that by exploring school culture over time it becomes possible to examine school development in such a way that researchers are able to develop an in depth understanding of what schools mean when they describe their work as 'the way we do things round here' (Balshaw et al., 2005, p324, Hargreaves, 1995, p25). Nias also describes schools as organisations which are constructed by their members or participants (Nias, 1989, p145) and identifies the importance of recognising not only that there may be more than one culture in a school (Angelides and Ainscow, 2000, p147), but there is likely to be a dominant one and that this will be 'the most pervasive influence operating within a school upon its members' (Nias, 1989, p145). This has in turn an impact on the way in which schools' capacity for change, continuity and development can be viewed.

Angelides and Ainscow (2000, p149), focus on an approach to school culture building on the work of Hargreaves and Nias, whereby they focus on critical incidents (Tripp, 1993), which they describe as 'surprises followed by reflection or, even, problems followed by solutions' (Angelides and Ainscow, 2000, p149). Through reflection, analysis and problem solving based on these surprises or interruptions (Ainscow, 1999, p36-40), schools can examine aspects of school culture in such a way that 'might help to support improvement efforts' (Angelides and Ainscow, 2000, p149).

One conclusion which can be surmised from these perspectives on school culture is that making sense of it is problematic for researchers. A number of different rules, rituals, customs and traditions tend to be part of accepted practice within an institution and therefore the notion of school culture enables researchers to conceptualise and make sense of a range of theoretical perspectives and assumptions about the way in which schools work with and around these in order to develop. However, the complexity of the range of features of school culture and the way in which they become embedded in a school's past and ongoing development make systematic analysis problematic, particularly for anyone who is concerned with working with schools in order to support change and development.

### Shared Values

Dyson et al (2002) found from their review, described above, that 'some schools have what can be described as an inclusive culture which is partly based on shared values which reflect 'respect for difference and a commitment to offering all students access to learning opportunities' (ibid p4). In these schools there may also be high levels of staff engagement in collaborative activity and also in collaborative problem solving approaches. Aspects of the culture in these schools can be seen as inherently participatory. For example, organisational systems in the school support in-class support as opposed to segregationary provision; there are 'constructivist approaches to teaching and learning ... which could be regarded as participatory by definition' (ibid p4). This aspect of shared values reflects a person centred approach and can be linked to the work of Fielding (2006) who does not use the word inclusive, rather applying the term person-centred. His description of a person centred school underpinned by person centred values may have some significance in attempting to understand inclusive school cultures, within the context of this particular study. He argues that what he describes as an intentional and emergent person-centred school is committed to 'wider human purposes' (ibid, p360) and aims to develop current practices or arrangements in order to 'extend the school's basic commitment to the development of a learning community' (ibid, p360). The way in which the school is organised is underpinned by the 'values and aspirations that express its distinctive character' (ibid, p360) and there are a range of formal and informal activities and spaces to ensure that different voices are heard and responded to. The needs of young people are seen as paramount in the school and there is synergy between 'pastoral and academic arrangements'. Fielding also sees continuing professional development as of fundamental importance in the school and argues that in the intentional mode, it is

'...wide ranging in both its processes and its substance. Often collegial, occasionally communal, it is enquiry driven and learning oriented, e.g. encouraging hermeneutic or critical approaches to action research.' (Fielding, 2006, p360)

Fielding goes on to describe a more developed version of the person centred school, and emphasises the importance of developing 'organizational forms that deliberately establish a sense of place, purpose and identity within which emergent, fluid forms of learning are encouraged.' (Fielding, 2006, p360-361). In such schools, he argues, it is likely that there will be 'more participatory, less hierarchical forms of engagement and decision-making' (ibid).

In the context of the current English schools system, Fielding's vision of person centred schools may appear radical but case studies of inclusive schools appear to bear some resemblance to certain aspects described above. Two case studies of schools which partly support this finding are by Kugelmass (2004) and Corbett (2001).

In her study of one Elementary School in the U.S. over eight years, Kugelmass argues that in order for a school to become more inclusive, it is necessary to undergo what she describes as a 'cultural transformation' (Kugelmass, 2004, p12). Adapting a 3 three dimensional model of culture (Hall, 1983), Kugelmass argues that inclusive schooling requires a school to 'support the unique development of each child' (ibid, p12) across three dimensions. The first of these is a 'visible-technical dimension' (ibid, p12) which includes the way a school is organised, technical pedagogy, language used in the school and physical organisation and environment. The second dimension represents 'the values and beliefs' (ibid, p12) which underpin practice within the school. The final, third dimension operates at a deeper 'unconscious and intuitive' level which is implicit and is the foundation which links different aspects of school culture together. Kugelmass cites evidence from her research to illustrate this dimension as being evident in the teachers'

'...deep appreciation for diversity in all aspects of life and an unconditional love of children. ... (Teachers) were attentive and responsive to the needs of others, negative judgements were absent in their language and action. These kinds of caring relationships reflected a capacity for compassion, that is, the ability to appreciate and understand the suffering of others while seeing their complete humanness, devoid of external expectations or judgements.' (ibid, p13)

Kugelmass argues that each of these different dimensions operate at different depths within the school culture and that, of these, the third is the deepest and therefore most sustainable. However, it is also the most deep rooted and difficult to change because it is complex and entrenched. Kugelmass advances the theory that inclusive school cultures are built upon the establishment of compassion and care which she links to a concern for 'social contexts and relationships' (ibid, p13). In her case study, she also emphasises the significance of the school culture in relation to sustaining values in practice (ibid, p101).

Corbett's case study of a primary school in London, England, provides similar insights into the importance of school culture in supporting inclusive schooling (Corbett, 2001). Corbett describes her case study school as one where 'inclusive value systems ... are now embedded in the school culture' (ibid, p2). In this school, the inclusive culture is part of the way in which the school defines itself through policy statements and in its communication with the wider community. Corbett's study found that the inclusive culture of the school could be viewed in a number of ways, all of which underpinned its inclusivity (Ibid, p110-111). These were identified as strategic planning, whereby resources were carefully allocated to enable high levels of staffing and effective use of specialised resources; working problems through cohesive and collaborative working practices, shared vision and shared responsibility; looking outside in and inside out, through 'a culture of self reflection' (ibid, p110) whereby staff are open to developing new skills, and remain open and welcoming to the diverse experiences which children bring into the school;. Corbett argues that the case study school shifts the focus of the school beyond an emphasis on academic achievement to a wider definition of learning

and achievement. The development of a school culture built upon shared values, appears then to be dependent upon a number of important factors but common in both case studies is the growth of a common language (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010, p403) based on existing knowledge (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p17), which allows staff to explore problems and challenges. This aspect will be explored in more detail below under the sub title of 'culture and collaboration'.

### Culture and Teaching and Learning

Corbett makes an important link between the culture of the school and the development of inclusive pedagogy, which she refers to as 'a connective pedagogy' (Corbett, 2001, p115) and is closely linked to Kugelmass's notion of deep rooted inclusive culture (Kugelmass, 2004, p13). This seems to build on the argument by Dyson et al (2002, p4) that aspects of an inclusive school culture are inherently participatory. Corbett's use of the term 'connective pedagogy' is, she argues, designed to 'open our understanding of what we mean by "teaching approaches"' (Corbett, 2001, p115). A connective pedagogy is led by students and demands that teachers respond to what is best for the individuals in the school, rather than being dogmatic or rigid. Interestingly, there is a tension between Corbett's argument here and the implications of Dyson et al's findings. Corbett advocates that 'if a mix of some one-to-one withdrawal work with small group and whole class teaching works best for some learners, then do that' (Corbett, 2001, p115). Whilst Dyson et al's view is that inclusive school cultures are

'likely to be characterised by forms of organisation (such as specialist provision being made in the ordinary classroom rather than by withdrawal) and practice (such as constructivist approaches to teaching and learning) which could be regarded as participatory by definition.' (Dyson et al, 2002, p4).

The issue of specialist provision, teaching outside the main classroom and organisation of support for different learners is one rooted in philosophical debate, much of it located within the fields of disability studies and special educational needs. By arguing that an inclusive school culture enables a school to be open about the range of pedagogical responses to individual needs, Corbett may be making an assumption about the school she has used in her case study. Corbett argues that her case study school is able to respond to diversity by offering a wide range of provision, organised in different ways and that this is achieved without compromising on inclusive values, such as ensuring that all children feel valued and respected. The implication is that where children are for example, withdrawn for one-to-one work or working in a low level ability group, this does not necessarily stigmatise them because of the schools inclusive culture. However, it may also be true that the case study school, as with Kugelmass' case study, is an 'exceptional' school (Ainscow et al., 2004, p3). These are schools which are not typical of either their locality or country. Therefore, it may be necessary to be wary of applying some of the findings of case studies such as these to all schools, as they may not be generally applicable. The findings from these case studies do not necessarily 'tell us what is likely to happen in the majority of schools' (ibid, p4) where there is not such an exceptionally developed inclusive culture.



In this example, it seems likely based on other research evidence that where children are being withdrawn for one-to-one support or working in a low level ability group, it might be expected that they will experience low self esteem and/or low teacher expectations of their level of achievement (Boaler et al., 2000, 637-639).

This notion is re-enforced by Hart et al who argue that the way in which teachers conceptualise student ability can limit students' capacity to achieve. This is partly linked to the power of labelling, whereby once a student is identified as having particular abilities, they remain identified as 'this and only this' (Apple, 2001, p261). These arguments are closely linked to research around inclusion and pedagogy, in the following section.

#### Culture and pedagogy

Hart et al (2007) suggest that current approaches to education in the UK are based on 'determinist beliefs about ability' (Hart et al., 2007, p499). They cite the example of the target setting culture, predominant in English schools and advocated by government (DfES, 2004) as best practice. However, they assert that this practice is based on a set of beliefs which are essentially determinist in that it assumes that:

'current differences between young people ... will persist in future tests and examinations. This belief in turn supposes that current patterns of achievement reflect stable, underlying differences in academic potential.' (Hart et al., 2007, p499)

Researchers advocating the need for an inclusive pedagogy are responding to a belief that where students are experiencing difficulties or challenges in learning, schools and teachers need to acknowledge that this is complex, and dependent on a number of interdependent factors including individual characteristics and social contexts (Lewis and Norwich, 2005 , p4). The case studies gathered by Hart et al (2004) were based on individual teachers working in different phases of education, sharing their practice with researchers over the course of one year. They argued that pedagogical constructs based upon fixed ability teaching, had been replaced in these teachers by what they refer to as 'transformability' (2007, p502). This is based upon the belief that:

'there is the potential for change in current patterns of achievement and response ... as result of what happens in the present, in the daily interactions of teachers and students' (ibid, p502).

These authors advocate three inclusive pedagogical principles which they argue can improve practice in schools for all young people. 'Everybody', whereby teachers have the responsibility to strengthen and transform learning equally and fairly for everybody (ibid, p504-5). This approach depends on a developmental process which reflects individual learning development at the same time as collective learning experiences; this demands that teachers strategies' are 'carefully selected to be accessible to

everybody and to enable the core purposes to be achieved as far as possible by everybody' (ibid, p505). The second principle, 'Co-Agency', builds upon the first principle, whereby teachers practice enlists children, individually and collectively, as active committed partners in the educational process (ibid, p506-7). Hart et al found from their case studies, that the teachers they studied had developed awareness 'that the emphasis on perceived differences in ... ability, and the consequent neglect of other real differences of many kinds, constitute a serious constraint on learning ...' (ibid, p507). These teachers had developed strategies which made specific use of the knowledge they had accumulated about the ways in which the young people they taught learned or preferred to learn, based on 'common learning opportunities ... accessible to everyone' (ibid, p507). The third principle, 'Trust', requires teachers to trust that children will make meaning of relevant and purposeful activity, support each other in their learning and will engage in the learning opportunities created by the teacher, if the conditions are right (ibid p507).

The implications of these arguments are that researchers concerned with trying to understand the development of inclusive schools perhaps need to be examining school culture, at very deep levels. At the heart of Hart et al's view of pedagogy in relation to inclusion, is the communication between young learners and teachers in the classroom, which Alexander describes as 'pedagogy of the spoken word' or dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008, p92-3). He argues that talk 'mediates the cognitive and cultural spaces between ... teacher and learner, between society and the individual ...' ibid, p.92). Understanding the application of inclusive theories of this nature in practice will therefore demand the development for research approaches which engage with dialogic approaches and explore the tensions and challenges of enacting inclusive pedagogy. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 3 'Methodology' where I describe my evolving research design around a partnership of exploration based on dialogic engagement.

### Culture and Collaboration

Research into inclusive school cultures tends to emphasise the importance of a collaborative culture whereby staff work actively together towards common goals (Corbett, 2001, Kugelmass, 2004). Skrtic's work in this area is significant (Skrtic et al., 1996, Skrtic, 1991). He advocates what he describes as an 'adhocracy' or problem solving organisation which is committed to innovation, challenging previously held standardised concepts and beliefs. Dyson and Millward (2000, p24-25) describe the features of Skrtic's adhocracy as being concerned with collaboration between professionals who have a range of expertise; 'mutual adjustment', which involves professionals managing their work together informally as they problem-solve and create new ways forward in their practice; 'discursive coupling' which involves professionals reflecting on practice and developing an

approach to problem solving through collaborative team work which unifies theory and practice; 'personal-political accountability' whereby professionals share aims in common but also develop a 'dialogue between professionals and client groups which acts as a control over professional work' (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p25). This links with Corbett's work, described above, whereby her case study school engaged with a wider vision of the school community than just teachers and students, to include multi agency professionals, families, extended families and local businesses (Corbett, 2001, p25), all of whom were, in one sense, actively mediating and interpreting a series of values and belief systems which fed into the way in which the school developed and re-interpreted its core purposes (ibid, p112). Adhocracy, and discursive coupling, support the development of inclusive practice through the creation of spaces and structures which enable existing assumptions, practices and values to be challenged. This allows staff to consider new possibilities and ways of thinking more inclusively and subsequently the development of new shared values and working practices.

Hanko's work (referred to in Chapter 1) focuses predominantly on the way in which social and emotional factors impact upon learning in schools (Hanko, 1999, Hanko, 1995, Hanko, 2003) and also builds on Ainscow's suggestion that 'teachers know more than they use' (Ainscow, 1999, p2, p54). It is also significant in that it supports researchers trying to understand the way in which inclusive schools evolve, in exploring the significance of collaborative approaches to supporting practice development. Hanko argues that, in relation to the inclusion of children who appear to be 'difficult' (Hanko, 2003, p126) or present behaviour which challenges the norms in the school, teachers will often appear to be lacking in 'confidence in their own competence' (Mittler, 2000, p133) and ability to manage the situation or respond appropriately. This is partly based on what Hanko refers to as 'the myth that only a trained expert can deal with special emotional and social difficulties' Hanko, 2003, p126), but is also a response to the impact in schools in England, of rapid change and a confused political agenda which has resulted in conflicting initiatives on inclusion and raising levels of achievement (Ainscow et al., 2006, p32-33) leaving many teachers feeling overwhelmed by the multiple responsibilities they feel they have. This is also noted in other studies (Travers and Cooper, 1996, Chaplain, 1995, Chaplain, 2008) with teachers often making a link between their own stress levels and their concerns over the behaviour of young people (MacBeath et al., 2005, p30, Cornwall and Walter, 2006, p42-43). Hanko argues that though questioning and discussion, teachers can be enabled to become more aware of what they do already know, particularly in relation to their own experiences of success in responding to challenging behaviour and the importance of deepening their understanding of social and emotional factors which interrelate with learning and behaviour in school (Hanko, 2003, p126). She believes this is significant in developing inclusive cultures in schools, whereby teachers can begin to view themselves as able to respond to the needs of all the young people they teach and quotes a teacher, working in a school-based staff support group:

'I have found that to the extent to which one becomes effective with one's most difficult children, to that extent one is also a better teacher with the whole class.' (Hanko, 2003, p125)

Hanko advocates the development of inclusive learning environments in schools through teachers working together, with support from others in a collaborative problem solving approach (Hanko, 1999, p9). Hanko identifies the theoretical principles behind this approach as being based on group consultation, citing the work of Balint (1956, in Hanko, 1999, p9) and Caplan (1970, in Hanko, 1999, p9). Teachers are supported in a variety of ways, including 'engaging colleagues in ... joint problem solving or ... helping teachers to develop their responses to specific problems' (ibid, p9). The framework for problem solving provided by Hanko, places outsider 'specialists' in the same role as 'insider' teachers – all are enabled to explore problems together without reliance on outside 'specialists' or 'experts' to provide solutions. This links with some important aspects of the inclusive school culture, in that staff work together towards a common set of aims, underpinned by a set of values – in this case equality amongst staff and confidence in their own abilities to teach all the young people in their care. It also re-enforces a notion implicit in much of the research on inclusive schools which is that 'schools are far from homogenous' (Howes et al., 2009, p37): they are independent of each other and therefore, development and change processes within an individual school will depend upon a number of critical factors, including the individual teachers, their beliefs and values and the way in which they respond to formal and non-formal learning processes (Knight, 2002, Hoban, 2002).

### **Inclusive Leaders**

Dyson et al's review argued that a school with an inclusive culture is likely to have a leader or leaders who are committed to inclusive values (2002) and there may also be evidence of aspects of distributed forms of leadership in the sense that range of different individuals may share and participate in various leadership functions. Fielding (2006, p364-5) offers five points in relation to leadership and management in the context of his vision of a person centred school, which expand on the above argument and also link to research in inclusive schools, already referred to. The first of these is 'integrity of means and ends' which addresses the need to develop ways of engaging with the school community which are 'reciprocal, emergent and inclusive' (ibid, p364). He argues that this necessitates developing new discourses which allow language to illustrate clearly what is valued and also what is opposed. This must be done in collaboration 'with others who share our values and our aspirations' (ibid, p364). This points links to features of Corbett's and Kugelmass' case study schools and the way in which they built links with the local communities and tried to build collaborative working partnerships both within and without the school, based on the development of a set of shared values, described elsewhere in this chapter. The second point is 'permanent provisionality' which requires the patient, purposeful fostering of 'dialogue, collective reflection and ... [the development of] discursive and dialogic spaces' for members of the school community to engage with' (ibid, p364). This is a feature of much of the research on inclusive schools and highlights the significance of the

development of cultures which enable space for dialogue and reflective practice. Fielding stresses the importance of acknowledging the 'more subtle and enduring person centred orientations of collegiality, ambiguity and openness' (ibid, p364). The third point for leadership in the person centred school is 'radical collegiality' which Fielding illustrates with reference to what he describes as the 'new wave student voice movement' (ibid, p364) whereby teachers work and learn together in partnership with students. This requires schools both to work through hierarchical issues of power in an exploratory, open and tolerant way, always trying to acknowledge the 'ambiguity and unpredictability' of the process' (ibid, p365). Hart et al's principle of co-agency is reflected in this argument, and emphasises the significance of school leaders who actively promote and enable partnership learning. It also implies that school leaders, who have this approach to leadership and school development, will also be more likely to be aware of the developmental process which is taking place, and which is closely aligned to action-research oriented enquiry in schools which will be ongoing and embedded in the school culture.

Fielding's fourth point is 'narrative, a sense of sustainable self and the emergence of democratic public spaces' (ibid, p365). In this, he addresses questions raised by Sennett (1998, p.27, in Fielding, 2006, p365) concerned with the durability of human relationships with one another and the development of a sense of self through 'a narrative of identity and life history' (ibid, p365). Here Fielding identifies ways forward for school leadership and management in the person centred school, through the development of dialogic spaces for 'mutually supportive engagement, companionship and enquiry' (ibid, p365). He argues that these can be formal, through critical friend relationships and the use of action learning sets and also informal, through continuities of relationship and encounter' (ibid, p365). These spaces can be supplemented by the development of narrative opportunities whereby the young people in the person centred school can lead dialogue, where young people and staff work together as 'co-enquirers in and co-contributors to understanding how as a community (the school) helps its members to live good lives together' (ibid, p365). Fielding's final point about leadership and management in the person centred school is 'problematizing leadership'. Here he contends that in order to be communal and emancipatory, people centred schools need to question and problematise the way in which leadership and management are understood and construed. This necessitates asking searching and critical questions of leadership functions based on the values of the person centred school (ibid, p366). For example, citing Parker (2002, p218, in Fielding, 2006, p365) he argues that leaders are simply another part of the organisation and may be of greater importance than any others within the person centred school.

Many of the issues raised by Fielding in his five points, resonate with findings from other researchers. For example, it seems likely that in rapidly changing policy contexts, where schools may feel vulnerable (Ainscow, 1999, p114), schools successful in responding to diversity will also need to accept and be able to respond to uncertainty (Leithwood et al., 1999) and to be prepared to explore ambiguity through action research and action learning sets (Durrant and Holden, 2005). Although Fielding critiques Fullan's work (Fielding, 2006, p361-362), his five points build in part on Fullan's components for leadership in times of change, particularly regarding moral purpose, building collaborative working relationships and developing an understanding of new knowledge which is then shared effectively through the school community (Fullan, 2001, Fullan, 2002, p16-21). Riehl's argument that inclusive leaders need to foster new meanings about diversity (Riehl, 2000, p59) re-enforces the notion that knowledge in the person centred school must evolve through collaborative engagement with new challenges and problems. In the case studies by Kugelmass (2003) and Corbett (2001) described above, the role of the head teacher was found to be of fundamental importance in supporting the development of the inclusive school. Leadership, is acknowledged to take different forms in different contexts (Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004, p133), and is often particularly influenced by social context (Fataar, 2009, p316) but is, nevertheless, identified by many researchers as being key in facilitating and enabling change processes which allow schools to become more inclusive (Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004, Riehl, 2000). In Kugelmass' case study, she notes that to many outsiders, the Principal of the school appears as heroic and visionary, 'single-handedly leading teachers out of chaos' (Kugelmass, 2004, p64). It has been noted that the charismatic or heroic leader can be partly responsible for enabling the development of inclusive practices in schools (Ainscow et al., 2004, p3) but also 'that leaders of inclusive schools are not autocrats' (Dyson, 2010, p3) and that they depend on 'a collaborative process of school development' (ibid) which involves other members of staff whom they enable and facilitate. Kugelmass argues that whilst the Principal in her case study school may have been a catalyst for change who provided invaluable support to the staff, focusing entirely on his role as a leader

'...conceals the true story of the school's development (and) ... also fails to explain how teachers were able to sustain commitments to its inclusive culture once he left the school.'  
(2003, p64)

In the case study school, a form of distributive leadership (Oduro, 2004, Spillane and Diamond, 2007) began to emerge whereby decision making was 'shared through dialogue and negotiation within a shared commitment to equity, justice and fairness' (2003, p66). The Principal in this school was also aware that he needed to build 'a critical mass of teachers ... who shared his belief' (ibid, p67). This combination of a Principal with an inclusive ethos, open to sharing power and control within the school with teachers who had a common and shared vision opened the way for what Kugelmass describes as 'collaborative leadership (ibid, p65) to emerge. A similar picture of a leader with a strong inclusive vision and a school with patterns of distributive leadership emerges from Corbett's case study (Corbett, 2001). The inclusive vision of the head teacher is shared by staff (ibid, p110) and there also

appears to be a critical mass of teachers who have been working in the school for many years and are committed to this vision (ibid, p41). Interestingly, the case study school began its inclusive journey under a previous head teacher, who Corbett quotes as saying:

‘Crucial to developing inclusive policies and practices is developing a staff team interested in learning and finding solutions rather than focusing on problems. They need to be superb teachers who believe they have a role in educating the whole child. My first challenge as a head teacher was to draw together enough talented individuals to help build an inclusive staff team and then to ensure we could share a common vision without stifling diversity.’ (ibid, pix)

Corbett’s case study appears to re-enforce the learning which emerges from Kugelmass’ in that leadership of the inclusive school may begin through one individual who brings together a team of like minded teachers. However, through collaboration and the enablement of distributed forms of leadership, staff can take on responsibility for responding to diversity and, in the case of both case study schools, continue to be inclusive, once the original head teacher has moved on.

In applying these findings to the research presented in this thesis, it seemed likely that school leaders of inclusive schools would be strongly committed to an ideal of inclusivity and that this would be something they actively tried to encourage and develop within both the staff and with the local community. They would also be likely to create spaces for discussion and dialogue to take place where different members of the school community could share and shape ideas, values and practices. There would be strong indications of forms of distributed leadership in the school and evidence of a school culture where teachers feel empowered to take creative approaches to the curriculum and their own teaching styles.

### **Links with parents and the community**

Returning to the Dyson et al review (2002), it was noted that inclusive schools will usually have good links with parents and the community (Dyson et al., 2002, p3). This is reflected in both case studies by Corbett and Kugelmass. Corbett argues that inclusive schools respond to the needs of their communities (Corbett, 2001, p35) and describes the way in which teachers in the school ‘link both into community values and into their own internal value systems’ (ibid, p35). Corbett describes how this aspect of the school was not only embedded in school culture but was also then expressed through school systems and structures. She cites the example of the home school link teacher establishing a toy and book library in the school and then developing this into an outreach service, hosted in different parent’s homes in response to the lack of uptake by the local Bangladeshi families (ibid, p35). This reflects a commitment to the enactment of inclusive values at an individual and structural level within the school. Other examples, cited by Corbett included the creation of specific posts which had

responsibility for engaging with the community and monitoring the way in which the school responded to changes in the community (ibid, p45).

Corbett also argues that engaging with community values can sometimes be challenging, when there is a tension between these and the school's inclusive values. The schools' wider community included a range of diverse ethnic groups, including families from rural areas of Bangladesh whose traditional views of gender equality and disability did not always reflect the schools. Corbett cites an example of a teacher challenging 'dominant value systems of gender hierarchy and negative notions of special needs' (ibid, p73) and stresses the importance of the subtle way in which the teacher confronted the situation. This can be interpreted as the enactment of what Corbett refers to as the deep culture of the inclusive school through the establishment and maintenance of inclusive values in the everyday life of the school (ibid, p73).

Kugelmass's case study school is presented as having similarly close links with the local community and parents. One of the examples cited, is the narrative assessment process based on 'understanding and describing each child in great detail' (Kugelmass, 2004, p33) whereby parents / carers met with teachers early in the school year to focus on what should be achieved during the coming 12 months. This builds on the school's values and commitment to the individuality of each student but also acknowledges that in order to enable individual learning to take place effectively, parents and carers must be closely involved, not only to share information but also to contribute to the overview and assessment of each child and their potential to achieve. The significance of this approach is supported by findings from other research. In Australia, Carrington et al (2006) identify valuing and collaborating with parents and the broader community as one of four fundamental principles in building inclusive school communities (Carrington and Robinson, 2006, p327). Research by Black-Hawkins et al (2008) supports this argument, stressing the significance of, not only working with parents and members of the wider community, but also acknowledging that teaching and learning 'takes place within the context of human relationships' (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007, p31). Working closely with parents and community also demands that schools are responsive to the 'emotional lives' (ibid) of the community. Black-Hawkins et al argue that where emotions such as 'fear, humiliation, failure, intolerance and anger, are ignored, then barriers to inclusion and achievement are strengthened' (ibid).

This argument serves to emphasise the complexity of this aspect of inclusivity in schools. It partly reflects Hanko's argument, discussed earlier in this chapter, and the importance of teachers in schools



deepening their understanding of social and emotional factors which impact on the wider school community. For researchers, these arguments point us towards the conclusion that if we want to understand how a school is developing, then we need to look beyond the classroom and also examine the way in which the school engages with and responds to the wider community.

### **The local and national policy environment**

Dyson et al's review (2002) also found that 'the local and national policy environment can act to support or undermine the realisation of schools' inclusive values' (ibid p4). Ainscow et al (2006) present a view of policy context in England between 1997 and 2006 which indicates that there may be a number of competing factors which both support and problematise inclusive development in schools (Ainscow et al., 2006, p28 - 43). They point to a tension between two agendas within the national policy context, which they describe as a 'standards' agenda and an 'inclusion' agenda. One outcome of this tension was that schools found themselves caught in a policy driven initiative to raise levels of attainment. This was supported by the development of national strategies which strongly influenced approaches to teaching and learning in such a way that the primary focus became narrow measures of pupil progress. This was enforced by national inspections regime which graded school success based on pupil progress in national tests. Ainscow et al argue that this approach was, at policy level, detailed, prescriptive and, therefore unavoidable for schools (Ainscow et al., 2006, p42). This contrasts with the espousal of inclusive values through national policy, at the same time, which they describe as 'ambiguous, tentative and contradictory' (ibid). One outcome of this policy tension is that teachers working in contexts where policy does not support the development of inclusive practices, may find that the enactment of the schools' inclusive values can become compromised (Dyson and Millward, 2000, p174). Schools which manage to continue developing inclusive practice within a changing policy context of this kind, will be likely to demonstrate a degree of resistance to pressures which are placed upon them (Ainscow et al, 2006, p43) but will also need to 'interpret the requirements placed upon them in the light of their values, and initiate principled change for themselves' (ibid).

This view of the policy context has implications for researchers in inclusive education. One implication is clear which is that in order to understand the conditions for inclusive development in schools, researchers must also take note of the wider political, cultural and social contexts (Armstrong and Barton, 2008, p16). The second implication, which is perhaps less clear, is that researchers must pay attention to the ways in which teachers think, position and construct themselves as agents of change within contexts which exert a powerful influence. (Howes, 2010, p3). However, researchers must also

acknowledge that in order to make sense of the way in which this occurs, there must be a recognition that teachers are not depersonalised agents, they:

‘... are much more. They are people, not agencies. They have minds and bodies, a past, a future, family, lifestyle.’ (ibid)

Understanding the people who work in and with schools and the complexities of their lives, enables an engagement with factors which incline towards what Dyson (quoted in Allan and Slee, 2008, p35) has described as, ‘the view that inclusiveness is a state of mind or a state of soul ... it’s about people, it’s about thinking.’ Whilst Dyson goes on to argue that one implication of this view of inclusion is that ‘empirical research (is) ... inconsequential ... because it doesn’t actually tell you very much’ (ibid), it is also possible to argue the reverse. Researchers wishing to understand the ways in which teachers and schools develop within changing policy contexts, need to engage with participants in the field in order to understand the way in which their real lives affect their professional identities (Day et al., 2007).

### Summary

The following table summarises the main findings of Western research investigating what schools can do to become more inclusive. Following the lead of the Dyson review (2002), it describes the findings as the Features of Inclusive Schools and links each feature specifically to research which supports this finding.

**Figure 1. Features of Inclusive Schools**

Features of Inclusive Schools	Research Literature which supports this finding
An inclusive culture, including a shared commitment to inclusive values and the development of school processes which support the participation and achievement of all, including evidence of a collaborative approach to problem solving.	Skrtic 1991, 1996; Hanko, 1995, 1999; Ainscow, 1999; Angelides and Ainscow, 2000; Corbett, 2001; Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Dyson et al, 2002; Kugelmass, 2004; Fielding, 2006; Howes et al, 2009
An emphasis on the development of a curriculum for all, which is reflective of student diversity and seeks to minimise and remove barriers to participation and achievement for all pupils.	Corbett, 2001; Dyson et al, 2002; Kugelmass, 2004; Hart et al, 2004; Fielding, 2006;
School leaders who are committed to inclusive	Ainscow, 1999; Riehl, 2000; Corbett, 2001;

values but also forms of collaborative or distributive leadership amongst all members of the school community, reflecting the shared commitment to the development of inclusive practices.	Dyson et al, 2002; Kugelmass, 2004; Fielding, 2006;
A critical mass of staff who are committed to a common vision of inclusion.	Corbett, 2001; Dyson et al, 2002; Kugelmass, 2004;
Partnership work between all stakeholder groups within the school community, including parents, students, staff, local advisors and the wider community.	Corbett, 2001; Dyson et al, 2002; Kugelmass, 2004; Carrington et al, 2006; Carrington and Robinson, 2006; Black-Hawkins et al, 2008
Likely to reflect a national policy context, which is, to some extent, supportive or enabling	Dyson and Milward, 2000; Dyson et al, 2002; Ainscow et al, 2006; Armstrong and Barton, 2008; Howes; 2010;

For the purposes of this thesis, however, I also needed to consider ways in which schools are supported to become more inclusive, as this relates to my role as a consultant working alongside schools. The following review of relevant research will add to my summary of the Features of Inclusive Schools, to create a new typology which I was to use as an initial theoretical framework for my research.

## **How can schools be supported to change and develop more inclusively?**

In this section I briefly examine some of the school support structures and frameworks through which inclusive change and development could be promoted. Two projects which influenced my own work in this field, as noted in the introduction to this thesis and at the beginning of this chapter were: the UNESCO Teacher Education Project 'Special Needs in the Classroom' (Ainscow, 1994, 2004, UNESCO, 2004), which developed into a UK project, based on the original materials, entitled 'Reaching Out to all Learners(ROAL)' (Balshaw et al., 2005); and 'Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools' (Ainscow et al., 2006), a project which undertook research into the way in which the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) was being used by schools in England.

The teacher education project 'Special Needs in the Classroom' began as a UNESCO teacher education initiative concerned with the development of more inclusive forms of schooling, eventually involving research in eight countries, Canada, Chile, India, Jordan, Kenya, Malta, Spain and Zimbabwe. It subsequently led to dissemination activities of various kinds in over fifty countries (Ainscow, 1998, p3). The project also led to the development of a resource pack of materials (UNESCO, 2004) and a book providing guidance and the background to the project (Ainscow, 1994, 2004). The project challenged and rejected notions of educational failure based on individual deficits and also the idea that integration and making additional arrangements or support available for those deemed as having special needs, was an effective way of meeting EFA goals. Instead the concept of restructuring schools and education systems to enable them to become more responsive to all children was articulated through the work of the project team and contributed to the development of the Salamanca Statement (Ainscow, 2004, p 23). Ainscow describes the Salamanca statement and, thus, the work of the UNESCO Teacher Education Project, as representing a

'...paradigm shift in respect to the way we look at educational difficulties. This shift in thinking is based on the belief that methodological and organisational changes made in response to pupils experiencing difficulties can, under certain conditions, benefit all children. Within such a formulation, those pupils who are currently categorised as having special needs come to be recognised as the stimulus that can encourage developments towards a richer overall learning environment.' (Ainscow, 2004, p23)

The project identified in particular two important strategies as being effective in supporting teachers to develop an approach to teaching whereby they were able to understand and use a 'wider curriculum perspective on educational difficulties' (ibid, p83). These were reflective enquiry and collaboration. Both these approaches have significant relevance to the methodology employed in my research and will be explored in Chapter Three of this thesis in some detail in relation to collaborative action research and the way in which I developed methods for interviewing participants. The principles of the project articulated a clear vision of teacher development, arguing that learning is more likely to occur in classrooms and staff rooms where there is active involvement of learners; negotiation of individual and group learning objectives; opportunities for demonstration, practice and feedback; continuous evaluation of learning and support for learners, teachers and leaders. The project combined distinct components to enable the participants to support developments in their schools. This was based on the concept of enquiry, with teachers constructing themselves as researchers investigating aspects of school culture, practice and policy in school; encouraging and enabling reflective practice; collaboration between colleagues in schools and between different schools; facilitating critical challenge and mutual critique (Balshaw and Ainscow, 2000, Appendix Two). One outcome of this process was that the project aimed to support the development of the school's capacity to solve problems.

The process of learning and reflection which the project facilitated was based on a structure which emphasised the importance of starting with people's own experiences. Therefore project activities usually began with individual reflection. This stage then moved onto activities which enabled participants to share ideas in pairs or small groups, then to group sharing with rest of participants. Each activity would then close with a summary / plenary where participants could evaluate outcomes and consider implications for practice in context firstly as a group and then individually, focusing on both personal/individual learning and practice / school based implications (Balshaw and Ainscow, 2000, Appendix Two).

The principles upon which this approach to teacher learning is based, build on theories around teacher development and reflective practice. Reflective teaching has been an accepted notion for many years not only in the UK but also internationally (Pollard et al., 2005, p xxiv). Reflective practice as a modern educational concept has been influenced by the work of Schon (1983) and his theories about the ways in which professionals approach changes in practice, particularly in the sense of reflection linked to action. The process of learning and reflection described above, in the UNESCO project, can be clearly linked to Schon's understanding of the links between reflection and action in the workplace. Where teachers are reflecting on their work before or after an action, he describes this as 'reflection-on-action', whilst reflection which takes place during a lesson, or action, he describes as 'reflection-in-action' (Schon, 1983). The links between these theories and collaborative action research will be explored in the next chapter of this thesis. In the context of this current discussion, it is also necessary to acknowledge that Schon's work has been critiqued and developed by a number of researchers in the field. Schon argues that a reflective practitioner will construct, frame and re-frame problems, challenges and issues through their engagement with the context in which they are working. This will necessitate the consideration of new information, changing circumstances which enable the professional to see issues from different perspectives (ibid). This involves the professional in not only solving problems but also in setting and re-setting the context for the problems. Schon, argues that problems are 'constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling and uncertain ...' (ibid, p40). The complexity of this process is acknowledged by Zeichner and Liston who note that 'practitioners interpret and frame ... their experiences through the repertoires of values, knowledge, theories and practices that they bring to the experiences' (Zeichner and Liston, 1996, p16). This is significant in relation to the aims of the UNESCO project with its focus on the development of more inclusive schools. The importance of school culture and the underlying knowledge and values which accumulate over time and help to shape the development of practice have already been explored in part two of this chapter. However, the reflective practice model proposed by Schon can be extended to acknowledge the importance of 'dialogical activity' (Zeichner and Liston, 1996p 18). The importance of the dialogical aspects of teachers learning (Day, 1993) emphasises the way in which teachers can be supported to share and reflect together as part of their

everyday practice (Zeichner and Liston, 1996) and this can be related to the work of Hanks (1990, 1999) and her work on collaboration and problem solving described in part two. In this sense, collaborative reflective practice can be seen as continually evolving. Within the UNESCO project the role of the project facilitators was to encourage participants to think about the action within their context in such a way that their routine patterns of thinking are 'interrupted' (Ainscow, 2003) enabling them to set and frame problems through different perspectives, generating new and creative solutions and developments in practice.

The significant aspects of theory emerging from the UNESCO project, regarding ways in which schools might be supported to develop more inclusive practices, can be summarised as being concerned with developing an enquiry led approach which facilitated teacher learning through reflective practices and collaboration through a focus on reducing barriers to participation in schools.

The 'Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools' project (Ainscow et al, 2006) built on some of these aspects as it tried to examine in detail the ways in which schools tried to respond to 'barriers to participation created within the English education system' (ibid, p6). The project involved schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in 3 areas of England, working closely with each other and researchers from a local University. The focus on creating 'a common agenda' (ibid, p186) with schools and LEAs enabled researchers to 'gain greater insights into possible avenues for the inclusive development of practice' (ibid, p186). The work of the project in relation to 'principled interruptions' (ibid, p118) develops the idea of interrupting thinking outlined above in relation to the UNESCO project. The collaborative approach to action research involved participants at different levels within the education system: teachers in schools, advisors within the LEA, working alongside University researchers. This collaborative arrangement enabled an engagement with evidence generated through practice based research which the project described as 'evidence stimulated reflection' (ibid, p120). This approach develops the role of the researcher as 'critical friend' (Swaffield, 2002), whereby the research participants in school and the LEA are supported but also challenged by the University researchers. In this case, the researcher supports the school in engaging with evidence generated through action research, which 'can sometimes lead to a reframing of perceived problems that, in turn, draws the teachers attention to overlooked possibilities for addressing barriers to participation and learning' (Ainscow et al., 2006, p120).

The work of Howes et al (2009) in an inclusive collaborative action research project in six secondary schools in England and Wales between 2005 and 2007 developed the notion of the critical friend by

identifying key personnel who could operate as facilitators of the action research in schools. The role of these individuals, in this case Local Authority Educational Psychologists (EPs), was identified as 'central in shaping the extent and quality of teachers engagement' (Howes et al., 2009, p124). Howes et al, describe the use of EPs as 'refreshing the concept of critical friend' (ibid, p151) and argue that it is possible for there to be a number of different approaches to the role, based on individuality and experience, which will work as long as there is a clear focus on creating relationships which 'work for the group concerned. This works well as long as the developing approach remains facilitative of collaboration, ownership and interaction with evidence' (ibid).

It seems, then, that the role of the researcher in supporting an exploration of the development of inclusive practice through collaboration with teachers can be viewed as a combination of different roles including outsider researcher, facilitator of action research processes, project co-ordination combined together through equal emphasis on support and challenge to school participants. The engagement with evidence generated through the research process needs to focus and continually connect with interpretations of inclusive values which may be embedded within the school culture.

## **Initial Theoretical Framework: developing a typology of theory concerning the development of inclusive schools**

As a result of my understanding of the prevalent theories concerning the ways in which the development of inclusive schools in countries of the South can be usefully theorised and understood, at the outset of my research in 2004, I concluded that there are common features of these schools, described above. With the addition of the features of support, described in the summary to Part 3, above, the typology would include:

- An inclusive culture, including a shared commitment to inclusive values and the development of school processes which support the participation and achievement of all, including evidence of a collaborative approach to problem solving.
- An emphasis on the development of a curriculum for all, which is reflective of student diversity and seeks to minimise and remove barriers to participation and achievement for all pupils.
- School leaders who are committed to inclusive values but also forms of collaborative or distributive leadership amongst all members of the school community, reflecting the shared commitment to the development of inclusive practices.
- A critical mass of staff who are committed to a common vision of inclusion.

- Partnership work between all stakeholder groups within the school community, including parents, students, staff, local advisors and the wider community.
- Support for these schools could be enabled through collaborative action research initiatives focusing on inclusive values and removing barriers to participation and achievement, involving school based participants, local advisors and facilitated by researchers / consultants acting as critical friends. The local and national policy contexts might support this process or create barriers to it.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have undertaken a review of research literature exploring the ways in which inclusion can be defined; what schools can do in order to become more inclusive practice and ways in which schools can be supported to change and develop more inclusively. I have used the findings to develop a typology to describe the common features of inclusive schools, incorporating ways in which they might be supported. Chapter Three will present my initial methodology, with a specific focus on research question 3.



## Chapter Three: Developing an Initial Methodology

### Introduction

Chapter Two of this thesis concluded with a summary presenting the key features of inclusive school development according to my analysis of Western research literature. To explore their application in South East Asian contexts, I designed a research project engaging at different levels of the education system: with schools and their teachers; those working in leadership positions within schools, and policy makers.

This chapter is primarily concerned with research question 3 (*How can the issues addressed in Research Questions 1 and 2 be investigated?*) and the challenge of developing appropriate methods for the collection and generation of appropriate data which enable an investigation of questions 1 and 2. I wanted to be able to use my experiences as an educational consultant working in countries of the South to generate the data which would enable an exploration of these questions.

### Positioning myself in the field

Much of the theory generated by the literature review, as well as my previous experience as a teacher researcher, was concerned with specific approaches to consultancy and research. In this sense, I saw that my work had 'methodological and epistemological affinities with action research and ethnography' (Quicke, 2009, p2). There were aspects of my research approach which also had an affinity with an auto ethnographic approach, in that in order to understand the learning which had taken place, I had to consider my 'own lived experiences' in the field (Wellington et al., 2005, p157) and the way in which I affected participants and was affected by them (Coffey, 1999, p159). Ainscow's view of his own work was of particular significance to me as I tried to develop a way of working with schools as a consultant. He describes himself as a critical friend to schools he is working with and goes on to describe his work:

'... as helping them to learn from their experiences and, in so doing, to point to patterns and examples of practice that might be instructive to others who are addressing similar agendas. In this sense my aim is not to propose recipes that can be applied universally but rather to suggest ingredients that might be worthy of further consideration within particular contexts.' (Ainscow, 2003, p26)

In this sense, the consultant as researcher is positioning himself as an active participant in the research process. In a similar way, I wanted to draw on discussions, conversations and observations which occurred during my work with schools to support them in identifying areas where they might

develop more inclusive practices and also to reflect on these as sources of data for the purpose of this thesis. A part of my research design therefore drew on approaches to collaborative enquiry (Durrant and Holden, 2005) whereby school-based participants were actively engaged in ongoing action research. In defining action research I am drawing on the work of a number of researchers by viewing it as an approach which allows research participants to actively identify areas for development through both reflection and systematic enquiry (Ebbutt, 1985, Elliott, 1991).

My early research designs were based on the idea of research to be undertaken in inclusive schools in England, India and Thailand, directly comparing the experiences of all three schools and the challenges they faced in their development of more inclusive practice. This reflected a definition of comparative research which argues that study must involve cross-national perspectives (Hantrais, 1995). However, this plan was rejected at an early stage, partly because of the practical challenge of research on three continents but also because I did not want to spread my research over too wide a field and risk 'oversimplification of educational processes and practices [or] ignore problems of interpretation and translation' (Booth and Ainscow, 1998, p1). Booth and Ainscow argue that comparative research can sometimes seek to produce conclusions which will have 'global significance' (ibid). In the field of inclusion, they recommend that researchers must seek to understand contexts and settings and the complex, personal and political philosophies and positions which influence the way in which events and developments may be interpreted (ibid, p232). In this sense, comparative research becomes less about value judgements of what appears to be effective inclusive practice or of a good quality and more focused on understanding the 'complexity of everyday life' (Atkinson et al., 2008, p3) in schools and settings in cultures other than our own. As Alexander argues, in order to do this, the researcher must attempt to understand how 'practice relates to the context of culture, structure and policy in which it is embedded' (2001b, p3). It also demands an approach to comparative research which acknowledges the complexity of culture and setting through the development of 'principled, systematic ethnography' (Atkinson et al., 2008, p3). Combining these perspectives I adopted Epstein's definition of comparative education as the 'application of the intellectual tools of history and the social sciences to understanding international issues of education' (Epstein, 2008, p373), with a particular emphasis on an ethnographic approach which sought to account for cultural and contextual 'issues, constraints and differences' (Ebbutt, 1998, p415) in interpretation and analysis.

I note above that I wanted to develop an ethnographic research design which was principled and systematic. The way in which I attempted to do this is described in detail throughout this chapter and also in Chapter Six 'A Revised Methodology'. The phrase 'principled, systematic ethnography' is

taken from the work of Atkinson, Delamont and Lousley (2008, p3) in their research into the way in which ethnographic approaches can be used to help understand complex social settings and in particular the impact of culture. These writers argue that a principled approach to understanding social settings involves the recognition that they are inevitably complex and that researchers must be principled in ensuring that the ethnography employed is responsive to this complexity. This requires that the researcher is open and honest in the way he /she conducts his / her research and in regard to the claims he / she makes regarding his / her findings. The adherence to a set of principles underpinning the design of the research, builds on the earlier work of these and other writers (e.g. Ely et al, 1991; Coffey, 1999; Delamont, 2002; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) who have also influenced me in trying to develop a principled approach to the methodology in this thesis and who I will refer to later in this chapter. In addition, I have tried to employ ethnographic research tools in a systematic way which clearly demonstrates the principled approach outlined above and also ensures that my data is collected through a set of carefully thought out processes which will enable me to develop a set of reliable conclusions. This involves the design and application of a variety of tools described below, but also as an ethnographer in international settings, it requires that I develop a methodology which allows me to develop an understanding of the way in which culture pervades 'the organisation of social life and social action' (Atkinson et al, 2008, p146). In this sense, 'systematic' requires the researcher to be as clear as possible about the ways in which he seeks to collect data which offers realistic and natural insights into new social, cultural and political settings. It also necessitates that the researcher develop tools of interpretation and analysis which allow for the emergence of dissonance, for example creating the space for difference and diverse perspectives to be engaged with as a route to new understanding.

My research design required that I worked with and alongside teachers and policy makers, in schools over a prolonged period of time, listening, talking and trying to understand the ways in which schools were developing and education systems evolving through their perspectives. This meant that my research approach was also rooted in an ethnographic paradigm. On one level this was, as with the application of action research, practical and pragmatic. In considering what I would be doing as a consultant I was able to identify with a number of the activities described by Hammersley and Atkinson as 'what ethnographers do' (2007, p3).

The definition of ethnography provided by Hammersley and Atkinson, builds on the work of numerous scholars in the field (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, Delamont, 2002, e.g. Ely et al., 1991, Atkinson et al., 2001) by emphasising the fact that 'people's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p3). The

ethnographic researcher is likely to be gathering data alongside people who are engaged in their day to day activity through methods which include:

‘watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews ... gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry’ (ibid)

This demands to a large degree, on immersion in the setting or field (Gordon et al., 2001, p188, Ely et al., 1991, p91), often over a significant period of time (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). A significant amount of the data collected through ethnographic methods is likely to be qualitative (Gordon et al., 2001, p188) in that the ethnographer should ‘want those who are studied to speak for themselves’ (Sherman and Webb, 1988, p5). However, this is problematic as the researcher must interpret and make sense of these perspectives as ‘nothing speaks for itself’ (Denzin, 2009, p85). The aim of the researcher then is to try and understand events and experiences as a whole and within their context (ibid, p5-8), rather than trying to develop theory out of ‘separate variables’ (Ely et al., 1991, p4). I will explore some of the problematic aspects of these methodological approaches later in this chapter.

Gathering data in this way reflects a social constructivist paradigm and acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed through a complex combination of factors, both cultural and social (Artiles and Dyson, 2005) including both rituals and customs (Delamont, 2002, p199). Furthermore, it seemed unlikely that I would be able to understand inclusive school development in a region such as South East Asia, or even within one country, by studying one classroom or one school. I would need to position myself in such a way that I was able to explore the wider contexts, both of the education systems and the social and cultural contexts, which would enable me to interrogate research questions 1 and 2.

This approach raised questions which lie at the heart of this thesis; in order to examine what is ‘inevitably elusive and complex’ (Corbett, 2001, p38) I wanted to find ways of understanding how my research participants construct themselves as teachers and professionals. This necessitated examination of deep rooted and often difficult to research challenges such as how teachers in different cultures perceive themselves as agents, within particular policy contexts which are usually requiring schools and teachers to change in some way. In order to do this, I too had to examine and re-examine the ways in which I constructed myself as a researcher and as an educational professional.

It has been argued that researchers in the field of inclusive Education are often unwilling to ‘reveal their positions, where they are coming from’ (Allan and Slee, 2008, p1) and therefore should be more

willing to specify 'the foundations of knowledge and assumptions about the nature of reality in which their work is based' (ibid). The importance of research question 3, therefore developed over the course of my research as I was forced to identify and problematise my own position and beliefs about knowledge and research.

## **Initial Strategy for Identifying Starting Points**

My initial strategy for developing ways in which I could begin to identify schools to undertake my research was based on opportunities which presented themselves and then by following up leads and possibilities. I was invited by Jenny Corbett to help run an Inclusive Education workshop in Mumbai, India in February 2003. This led directly to face to face work with a number of Mumbai schools interested in becoming more inclusive. This generated my confidence to directly approach UNESCO Bangkok, and Save the Children UK in Lao PDR in September 2003, via introductions from Mel Ainscow, one of my supervisors. I offered my services as an expert: a consultant specialising in Inclusive Education, who was willing to work without pay, hoping that this might generate engagement with schools in the region.

The part time doctorate route allowed me the space and time to be able to view possibilities such as these, as something which might be allowed to evolve over time. This meant that by the point at which I formally registered for my PhD at the University of Manchester, in September 2004, I had already been able to begin work with a school in Bangkok, Thailand, a school in Mumbai, India and had also begun to work with Save the Children and the Lao PDR Inclusive Education project, which would generate much of the data I will present in this thesis.

This strategy recognised some key issues regarding the way in which I saw my role as a researcher and a consultant. Much of my reflexive analysis regarding my methodology will focus on ways in which I struggled to marry these two sides of myself and tensions which were generated. Atkinson et al argue that in order to understand the complexity generated by multifaceted cultural research settings, with the attendant problems and issues which arise, the researcher must be committed to a systematic and rigorous research approach but also be open to new ways of describing and exploring complex settings and systems (2008). The journey which I undertook as consultant / researcher enabled me, over time, not only to marry the two roles to some extent, but also led to my experimenting with ways in which I could incorporate relatively new research methodologies such as the use of video (Haw and Hadfield, 2011b), which I explore in more detail in Chapter Six.

My role as consultant positioned me as an expert or specialist and as a collaborator. Both of these aspects brought advantages, in that I was able to be influenced by others in developing deeper understandings and disadvantages in that I was also open to being misled through my collaborative stance. The important aspect was as noted above, to try and remain open and as aware as possible of the tensions and to problematise rather than accept processes and developments at face value.

There was also a sense of risk with my overall strategy in establishing myself in the field: there might be few boundaries; I might have a sense of too much time; and I might be trying to work in too many countries and too many different settings. This might lead to a sense of too many choices and the possibility that I would begin to select research opportunities in order to fulfil or fit my existing preconceptions. There was a danger that the research process could therefore become confused and disorganised. In trying to pursue my research questions, particularly one and two relating to the literature review, I also ran the risk of being too open to the views and perceptions of others and thus being misled by, for example, policy makers and school leaders. There would also be the possibility that school leaders might exert pressure on staff to comply with my research in order to make themselves appear advantageously or in order to 'please' the foreign expert. All of these factors had the potential to exert negative influences on my research approach and lead to my analysis of my own role being under-theorised.

## **Research strategy**

In this thesis, collaborative action research with the schools I was working with as a consultant and my own research activity designed to generate data to answer my research questions, are intertwined and there is significant overlap between them. This overlap was consistently problematic in that there was never a neat and clearly defined delineation between the two. This affected choices that I made throughout my research and consultancy activity concerning methods I chose to employ and the ways in which I tried to interpret and analyse data.

The data I present in Chapter Four is drawn from two specific research activities, which can be viewed chronologically as a timeline in Appendix One. Between November 2003 and March 2005, I visited and worked in Market School in Bangkok, Thailand; between July 2004 and January 2007 I worked with a group of advisors and 9 Primary schools within the Lao PDR Inclusive Education Project. I also collected data, through a series of visits, to the school, in Mumbai, India, between February 2003 and February 2005. For a number of reasons concerned with the internal organisation of the school, I was

unable to continue my research with this school and made the decision, in collaboration with my PhD supervisors, not to include this data in my thesis.

The methods I used to collect data reflected in part the approach I took to consultancy. In Chapters One and Two, I described the UNESCO teacher education project 'Special Needs in the Classroom'. The project evolved into an inclusion project in the UK 'Reaching Out to all Learners' which applied the same processes to participatory work with groups of English schools. I based much of my activity as a consultant, on the principles and strategies set out in this project and used the activities to generate data for this thesis.

My approach to working with schools in Lao PDR and Thailand used inquiry processes and critical self-review as an underpinning rationale (Balshaw et al., 2005, p1). Workshops with teachers, involved a series of activities which enabled 'reflection in and on practice' (Schon, 1991, p1) and which were flexible enough to support teachers and advisors to work collaboratively to explore the

'uniqueness of particular educational occurrences and contexts [allowing] schools and classrooms to be understood from the perspectives of different participants.' (Ainscow, 1999, p37)

Recent studies have affirmed the effectiveness of collaborative action research processes in supporting teachers in considering the inclusivity of their own organisations and practice (Song, 2010, Deppeler, 2010, Howes et al., 2009). Reflecting on the development of practice as an individual can be powerful and contribute directly to professional development but it can be argued that its value is 'enhanced if it can be carried out in association with other colleagues' (Pollard et al., 2005, p21). It also seems more likely to support processes of school development when teachers work collaboratively together, supporting each other in identifying strategic opportunities (Durrant and Holden, 2005). In his case study of collaborative action research, Song (2010, p224) notes the importance of teachers being supported in developing 'critical self reflection' and the significance of data generated through teachers learning journals and through what he describes as 'reflective interviewing' (ibid). It is also important to note that teachers who are introduced to a collaborative action research methodology will need time to develop familiarity with the processes (Deppeler 2010, p186). This was significant for my research in Phase 1, as it required me to consider whether there may be a paradigm shift taking place on two levels. The first of these shifts was related to professional learning and inclusive education, whereby teachers were being asked to think about their schools and teaching in new, innovative and often challenging ways (Forlin, 2010, pxxii). However, the second paradigm shift concerned the way in which teachers constructed themselves as professionals. My work with them was asking them to engage with the concept of teacher as

researcher and, over the course of the project, the notion of teacher as an agent of change. Both of these shifts were problematic and challenging for the participants and for the way in which I had planned to undertake the data collection and I will explore this in more detail in the following chapters.

The activities which were undertaken in workshops, included presentations based on the subject of the workshops by myself and participants; individual reflection on questions posed by myself or outcomes from workshop activity; sharing of individual reflections with colleagues in pairs and small groups; working collaboratively on designing materials or solving challenges and problems. The structure of these activities allowed me to collect data through a variety of ethnographic methods, based upon my observations and records of talk, discussion and feedback from participants. I was also able to observe lessons and spend time in and around schools and their locality, talking to teachers, students, parents and members of the local community. During this first phase of research, my main focus was to try and understand the ways in which participants viewed the schools and education system. Although I was in the role of an education 'expert' I saw myself as a learner who wanted to try and make sense of these settings. I had significant uncertainties and doubts at this point as to how these different aspects would and should be combined, which are addressed in the next section.

### **Access, Roles and Relationships**

It has been recognised that, in qualitative research, the researcher immersed in the field faces a range of possible criticisms. These include the issue of subjectivity (Hutchinson, 1988, p131) whereby events are interpreted according to the researchers own predetermined agenda making conclusions unreliable. Additionally, it has also been argued that 'the presence of the field researcher [is] an intrusive factor which inevitably influences the behaviour of the participants' (ibid). I aimed to counteract these possible limitations to my research findings by acknowledging the significance of my role as a collaborator rather than simply an observer. This relates both to my access to the field as well as to relationships within it. My access depended significantly on the establishment of collegiate partnerships with key individuals who would act as both gatekeepers and collaborators in important aspects of my research.

The gatekeeper is of 'central importance' (Corbett, 2001, p41) in ethnographic research in providing access to settings and participants as well as in supporting effective communication between the researcher and the participants. There are numerous case studies of qualitative research projects whereby the researcher has made ill-founded assumptions about the reliability of arrangements made



through the gatekeeper (e.g. Ely et al, 1991, p36). Communication difficulties with the gatekeeper in Mumbai, India, directly led to my decision to stop my data collection in that setting. Having spent several months planning my next visit to the school, by phone and email, I arrived on the arranged day to find the school closed for the week we had agreed on for the next phase of my field work. In both Lao PDR and Bangkok, Thailand, I was fortunate to be able to form what would prove to be close and more reliable relationships with two gatekeepers, who would support not only my access to the field but also help me to make sense of my data throughout Phase 1 and 2 of my research. These were Mai , who in 2003 was Programme Coordinator of the Lao PDR Inclusive Education Project and who originally agreed for me to be able to come and work with the schools in Lao PDR; Ana , Principal / Head Teacher of Market School in Bangkok, who agreed to my request to come and undertake my research in the school and from my first visit, positioned me as a consultant, who could support the school's development, as well as a researcher. In both cases, I went on to undertake joint research with these gatekeepers, referred to in both phases of the research and also presented for publication in journals and conference proceedings (e.g. Grimes and Witoonchat, 2005, Grimes et al., 2010). Although my relationship with both was problematic, they also became trusted collaborators without whose support it seems unlikely, in retrospect, that the research would have been completed. I also had an additional gatekeeper in Bangkok, John, an English national, working as an English language and Information Technology teacher in Market School. John initially communicated with me in order to arrange my first and subsequent visits and also translated all of my early conversations with Thai participants, which I discuss further, later in this chapter. Whilst John remained a key informant throughout the first three years of my research, I also became increasingly aware of the problematic nature of my dependence on him as a source of reliable data, which I discuss in Chapter Four.


I identified my research role as one whereby I would depend upon the views and perceptions of both these trusted collaborators and others, to support me in making sense of the research context. This would require self awareness, in that I would need to be clear about my own pre-conceptions and existing assumptions (Ely et al., 1991, p122), in order to be aware of my own possible bias, but also so that I would be better able to 'separate [my] thoughts and feelings from those of [my] research participants' (ibid) and collaborators. Working alongside collaborators I wanted to develop spaces for dialogue to take place, which I describe in more detail in the next section. My own role was central to all the research and consultancy processes taking place. I was aware in planning and undertaking the early stages of what would become Phase 1 that the engagement with participants would not be in one direction and that I would be having an impact on them, as they would on me. I would be 'part of the interactions of the setting' (Coffey, 1999, p159) and becoming part of the social dynamic. Affecting the setting and being affected by it was a process which I planned to document through field notes, described in the following section, in which I wanted to explore the ways in which my identity as a researcher developed as I sought to develop and construct my research process (Coffey, 1999, p5)

but also in order to document the way in which I was affected by the research experience. I was aware from my initial reading in the field of ethnography that I was likely to be affected emotionally (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p92-3) as well as challenged methodologically by the research process and the ways in which the concepts of research and researcher were interpreted by participants. This was likely to be particularly true, within a different culture (ibid, p84). The likelihood of the researcher being affected emotionally by the research process, means that there is

‘... a constant interplay between the personal and emotional on the one hand, and the intellectual on the other. Private response should be transformed by reflection and analysis into potential public knowledge.’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p151)

I aimed to use field notes to try and document aspects of my growing understanding of this process. The learning which took place during Phase 1 affected the way in which I designed my methodology for Phase 2, and this is discussed in Chapters Four and Six.

**Methods**

<b>Figure 2: Methodological Framework</b>		
<p><b>Researcher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping and becoming familiar with the research terrain</li> <li>• Ethnographic researcher</li> <li>• Dialogue and Interviewing based on research questions</li> <li>• Informal observations</li> <li>• Research diary / field notes</li> <li>• Data produced which would support investigation of all Research Questions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Shifting Continuum between Two Roles</b></p> 	<p><b>Consultant</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action researcher / participant researcher</li> <li>• Creating conditions for dialogue to take place</li> <li>• Range of research activities to generate data to support school development</li> <li>• Data produced which would support investigation of Research Questions 1 and 2</li> </ul>

In this section, I discuss in detail the methods set out within my methodological framework, with reference to some of the potentially problematic aspects of my approach, referred to earlier in this chapter. Figure 2, Methodological Framework, sets out an overview of my two roles of researcher and consultant. The continuum between these roles was a shifting one. Both roles were concerned with research activity which would generate data. The role of researcher was primarily focused on generating data which would address the research questions. The role of consultant was multi-

faceted in that the primary purpose was to support activities and generate data to enable the inclusive development of the schools I was working with. For example, taking notes of group discussions in order to be able to reflect back ongoing school development issues and challenges to school participants; making notes during school visits to be used for the facilitation of discussion with the school in regard to their action planning. At the same time, much of the research activity I would undertake as consultant would also address the research questions thus generating data for this study.

### **Field Notes and Documenting the Research Landscape**

In designing methods for recording data in the field, I began with the assumption that most of what I wanted to record or remember would be written down in my field notes. My previous experience as a researcher had involved a long term research project over the course of two years but this was of a relatively small scale compared to the current study. Additionally, I had not undertaken research in another culture before. I stress the significance of this, because although I planned a series of methods to record data, I was not in a position to be able to anticipate the range of methodological challenges I would experience and which are discussed at the end of Chapter Four and in Chapter Six.

I was aware that my role as participant observer would have an impact on my capacity for making notes during the day. Using an adaptation (Ainscow, 1998, p20-21) of Spradley's original typography of a continuum of the 'degree of participation' (Ainscow, 1994, 2004, p58-62), I had identified that my participant role would oscillate between passive participation, where I would be able to observe in classrooms and probably make fuller notes, to more active participation and at times complete participation in activities, when making notes would be challenging (Ainscow, 1998, p21). In designing my approach to field notes, I assumed that the most effective approach would be to either make notes immediately in the field itself or as soon as possible after my work for the day had finished (Agar, 1994, p64). It has been noted (Flick, 2002, p296) that note taking during the day may be problematic when working in partnership with others in the field, such as when engaged in collaborative action research. I decided upon two courses of action in regard to the making of notes. Wherever possible I would make rapid notes during field work employing a brief notes technique (Delamont, 2002, p61) whereby I would condense (Ainscow, 1994, 2004, p69) observations, ideas, quotes from participants into single words or short sentences which would act as a prompt when I later came to write full accounts in the evenings. An example of my edited field notes is available in Appendix Three.

I wanted to create a design for my field notes which would enable me to be organised about my data, so that questions such as date, time, place, participants, etc can be clearly identified (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p247). I was also mindful that my data collection should be designed in such a way as to facilitate data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p50-51). From my previous experience as a researcher I was aware that the taking of notes and organising them in such a way that I would be able to analyse them efficiently, was one of my weaknesses.

I tried to combine elements from a contact summary form (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p53), with a more open template (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p247) which would allow important identifying information regarding people and places but also allow space for reflection (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p114). This template was a simple one which I could sketch out roughly in my field journal and then type up afterwards. It allowed the recording of observations / notes and information for identification, but also allowed space in a second column for reflection and prompts which could be linked to, for analysis later. The recording of notes within my diary allowed me to include other prompts which I thought would be useful to me in the field. For example, I had a typed set of research questions, including sub questions, stuck onto the front of my diary to remind me of areas to focus on. At other times, I included central information, relating to the settings I was in, to refer to, such as names of key participants, school information, number of previous visits, etc. In making notes, I also tried to be aware of the range of 'descriptive observations' (Spradley, 1980, p73-76) I could make use of including not only my observations of what I thought was occurring, but specific details concerning the space in which the observation was taking place and the arrangement of objects; activities, acts and actors; and also the feelings that were generated both on the part of the participants and myself (Coffey, 1999, p159).

### **Dialogue and Creating the Space for Conversation**

In this section I discuss the significance of discussion, conversation and dialogue which I saw as central to the consultancy I was undertaking, as well as to the research for this study. I will also examine the importance of interpreters and translation. Wells describes the 'thinking together' (Wells, 2009) which can occur in collaborative action research as 'dialogic inquiry' (ibid). This came to form the central methodological approach for Phase two of my research, described in more detail in Chapter 6. However, it was also important in Phase 1. Dialogic inquiry allowed me to begin to understand the cultural contexts in which I was working (Stephens, 2007) by exploring what individuals understood when we discussed different concepts and ideas. It also supported my developing understanding of the complexities involved in trying to theorise processes occurring in any society or culture, but particularly in one which is not familiar (Atkinson et al., 2008). As a consultant researcher addressing my research questions 1 and 2, I was also concerned with creating space for

dialogue between participants, which would enable the 'process of generating and sharing stories, ideas and experience' (Miles, 2009, p24). This would support the development of shared understanding of the school development processes they were engaged in, enable learning between participants to take place and also create the necessary conditions for 'interruptions' to existing assumptions and practices within a school in order to allow new ways of thinking to develop (Miles and Ainscow, 2011, p79-80). Both of these aspects of dialogue, support the model of reflection 'on' and 'in' action (Schon, 1983), which I believed underpinned the development of inclusive practices in schools. It is also linked to the work of Hanks, described in Chapter One and Two, particularly in relation to the role of the consultant and the way in which he approaches conversation and dialogue. For Hanks it is of fundamental importance that the consultant does not position himself within discussions and conversations as an expert who already has the solutions to problems or the answers to questions he is about to ask. From this perspective, my role as a researcher needed to be based on open enquiry, where my analysis and interpretation of participant response was not fixed or closed but open to different perspectives and viewpoints.

Contrasting experiences of being interviewed for research projects myself, had shown me that the stance of the researcher greatly affected what I revealed as an interviewee and how openly I was prepared to describe my practice. Therefore, one of my guiding principles in constructing the interview approach for my thesis was to aim as far as I was able, to position myself as a researcher who wanted participants to feel relaxed and listened to. The work of Kvale (Kvale, 1996, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) was significant in the design as I wanted my interviews to be concerned with the generation of dialogue through conversation. Kvale notes that whilst this may appear to be a simplistic interpretation of the process, without an acknowledgement of the complexity of the interview process from planning to conversation and then analysis, it is unlikely that useful social knowledge will be generated (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p15 - 18). In order for the interview to be purposeful, I needed to establish trust and rapport with participants so that they felt 'safe enough to talk freely about ... experiences and feelings' (Kvale, 1996, p125) but also make sure that the dialogue was closely linked to my observations of the 'social action' (Atkinson et al., 2008, p32). Interviews which occur in isolation from data collected through immersion in the setting are unlikely to capture the complexity of social action (ibid) resulting in limited and possibly subjective conclusions. Atkinson and Coffey have argued that historically ethnographers have tended to view participant observation of action in social settings and interviewing as separate tools, which can be used to contrast 'what people do and what people say they do' (Atkinson and Coffey, 2001, p812-813). However, they reject this as irrelevant and argue that interview talk is also action (ibid) and in this sense, in the context of my research, conversations and interviews were constructed as extensions of the social action taking place; the purpose of talk being to explore and understand, to encourage reflection and exchanges of perspectives. From my perspective as researcher, any discussion or interview had to be rooted in my analytical framework (Silverman, 2006, p137), based on the theoretical framework presented in

Chapter Two of this thesis and which I discuss in more detail below. Therefore, although the discussion would, I hoped, be open and exploratory, I would be aware of the precise areas of relevance to my research questions. I used a small digital recorder to tape interviews and an example of an interview transcript is available in Appendix Four.

When designing my interview strategy, I planned for the use of translators in some settings and was aware that this would be potentially problematic (Ryen, 2001, p335). As an outsider - researcher there is already a set of barriers to clear communication based on a range of factors (Chawla-Duggan, 2007, p198), including the fact that the outsider researcher may not understand the cultural significance of action (Ebbutt, 1998). The role of the translator should ease the exchange of information and enable understanding to develop. However, much of the literature concerned with use of translators and interpreters in qualitative research in international settings, identifies the fact that 'within the interpretation process there is a loss of meaning and an ongoing concern about enhancement or embellishment of meaning' (ibid, p418). The assumption in qualitative research that translation is an 'objective and neutral process' (Wong and Poon, 2010, p151) may often be misguided. A number of recent studies have identified that the use of translators is problematic (Wong and Poon, 2010, Temple and Young, 2004, Temple, 1997, Birbili, 2000) and requires researchers to plan carefully, not only in the way they identify possible translators, but also in the way in which they triangulate data collected through translation. In developing my research design, this was an area in which my understanding of the complexities involved grew considerably as my field work progressed. Initially I used the translators provided for me; John in Bangkok, as noted above, and a series of translators provided by Save the Children in Laos. This led to the identification of a series of issues which would impact on the reliability of my data and which I discuss in Chapter Four.

## **Analysis**

Miles and Huberman (1994, p50) caution researchers who plan to focus on the collection of their data for extended periods of time, against beginning research analysis after they have completed their field work. They argue against this for a number of reasons. When analysing data as it is collected, the researcher is able to identify gaps or explore variations on theories which begin to emerge. These in turn may lead to new phases of fieldwork. Ongoing analysis also enables the researcher to develop new theories or perspectives which help to challenge 'routine assumptions and biases' (ibid). In designing this research project, I was not aware that there would be different phases, nor could I predict how events would develop. However, as a beginning researcher in international qualitative research, I made the assumption that the greatest challenge would be the collection of data, rather than the analysis of what I collected. This was a mistake because as soon as I began working in the

field, I realised that it was not possible to leave analysis until some end point in the unforeseeable future. In my first field trips to India and Thailand, I was collecting large amounts of interview, observational and documentary evidence. I could see that I needed to engage with this as I collected it, identifying in particular where data seemed to confirm or contradict my initial theoretical framework.

In preparation for analysis, I planned to ensure that my field notes and interview notes were typed up so that I would be more easily able to access them for re-reading, editing / checking for accuracy, making comments on or coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p51). My expectation was that I would need to apply what have been referred to as 'thinking units' (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, p71) or 'broadly framed sorting files' (Ely et al, 1991, p143). I envisaged these as combining two different elements. The first would be for general organisation of data and would include schools, organisations, individuals and roles, geographical areas. The second layer of organisation would focus on themes related to my theoretical framework and would include thematic elements from my typology of inclusive school development. The third layer would view the categories through a lens focusing on core inclusive values such as equality, participation, achievement, response to diversity; this would enable an understanding of what inclusion meant in these settings. I anticipated that the use of these categories would facilitate a process whereby significant themes would begin to emerge from my data which I could use to construct a thematic analysis (Ely et al, 1991, p150) and discuss the tensions and problematic nature of inclusive school development.

I stated earlier in this chapter that my research approach was grounded in qualitative enquiry and as such I wanted participants to speak for themselves. I also noted that this is problematic and has the potential to generate tension around the reliability of data. The act of researcher interpretation (Denzin, 2009, p85) raises the question of subjectivity and bias. I wanted to be sure that the way I approached my analysis did not simply confirm my existing assumptions. I developed an approach to dealing with this problem which built upon my overall methodology by using my existing relationships with trusted participants to support me in checking and re-validating my impressions and conclusions through ongoing analysis in the field. This approach developed throughout my research and I will refer to this in more detail in later chapters. However, the form that this took in the early stages of Phase One of my research, involved making observations or engaging in conversation with participants; making notes and identifying themes and issues as I wrote or at later points in the day; sharing conclusions or emerging ideas / themes with trusted participants and then using their perspective to re-write or re-organise my thoughts. I would then take these ideas / emerging theories and share them, check them with the wider group of participants the following day or at a later point in my field work.

This developed into a critical incidents approach to the data presentation, which I have employed throughout Chapters Four and Seven. In these chapters I present a series of critical incidents, linked to the themes and issues described above, and selected to illustrate the range and complexity of the data which emerged, in relation to my research questions. Tripp argues that an incident becomes critical depending on the way in which its significance is interpreted by the researcher (1993, p8). A value judgement is made by the researcher, regarding this significance. Where this approach is combined with action research it can lead to increased understanding (Durrant and Holden, 2005, p86) of complexity settings through engagement with diverse perspectives of the same social actions. There are also important links between a critical incidents approach and other key aspects of my research, such as critical reflection and the development of the dialogic space, described in Chapter Six and Seven. I chose the critical incidents presented in this thesis on the basis of the extent to which they allowed critical exploration of my research questions. In particular I was drawn to those incidents which explored contrast and dissonance because I wanted to clearly engage with the challenges of my first two research questions. I was interested in challenging the assumptions of western theory regarding inclusion and therefore I chose critical incidents which allowed me to discuss the complexities surrounding this. I also tried to choose some incidents where I felt uncomfortable as a researcher consultant, because I was aware that often my discomfort was in some way connected to my attachment to western theories and that, therefore, exploring my discomfort would enable a deeper examination of the realities of inclusive school development in these settings.

One issue which emerged and which will be examined in greater detail in later chapters, was that alluded to earlier, namely the issue of translation. I began to realise as my data collection progressed that translation did not only relate to technical translation of one spoken language into another. It also related to the translation of concepts and ideas across language and culture. Much of my early data collection in Phase One became a journey of gradual realisation that my field work was an exercise in engagement with complex socio-cultural settings and structures. For example, it is important not to overlook the significance of the 'human level of everyday processes' (Howes, 2008, p23) when trying to understand how and why people and institutions develop in particular ways. My methodology therefore needed to allow me to explore contradictions, transgressions and negotiations when considering different perspectives of participants (ibid, p24). I could not take anything I was told, or that I observed, at face value. Everything needed to be checked and re-checked for meaning and understanding, both on my part but also on the part of those I spoke with. I came to realise that I would need to develop my methodology and this is described in Chapter Six.



## Ethics

Awareness of ethical considerations should be paramount in the researchers mind from the inception of the project (Oliver, 2003, p9). I was clear that I wanted my research to be undertaken as ethically as possible. I envisaged a research process which would be ethically transparent and where all participants felt safe, trusting of me, clear of my role and also that they supported and gave permission to the collection and analysis of data throughout the process. Whilst this view built on an ideal of ethical data collection which is set out in most literature concerning qualitative and ethnographic research (Zeni, 1998, p9-10), it was aspirational rather than realistic. Silverman identifies a number of ethical pitfalls for qualitative researchers, all of which I needed to engage with at some point in Phase 1 of my research but which I did not anticipate at the outset. These include 'exploitation, deception, revealing peoples identities when they might not want it or not revealing peoples identities when they expect it' (Silverman, 2006, p317). My aim was to be open and honest with all participants from my first encounter with them. I expected to be able to explain that I was undertaking research for my PhD; this would involve my undertaking observations of activities we were engaged in and at times talking to them and making a record of these conversations. This became problematic for a number of reasons, including the way in which participants conceptualised my consultancy role and also what they understood by the term 'research'. On one level it would be possible to argue that all participants were informed of my intentions, in that my gatekeepers and trusted collaborators, Mai, Ana and John all relayed my role and intentions to school staff, workshop participants and where appropriate parents and community members. However, as Phase One progressed, I came to understand that participants' levels of understanding varied and also that the way in which information was passed on to them through translators meant that it was filtered through one or more layers of interpretation, probably acquiring new meanings as it was relayed. It also became clearer, as I progressed that in complex settings, involving collaborative action research between schools and advisors, all participants have different roles and thus 'multiple accountabilities for their work .... to pupils, parents, colleague professionals and the ... funding agency' (Day and Townsend, 2007, p42). Where there are different roles as participant researchers and school based teachers, combined with members of local communities, and associated accountabilities, there are likely to be ethical tensions. The onus on the consultant-researcher to 'hold and display a clear set of ethical principles' (ibid) within such complex settings is a demanding one which is not easily resolvable. I aimed to manage all ethical issues by trying to be transparent and open, explaining ethical challenges and giving participants time and space to discuss and problem solve in workshop settings. However, the particular social constraints of individual settings played a significant role in these processes, which I explore in later chapters. Therefore, ethical considerations, as with much of my phase one methodology, was based on a series of assumptions which needed to be critically addressed as my research progresses. Although all the key participants assured me that they were happy for their names to be included in my research, in the

interests of confidentiality and protecting the identity of all concerned, I decided to give all schools and individuals a pseudonym. This convention is maintained throughout the thesis.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have set out my research design which was based on collaborative action research initiatives and an ethnographic approach to data collection. I have emphasised the importance of developing a research approach which would allow me to problematise the challenges of applying western theory within a complex cultural setting, whilst also acknowledging the complexity of my own role and the way in which I might be perceived by participants. In the next chapter, I present my early data collection and analysis from Phase One. I reflect on the appropriateness of both my theoretical framework from Chapter Two and the methodology presented in this chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Research Phase One – The Early Stages of my Research**

This chapter identifies some critical themes which emerged from Phase One of my research, in Thailand and Lao PDR, focusing on the period November 2003 – January 2007. I will be drawing on my initial experiences as a consultant/ researcher in the two settings, as I tried to apply my understanding of theories of inclusive school development. Using my field notes from this period I identify a number of critical incidents and issues which highlight the tensions between the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two and my developing understanding of the ways in which schools were developing in these contexts. In the second section of the chapter, I discuss this and categorize experiences which were problematic at this point in my research. At the end of this chapter I identify the need to reconceptualise the theoretical framework which would take account of additional factors such as local and national culture and the impact of the policy context in countries of the South. I also reflect on the methodological challenges as I began to re-appraise my research questions and the tools I was using as well as my own role within the research, identifying the need to develop my approach to inquiry, during the second phase of the research.

### **The Two Research Settings**

The first setting was Market School in Bangkok, Thailand. The school was established in 1950, by the local Chinese community, as a community foundation school. In the context of the Thai education system, this means that it is 40% funded by the government and 60% by fees/donations from parents and the local community (Witoonchat, 2000). The school is accountable to a local community committee who are responsible for the schools effective administration. When I began searching for a school in Bangkok, where I could undertake my PhD research, I contacted UNESCO Bangkok. They identified Market as a school which was 'interested in developing inclusion but was also quite poor and would welcome any help and assistance I could offer' (field notes 2003). The Principal, Ana, had been Principal since 1973. I was expecting a relatively poor, undeveloped school, large class sizes and pedagogy reliant on rote learning, similar to other schools I had visited in countries of the South. My field notes paint a very different picture:

'Market School is a community foundation school, catering for 1300 pupils between the ages of 3 and 17. Approximately 10% of the students have additional needs, including students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Down's syndrome, physical impairments, speech and language impairments and cognitive impairments. The school has been described as 'a model of child-centred, participatory, inclusive education' (UNICEF, 2003). The school is unique, not only in Bangkok, but in Thailand, in its commitment to the development of more inclusive practices. Its openness to working with diverse groups of students and open admissions policy sets it apart on a local and national level. Each year, the school hosts large

numbers of visiting teachers who attend workshops on the schools approaches to education, but as yet, no other schools have attempted to apply the principles of Market to their own institution.

The school policy documentation describes the ethos as based on the following key components:

A child centred approach, including a child friendly environment

Child participation

A flexible and working curricula

Use of art and music instruction

Incorporation of innovative teaching methods

Working closely with parents

Inclusion of disadvantaged students.’ (field notes February 2004)

In retrospect this description is rather exuberant and lacking criticality. However, it would be true to describe the school as being at the forefront in Thailand in the development of ‘child-centred’ practices and in the enrolment of disabled students. However, it was not ‘unique’ in this as I discovered later when I was able to visit some of the schools in the Thai Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education Project<sup>1</sup>.

The second setting was the Lao PDR Inclusive Education (IE) Project – ‘Improving Quality Schools for All’: The project was attempting to change the dominant educational pedagogy from one based on rote-learning and the delivery of a rigid, narrow curriculum, to a child centred one concerned with activity and resource based experiential learning.

The Inclusive Education Project in Lao PDR began with the opening of a special school for Visually Impaired children in 1993. A pilot project in a mainstream primary school was started in 1995 with the aims of supporting the inclusion of disabled children and children from other disadvantaged groups and also trying to ensure that the education that all students received was of a high quality. By 2009, when external funding for the project had finished, there were 539 Inclusive Education Schools across the country. The midterm review of the project, in May 2002, recommended the development of an evaluation tool in schools which could also be used to improve the quality of educational provision. It was decided that the most useful approach would be to develop quality indicators of inclusive practice

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<sup>1</sup> My data is drawn from 5 visits to the school: November 2003, 1 week; February 2004, 1 week; July 2004, 1 week; November 2004, 1 week; February 2005, 1 week.

in schools, so that the developments in school practice and the impact of the project could be measured. These could then be used as the basis for school self evaluation and external evaluation in order to set priorities for future school improvement. In 2004, I was asked by the IE Project Coordinator at Save the Children UK in Lao, if I would act in the role of advisor to the IE Project and support the development of these materials.

Between 2004 and February 2007, I worked as consultant with a team of teachers and advisors to develop and trial the materials which became known as 'The Improving Quality Schools for All Toolkit'. This involved teams from 9 Primary schools, comprising the Principal and 2 other teachers, advisors from the 3 District Education Teams and 3 Provincial Education Teams, who would be supporting the schools in implementing the materials. In addition the group was joined by the IE Project's national team, comprising representatives from the Ministry of Education and the NGO managing the project, Save the Children Norway. During this period I collected field notes from my visits to the 9 schools, observations of the development of the workshops, my developing understanding of the complexity of my role as a consultant and also the developing perspectives of the participants<sup>2</sup>.

## **Interpretations of Inclusion**

In this section I identify some critical incidents from the data I collected in Phase 1, which enabled me to begin to understand the ways in which inclusion was interpreted in these settings and also to identify tensions in comparison to my theoretical framework.

Initially my view was that views of inclusion in the settings were constructed around models based on disability and special educational needs. This was partly due to my first contacts with the two settings and early engagement with literature describing them. A study commissioned by UNICEF and published in April 2003, shortly before I entered the field, purported to provide an overview of Inclusive Education in South East Asia by presenting a number of case studies in the region. Market and the

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<sup>2</sup> Data is drawn from several visits comprising both workshops and school visits: July 2004, 3 day workshop and half day visits to 2 schools; January-February 2005 1 week workshop and half-day visits to 2 schools; July 2005, 1 week workshop and 2 half day visits to schools; November 2005, 3 weeks comprising one day visit to each school in the project and 3 1-day workshops in each of 3 Provinces; July 2006, 1 week workshop; November 2006, 3 weeks comprising one day visit to each school in the project and 3 1-day workshops in each of 3 Provinces; February 2007, 1 week workshop.

Laos IE Project, were both featured in the publication which defined inclusive education as being concerned with providing provision and support for children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2003). However, as I began to engage more closely I started to understand that the ways in which inclusion was understood was more complex and reflected a range of different factors.

### **Market School**

My first visits to Market School were concerned with trying to develop an initial understanding of the school, its community, the way that things were done 'around here' (Hargreaves, 1995, p25). My initial transcripts of interviews and field notes contain numerous references to children with disabilities. The school's reputation had been partly based on the fact that it was admitting children with disabilities into mainstream settings at a time when few other schools were doing so. In an early interview with the Principal, in February 2004, I tried to explore how this had come about and also how she interpreted the term inclusion. The interview was undertaken in both English and Thai through a translator and Ana tried to speak in English as far as she was able, although her English at this time was not fluent.

During the course of the interview, she explained that her use of the word inclusion was relatively recent, since 1998 when she had been introduced to it by a visitor from UNESCO; previously she had used the term special educational needs. Several times during the interview, Ana used the phrase 'child special needs' and explained that in the Thai language the concept of special needs was easier to communicate because it was associated with the Thai term for handicap. This idea of special needs being linked to a medical model through its association with the word 'handicap' was reinforced by the phrase 'regular children' which emerged in several conversations and interviews, and which was used to differentiate between those with special needs and those without. Perhaps this was linked to the use of the phrase 'regular' in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994a) where it referred to mainstream schools, but at the time I noted that it appeared to imply an understanding of inclusion which had strong links to a medical model. Ana also explained that the term inclusion does not translate easily or directly into Thai and is more easily understood through the translation of the phrase 'everybody learning together'. As the interview progressed, and interpretation of the word was later elaborated on by other members of staff, it emerged that the school's development consisted of a number of different strands, which could be linked to different definitions of inclusion.

One example was the introduction of what was described as active learning or child centred teaching, which the school identified as a separate development from the admission of children with disabilities.

An interview with Min, one of the more experienced members of the teaching staff, provided a more detailed picture of the schools development in relation to this. He explained that when he had started teaching at the school, at the end of the 1980s, it

‘was no different to any other school in regards to the way the children learnt; it was very competitive - the students were learning academically and they had to memorize things’ (field notes November 2004).

Min describes the education of Ana’s eldest son, Tai, who was an 8 year old student in the school at this time, as a critical incident which led to changes in the way the curriculum was conceptualised and delivered. He explained that Tai

‘...didn’t like to learn from books, but would like to get involved in doing things; when it rained he would take my shoes and float them in the water to see what happened, but he was very clever – you could ask him any question and he would know the answer. This was one of the issues that got us thinking about different ways of learning’ (ibid).

A third inclusion strand in the school was described by Ana as a response to diversity in terms of social class and also religious faith.

‘In Thailand there are many classes; I do not want to select or separate rich pupils and poor pupils. We have around 100 students studying here who do not pay fees’ (Ana, Principal of Market, field notes February 2004).

Several teachers described a particular incident which they felt demonstrated Ana’s commitment to supporting economically poorer classes within Thai society. In 2002, a motorway flyover was built close to the school, taking over a year to complete. The workers employed were travelling families who would move around the country to different construction projects. When Ana became aware that the children were not attending school but either helping their parents on the construction project or playing around the local area, she offered free places in her school to all the families involved. Several teachers also told me that Ana worked with the staff to try and make sure the children were welcomed and not stigmatised. On one level this appears to be a strong commitment to values such as equity and participation for all, which emerge strongly in the case studies cited in chapter two (e.g. Corbett, 2001; Kugelmass, 2004). However, as I worked in the school I also began to understand the problematic nature of trying to understand the significance of this within Thai culture. Ana knew that she would have to support her staff in welcoming the children into the school because, as with children with disabilities, they were stigmatised within Thai society. Through conversations with parents of children with disabilities and poor backgrounds, I began to realise that Thai culture has two features which directly impact on the poor and the disabled. In social hierarchy, these two groups are traditionally considered to be either in the lowest social class or outside the class system. Additionally, within Thai Theravada Buddhism, many practitioners still believe that those who are disabled or poor are paying the penalty for sins committed in previous re-incarnations.

Perhaps partly in response to this challenge, part of Ana's philosophy of inclusion was to try and develop a response to social and religious diversity by drawing strands of Buddhist philosophy together with new approaches to school-based learning by developing a curriculum which she described as responding to 'head, hand, heart' (field notes, February 2004). She believed that this approach was the centre stone of her inclusive philosophy as it symbolised an integration of Buddhism and child centred education; the experience of the children in the school should be on an intellectual, physical and spiritual level. This was extremely difficult for me to understand during this phase of my research. In my field notes, February 2005 I wrote:

'I don't understand it [head, hand and heart] and because of this I cannot see any evidence of it in the school, even though she [Ana] has explained it to me so many times.' (ibid)

I went on to articulate an issue within my research which became an epistemological tension which I theorize in later chapters. This concerns the ways in which researchers can develop their understanding of reality (Sumner, 2006, p92). The question I posed in February 2005 was

'How can I understand their approaches and teaching perspectives when I am coming from such a different perspective? For example, in relation to school culture: what are the basic shared understandings in this context that are fundamental to the way people think?' (field notes, February 2005).

It was at this stage in my research that I began to formulate ideas for the next phase of research which would allow me to examine participant perspectives more closely over a longer period of time.

In summary, my engagement with Market, enabled me to conclude that in the context of this school, inclusion as a concept was probably comprised of at least three strands: the inclusion of children with disabilities in a mainstream setting; a development of the curriculum and the way it was taught to reflect a child centred / active-learning approach; a response to diversity, based on rights based values such as equality and access, equity and participation, whereby children from different backgrounds should be enabled to attend schools and experience the same curriculum as others. This last strand also included a response to complex social-religious factors within Thai society and culture.

### **The Laos IE Project**

My engagement with the Laos IE Project, was at a different point on the continuum I present in my methodological framework, Figure 2, Page 57 in Chapter Three. In Market, I was able to present myself more towards the pure researcher end of the continuum, whilst in Laos I was introduced to the participants as a consultant, albeit one who intended to employ a collaborative action research methodology. This is significant in identifying the starting point for my engagement with concepts of



inclusion and how it was interpreted within the setting, because to some extent the concept had already been constructed at a policy level. The interesting aspect for my research was in what ways this policy construct had impacted on perspectives at a school based and individual level.

The original aim of the IE Project, as described above, was to enable the inclusion of children with, what were considered mild to moderate disabilities (Holdsworth, 2003, p26-28) within mainstream settings. In addition a quality standard was developed, reflecting a child-centred teaching approach (ibid, p36-41) which set out an ideal of what quality schooling might look like in Laos schools. This reflected the twin-track approach which paid particular attention to improving provision for disabled children, whilst at the same time aiming to reform the education system in order to increase participation and learning for all children (Miles and Singal, 2010). The application of the twin track approach in Laos was justified on the basis that the best way to ensure that children with disabilities were included was to change the way in which teachers taught and the curriculum which was being delivered, towards a child centred approach reflecting the Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994b). In an interview with Sai , Ministry of Education IE Project coordinator and Mai , Save the Children IE project coordinator, in July 2005, I discussed with them their perspectives on the way in which the project had conceptualised inclusion. They described the initial focus on children with disabilities as being the main driving force behind the project development and explained that at policy level it was a joint initiative between the Department of Teacher Training and the Ministry of Health Rehabilitation Centre. They felt that this was one of the reasons why inclusion in Laos became so strongly associated with disability, as the involvement of doctors and medical staff meant that there was always more of a focus on a medical model of disability than on anything else (summary of interview notes, July 2005). For much of its early life, the project had also been titled the Integrated Education Project, rather than Inclusive and it was only in more recent years that they had come to consider how inclusion might differ from integration as a concept. Mai and Sai also felt that that the emphasis on developing a child centred teaching pedagogy came from the involvement of Save the Children, although Sai also explained that as the coordinator within the Ministry of Education he was very happy that the project developed a focus on pedagogy because as he noted:

‘I could see that we had to try and change the way the teachers were teaching. The old fashioned way did not actually work well for any children but we could easily see that for some of the children with special needs, they could not join in with learning because they did not understand what was happening – especially, you know, the slow learners. They found it very hard’ (ibid).

The role of the agency or NGO was identified here as being fundamental in setting the agenda for change. Understanding the development of inclusion as a concept in this setting would then require a close analysis of how ‘levers for change’ (Ainscow, 2005, p109) are partly created by and sustained by aid agencies and wider international agendas.

One method of assessing how the concept of inclusion was being perceived at different levels of the education system was based on an analysis of the indicators that were being developed for the 'Improving Quality Schools for All' (IQSA) toolkit, based on the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). I introduced the process of developing the toolkit in July 2004 with a range of education and health advisors from across the country. By January 2005, and following two further workshops run firstly by a different consultant, Samantha Fox, from the University of Manchester, with whom I had discussed the project in some detail, and then by Sai, a draft set of 29 indicators, had been developed. The teachers, provincial and district advisors involved in the pilot project, which began at this point (January 2005), had not been involved in the development process. The content of the indicators was very broad and each indicator began with the phrase 'All Students ...'. None of the indicators focused in any specific way on children with disabilities, although two of the questions used to clarify the indicators referred to parental encouragement of CSN (Laos acronym meaning Children with Special Needs) to attend school and also the attitudes of other children towards CSN. I noted this at the time in my field notes and identified it as the product of a number of factors, including input from both consultants, the Ministry of Education and also from the Save the Children. An emphasis had been placed on inclusion meaning participation and achievement within a quality educational experience, rather than on the inclusion of children with disabilities. Thus, the indicators were shaped by policy rather than individual perspectives.

The first stages of the workshop involved the IQSA project team, comprising of myself, Sai and Mai, explaining the purpose of the project and then sharing the indicators which had already been developed. Using a group exercise adapted from the ROAL materials (Chapters One and Two) participants were mixed into small groups with members from different schools and geographical locations as well as combining different levels of the education system. Each group was asked to review the 29 indicators and to try and identify a list of 5 indicators which they all agreed on as a group. These were then displayed on flip chart sheets around the room. My field notes at the end of the session read:

'Interestingly, out of the 4 groups, with a possible 20 indicators out of the original 29, 12 were chosen. Number 1 was on every single sheet – Everyone is made to feel welcome. What was significant to me about this was that the workshop members up to this point have not been shown the UK Index for Inclusion, just told about it and yet this indicator is also the first one in the Index. I asked them why they thought this was and someone said "you can tell a lot about a school if you feel welcome when you go to visit".' (field notes, January 2005)

On one level this seemed to re-affirm that perhaps the language of inclusion was universal to some extent, for example 'welcome' was perhaps a familiar and translatable concept, but other concepts seemed more problematic. However, as we proceeded through the workshop and began to examine each indicator in detail and also to develop questions which would clarify meaning, as in the UK

version of the Index, it became more apparent that this was a problematic assumption. The response of the participants in regard to the language used in different questions and the disagreements about exactly what each indicator might mean, highlighted some tensions around the way in which inclusion was defined at the level of the advisors (provincial and district) and at school level (Principals and teachers).

One example of this concerned a discussion concerning the draft indicator number 4 'All students are well supported by school staff' and what constituted a student with special needs. The debate centred on the term 'slow learner' and what the criteria would be for this. Some participants from schools in the North-East of the country argued that this term meant a wide range of children, including children from poor backgrounds, those who had not been to kindergarten, children who may have a first language that was not Lao (policy dictates that all lessons in Laos are taught in the Lao language) and those who were 'intellectually impaired' (this phrase is a translation from my field notes). Other participants, from the south of the country, argued that this was an incorrect interpretation and that slow learners must mean 'intellectual impairment'. This was a discussion that continued through this and subsequent workshops as participants engaged with the critical question of how a teacher would respond to a student who was not engaged or learning slowly. There was resolution in the sense that agreements were made about final wording for the indicators and questions, but the issue of what constituted a slow learner continued to be a subject of much discussion throughout the 6 years that I was collecting data for this thesis. Similarly the question of whether the term 'enjoy school' indicated inclusion was not easily agreed.

'Some people were saying that enjoy meant to relax and not be focused so it was not an inclusion word; others argued that it meant to be motivated, interested and excited and so it was about inclusion' (excerpt from field notes January 2005)

In summary, these tensions highlighted a number of points. Inclusion as a concept appeared to be one that was expanding from an original understanding linked to disability and integration, towards a broader definition that seemed to be linked to quality education, with some reference to aspects of a rights based perspective. For example, there was a clear agreement that most if not all of the children in a village should be able to go to school, although there was some concern about how to accommodate children with more complex disabilities. This was directly linked to the Education for All (EFA) agenda (UNESCO, 2008, UNESCO, 1990). There was also general agreement that it was the duty of the government to promote and enable this to take place. However, the concept of what a child centred and quality education might look like was the subject of much discussion and most participants seemed to feel that they needed more training and support. An argument that was often used in discussions was 'we are a poor country and our teachers have not had much training. We

need lots of support and help'. This seemed to reflect an assumption that there was a correct or better way to proceed in schools and those individuals like myself and organisations such as Save the Children could provide the answers to educational problems and challenges.

In regard to the impact of policy on inclusion on schools, it seemed likely that not only were there layers of tension concerning misunderstandings and different interpretations, but that language was also a significant factor. My initial assumption was that this was related to the translation of English language into Lao language. However, it became clearer during the first phase that it was more complex than this. As a country Laos has 49 indigenous, ethno linguistic groups including the Laos majority (Messerli et al., 2008). Lao language is only spoken by approximately 60% of the population and this has resulted in a complex linguistic context, whereby written Lao has not developed significantly in recent years and is sometimes considered very formal and often inadequate for clearly expressing concepts which may be articulated through an oral combination of dialect and Lao language. In the case of the workshop, whilst those from the north of Laos might be able to converse with and understand those from the south, their respective use of Lao language might be significantly influenced by the language of other linguistic groups. The result of this might be that the same word could take on a range of very different meanings and nuances, depending on the local linguistic context.

## **Summary**

There are similarities between the way in which inclusion is interpreted and contextualised in both the Laos IE Project and Market School. For example, both settings initially seemed to be concerned with a conceptualisation of inclusion, which drew upon a disability framework concerned with the enrolment of disabled students in mainstream settings. In both Market and within the Laos IE Project, the initial process to enrol students with disabilities was in part a reaction to a perceived inequality of educational opportunity. In the case of Laos this was partly driven by external policy agendas such as Education for All and the aims of the NGO at the time, Save the Children UK. In both cases, the initial admissions of students with disabilities, took place within mainstream school, against a social context and educational system which was actively discriminatory. It is also reasonable to acknowledge that in both cases, children with more complex educational needs were not admitted. In Market, children were assessed before entry and only offered a place in the school if staff believed they would be able to support the child. In Laos the IE Project policy, formally identified that admission would be offered to children with mild to moderate disabilities. The inadequacy of language to accurately describe grades of disability is illustrated by my findings that in both settings, children were admitted with a broad range of disabilities, including those on the Autistic Spectrum, children with

Down syndrome, speech and language difficulties and some with multiple difficulties. This tends to reinforce the impression that the main aim of both settings was to enrol children into school who previously may have been unable to attend, despite concerns about the perceived severity of a disability and whether or not a school might be able to 'cope' with the support a child might need. Therefore there was a strong element of a rights based agenda being implemented.

It is also important to recognise that in both cases, the concept of inclusion was not formally developed during the early years of the process. The term inclusion was only applied in Thailand after 1998, and in Laos this did not occur until after 2000. In both cases the terminology which developed was drawn from the language of special educational needs – 'child special needs' in Thailand, and 'children with special needs' in Laos. Despite, the language used, in both settings there were also elements of a broader view of inclusion, which questioned the quality of the experiences that all students were having in the classroom and also evidence of the development of teaching approaches which might enable all students to participate and learn in school. In part this relates to a twin track approach (Miles and Singal, 2010) to the reform of education systems, although there was no specific evidence that participants in either setting were formally aware of this label. However, there was a strong indication in both cases of a commitment to reform through in service training.

There were also a number of tensions which I identified. For example, in Market, it was relatively easy to identify the way in which the school was developing teaching approaches to try and support the participation of students. In Laos, teachers had received some training in developing new teaching approaches, but these did not appear to be particularly evident in classes I visited. This raised questions about not only the impact of training, but also the assumptions behind the design of the training courses, in particular in relation to the way in which teachers might be expected to develop their practice. I also noted that values and principles associated with inclusion may be re-defined in different ways through translation not only into another language but through interpretation into different cultures. The impact of culture on the concept of inclusion, seemed to envelop all levels at which I sought to engage with both cases. An example of this is the way in which Market tried to develop a curriculum which drew together Buddhism and elements from western teaching methods; or the warnings from the SIDA representative in Laos that the political system would not enable the teachers to discuss openly or to reflect on their practice. I will develop my discussion of these issues in the final section of this chapter.

The following section examines a number of incidents arising from my research, which further highlighted tensions concerning the way in which my typology might be applied to the schools I was working with.

## **Critical Incidents**

### **Incident 1: 'Self evaluation can't work'**

Early on in the process of planning for the IQSA workshops, the representative of SIDA in Laos (a Lao national), argued forcefully that a process based on self evaluation could not work in Laos for two reasons. The first was the political structure of the country which did not encourage openness and questioning of the social hierarchy. The second reason was because he felt that people in Laos could not be self-reflective as it 'went against their culture' (extract from field notes, 2005). At the time I did not really understand what he meant and in discussions with Mai and Sai I tried to explore what they felt the issues might be. Their view was that whilst teachers in Laos might not be used to discussion and reflection, they could be encouraged and enabled to develop in these areas. I was satisfied by this response, partly because, in retrospect, I think I wanted to be reassured that this was not going to be an insurmountable challenge. However, the significance of these warnings became gradually more apparent and required me to engage with cultural factors on a much deeper level than I was originally prepared for. I became aware that Lao society was very hierarchical and organised into a series of groups and collectives which were, in part, responsible for reporting to and monitoring each other. It was therefore a greater challenge in this context to facilitate discussion which was truly equitable.

In the meantime, I planned for the IQSA workshops with a specific aim of trying to encourage open and democratic discussion as far as possible. My work with 'The Circle Works' described in the introduction to this thesis (Grimes, 1996), led me to organise the workshops with the participants sitting in a circle. The aim of this was to encourage participants to view themselves as equal members of the group and also to break away from an instructional mode of delivery. If the workshops were to enable schools to develop inclusively they had to model inclusive ways of working. This was drawing on concepts developed through the UNESCO project Reaching Out To All Learners, based on 'Special Needs in the Classroom (UNESCO, 2004, Ainscow, 1994, 2004), also described earlier in this thesis. However, my work with 'The Circle Works' had also led to the development of theoretical hypothesis about the nature of power in group learning contexts, such as within the classroom. The Circle Works research with schools led me to argue that through working in a circle, traditional notions of power being located within one individual were shifted, allowing power to move in and around the collective, between individuals (Grimes, 1996). It seemed to me that this approach might be useful in shifting traditional power relationships within the Laos group. I also tried as much as I could to ensure

that when we were not working together in a large circle, the participants were working in a range of different groups including school groups, district groups and mixed groups with combinations of teachers, Principals and advisors in every permutation I could think of. The idea behind this was to challenge traditional roles and responsibilities and any in-built deference to authority that might exist.

### **Incident 2 'A new way of working'**

I noted in my field notes, my surprise that the participants reported that this was the first time that they had worked in this way. My field notes contained several examples of participants speaking to me during the workshops over the two years of the project, explaining the impact it had had on them. One example of this is the way in which this form of collaborative working began to impact on teachers approaches to their work in the classroom. The following incident explores this in some detail.

As noted above, in my first visits to IE schools I observed classroom practice which was predominantly teacher centred – instructional and with an emphasis on memorising facts and practising skills through copying from the blackboard, rather than child-centred, with an emphasis on activity, use of problem based learning, and the construction of learning as a social process. Classrooms were mostly organised with children sitting in rows facing the front of the classroom, where the teacher stood or sat with a desk and a blackboard. There were usually some simple locally made resources, but teachers mostly used them in Lao language lessons for children to read aloud from. The curriculum followed set lessons from a Grade text book which did not offer any suggestions to teachers about 'how' they might teach the lesson, only the content which needed to be covered.

One of the schools in the IQSA project, Leaf Lane Primary, was identified by the Ministry of Education as a 'weak' school. This was based on the fact that the Principal was perceived as a concern to the local advisors:

'He's new – an ex-secondary teacher and doesn't really understand Primary schools. He is also finding it hard to work with the local community' (Sai, Ministry of Education, Field notes, February 2005).

On the first occasion I visited the school, in July 2004, it seemed to be typical of schools I was being taken to in that it was very teacher-centred and I noticed that the teachers did not seem very energised.

'They were all teaching diligently when I walked around, but there was little enthusiasm or energy in their teaching; for example, I didn't see any of them smiling or laughing with the children, there was not any singing (which is very common in Laos schools I am visiting) and the children were mostly engaged in copying from the board or chanting out loud. I wonder

what is going on in this school – where does this unhappiness come from?’ (Field notes, July 2004).

During the course of the IQSA workshops I made close observations of the Principal and the two teachers who were part of his team. I noted that they were very quiet when working in groups at the beginning of the process, in January 2005, and also that when they worked in a school based group, rather than with colleagues from other schools, the two teachers seemed to defer to the Principal and there was not a lot of discussion taking place.

Visiting the school in November 2005, I walked with my interpreter down the line of classrooms looking through the open windows to see the usual scenes of children in rows facing a blackboard described above. At the end of the row of classrooms was the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade classroom. My interpreter walked ahead of me towards the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and quickly came running back. ‘I think you had better come and see this’ he said. The Grade 1 teacher had been a member of the IQSA project and had attended all the workshops. During my previous visit her classroom had been organised in rows. Today it was in a U shape with all the children sitting around in 2 rows, with the teacher in the middle. Her behaviour was also different – she was moving around the space in the middle of the U, asking different children questions, singing songs, playing clapping games, showing resources to the children. A boy with Down’s syndrome was sitting alone in the middle of the U, towards the open end, nearest to the teacher. The teacher would move forward into the U and around the outside of the bend to ask children questions and would then come back to this boy and either smile at him, encourage him or show him the resource. There was a vivid sense of engagement, in the lesson, on the part of the teacher and the children, which was completely different to anything I had seen in Laos before.

I sat and watched the rest of the lesson and at break time, I interviewed the teacher, asking her about the lesson and why it was so different from what I had seen last time.

‘Yes, I have changed the way I work. It is very different now. I use this U shape a lot but then after break I have maths so I will probably put the furniture back into rows because the children need to see the board. Then after that it is ‘The World Around Us’ and so we will sit in groups so we can talk to each other’ (Leaf Lane Grade 1 Teacher, Field notes, November 2005)

I said that I was interested to see the way in which she moved around a lot during the lesson and seemed to be talking to the children more than I had observed on previous visits. I wondered what had led to this change in practice.

‘This is also true. I am working very differently. It is because of the (IQSA) workshops. We worked in the shape of a circle so much there and I thought it was wonderful – it encouraged us to think and be a part of what was going on and so I thought ‘how can I do this in my



classroom?’ This U shape is the best I can do at the moment, but I have become confident to experiment. So next I thought that it was very good to work in small groups in the workshop – why not get the children to discuss our lessons together in small groups. Now I do that too. But I found that I can talk to the children more easily – get close to them – show them resources and the boy who is the slow learner (the boy with Down’s syndrome), I can support his learning much more easily in this way.’ (Leaf Lane Grade 1 Teacher, Field notes, November 2005)

This incident is linked to the following one.

### **Incident 3. An alternative use for questionnaires**

During a visit to the school with Mr Bai, a Ministry of Education advisor, we discussed the progress of the IQSA project with the Principal and asked him if they had begun trialling the use of the questionnaires. The Principal made a number of excuses as to why this had not yet happened, such as the fact that they had been very busy and the teachers had a lot of other work to complete. As the project consultant, I was expected by social convention to lead the discussion. However, because we were concerned that the Principal might be nervous, we had previously decided that it might be easier for the Principal if Mr Bai led the discussion, so that the conversation could take place in Laos language rather than having to stop for translations. Mr Bai spoke quite good English, although not as fluent as a professional translator; he did not have a very wide vocabulary but could communicate clearly and make himself understood in English. We discovered that the Principal had used the questionnaires to wrap up artefacts in his house to keep them clean, in the same way as western families might use newspaper. As we talked with him, Mr Bai said to me in English:

‘He is a very simple man – he’s not very well educated and probably doesn’t understand properly. This is how it is in Laos – we need to expect the unexpected; we cannot predict how our work will have an impact on people in the way that you can in England. I will explain to him that he must find the papers and bring them here – if he has ruined them we will have to photocopy them again. I think that we will need to show them how to use the questionnaires carefully in this school.’ (Ministry of Education advisor, Mr Bai, Field notes, November 2005)

I noted in my field notes that I was ‘shocked’ by this encounter. It was difficult for me to believe that the work we had done in the workshops in developing the materials with the local school staff had had such little impact on the Principal that he didn’t understand what he was supposed to do with the questionnaires. It was a significant moment for me as a consultant because I had to acknowledge that he saw a use for the questionnaires, which was different to mine. Within a year he had been removed from his post by the Ministry and I reflected at that time that in one sense did not fit the agenda set by the aid drivers and so was disposed of.

Reflecting on these two incidents in the same school, it seemed to me that the first incident served to re-enforce the lesson from the second one. As a consultant I needed to ‘expect the unexpected’.

Whilst the modelling of inclusive practices was an integral part of the ROAL Project and this had directly influenced my approach to the design of the IQSA project, I had not expected it to have such a direct impact on the teachers practice. On one level I was able to make sense of what had occurred theoretically, in that I could see how the project had 'interrupted' the traditional discourse (Ainscow and Howes, 2006, p36) and that through her exposure to a different way of working the Grade 1 teacher had begun to adapt her own approach to teaching. I was particularly interested in the fact that despite the presence of potentially conflicting perspectives, in the shape of the Principal, this teacher had enough autonomy to be able to experiment. However, I was also ready to acknowledge that the two incidents indicated that the way in which I was working were not having an impact in the way I had expected and that the way in which inclusive practice might be developed would require that I try and understand the context of education and culture in Laos at deeper levels in order to be able to make more accurate predictions about the most effective way of working in the future.

#### **Incident 4: 'I'm not being critical but...'**

The interactive approach of the IQSA workshops emphasised a collaborative approach to problem solving with all participants contributing and sharing ideas. Once the participants had got used to this different way of working, some of them began to ask questions about the theoretical perspectives underpinning it. One advisor talked to me about the difficulties in managing a District Education team.

'I have so many different projects funded by different agencies with different staff working on each one. This has been really a challenge to coordinate in the past and it has felt to me that there were many disconnected initiatives happening at the same time. But with this self evaluation project, I can see how I can work in a different way – getting the different advisors to collaborate and share their thinking with each other ... this would help to join the projects together.' (District Advisor, Field Notes, February 2006)

In his opinion, it seemed that it was quite possible to encourage his staff to work together and 'share' views more openly. The fact that some of the participants could discuss the outcomes of the workshops in such a way encouraged me to think that there was some potential in this way of working in a Lao context. The notion of encouraging the democratic sharing of different perspectives and building on this in a strategic way was possible.

I was also developing an awareness that encouraging 'voice' was not without its challenges in this context. For example, one advisor asked me during our second workshop together, why I did not give the participants a clear breakdown of the activities to be covered and the expected outcomes for each session as other consultants had. My response to this was that it was because I did not necessarily know what the outcomes would be or what activities we would cover. I based each section of the day on how the previous activity had progressed and the responsiveness of the group.

'But you must have an idea of what you are going to start with and what you would like us to have produced by the end of the day? We are used to knowing exactly what is going to happen at each stage of the day' (Provincial Advisor, Field notes, February 2006)

This particular participant was a very experienced advisor, who was usually very engaged in the proceedings and seemed to have a good understanding of what we were trying to do. I talked to him after the workshop to try and understand what he was exploring during his questioning of me.

'I am not being critical. Actually, just trying to understand your way of working because I like it very much. But, you know, you must also understand that this is a very different way of working to what we are used to. As advisors we attend many workshops run by different agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP and others. Of course, we also run workshops for other advisors and teachers ourselves. Our experience of these workshops is that it is not so participatory as this – there is usually a fixed schedule – if there is a group discussion, we have a very time limited task and have to make decisions or feedback quite quickly. Here we are given time and asked to think, discuss, maybe even argue with each other. It is like you want us to disagree – or at least say what we think to each other. I want to try and understand more about this way of working – I think it has a lot of use for us, but we are not used to it and I think it can take a lot of time for people to understand how it works.' (ibid)

Over the course of my work in Laos I was able to get to know this participant very well and we had many discussions about our work together. He later developed the IQSA tool into a set of materials which could be used with secondary schools and colleges in his Province. Reflecting back on this incident I am not sure that he was trying to be critical, but rather genuinely interested in the way that the workshops were structured and my approach. The incident also raised interesting questions about our relative positions as consultant and participant in that he felt able to challenge me and was also being reflective and opening up a dialogue about the process we were following. Whilst it does not constitute evidence that the warning about Laos participants not being reflective or able to have open discussions was incorrect, it does question this supposition to some extent. However, it is also important to note that I was beginning to understand that the 'cultural' context of working in Laos was not just affected by tradition, beliefs and values or social organisation. The involvement of multi-Aid Agencies in the country was actually impacting on cultural development in a way that I had not been able to anticipate. This caused me to engage with some critical questions: if participants in the project were not used to ideas such as 'reflection', 'collaboration' and 'problem-solving', how would teachers, parents and students in schools and communities, respond to the demands of an initiative which required them to share their views and discuss problems together? Would it be a question of time and encouragement, as argued by Sai and Mai, or were there significant barriers which needed to be engaged with.

#### **Incident 5: Its better than catching frogs isn't it?**

The experience of working with the school's local community mirrored to some extent the lessons I was learning through the workshops. It appeared that as parents and community representatives who were invited to meetings at the schools, became accustomed to the fact that the school and advisors

really did want them to share their opinions, the more able they were able to speak openly. There were several instances of parents and members of the local community making clear suggestions about how the school could be improved or, in one case, complaining about the Principal (in Leaf Lane, the school described above). This seemed to confirm that it was possible to encourage local people to share their views. However, as I visited more schools, I began to understand some of the contextual and cultural factors which were affecting the way in which schools were consulting parents.

In the workshops we had designed materials which were to be used to consult the views of parents and community members. Therefore, I had assumed that the school was sending out general invitations to parents to attend consultation meetings. After observing and participating in several of these consultation meetings in different schools, I started to realise that the participants were mostly local Village Committee members. This would usually include the head of the village, his or her deputy and several other prominent and high status figures such as the representative of the Laos Women's Union. In some instances where the school served several villages, each village Head and deputy would attend. These were all participants who were used to working on committees and in meetings in a particular style, used to making themselves 'heard' and often with a particular agenda to defend or put forward. For example, it was part of the village committee's responsibilities to liaise and work closely with the school Principal. What had appeared to be a representation of parents was in reality a 'snapshot' of local politicians in action.

This led to a review of the way in which the schools in the project consulted with parents and community. I tried to encourage the schools to invite and encourage the attendance of a wider range of parents, including those from disadvantaged groups and parents of those with disabilities. For many of the schools, thinking about specific groups of children who might be disadvantaged was a familiar approach and subsequent discussions enabled me to appreciate the impact of Aid Agencies, NGOs and the Ministry in implementing policies such as Education For All (UNESCO, 1990). It also helped me to clarify the complexity of the processes we were engaged in together. The assumption that schools would automatically invite a range of parents was not a shared one. Furthermore, it raised the question of how the democratic ideals driving the project, as I imagined them, were being interpreted by schools. I understood from this, that certain concepts were not as transferable as I had thought. This included concepts, which to me appeared reasonably simple and straightforward, such as the notion that if we were to talk to a group of parents then those parents should be broadly representative of the parent community.

Once we began to get 'real' parents attending consultation meetings, I began to appreciate another set of constraints to my assumptions about the transferability of inclusive concepts. The parents who came to consultation meetings in Laos were not used to being asked what they thought and I observed that any questions about 'inclusivity' or 'quality' were very challenging for them to answer. The project had to develop starting points which were based on simpler questions than the ones I had initially expected the schools to explore. For example, a question such as 'What do you think is good about this school?' usually elicited little response from parents. We had to use questions such as 'Do your children like coming to school?' and 'What sorts of things do they like to do in school?' Whilst we did get responses it soon became clear that many parents did not really know what went on in school and did not have conversations with their children about school or learning. Education was seen as something which was 'done' by the school. Parents mostly appeared grateful that the children were able to attend a school and to be 'learning'. This is perhaps typified by the response from the grandmother (presented in the Introduction to this thesis) who came to a parents consultation in Champasack, in the south of Laos in November 2005:

'on being asked why her grandchildren enjoyed school [she replied] 'Well its better than catching frogs isn't it? School, in the sense that it involves learning, being with other children and playing together at lunchtimes and after school, is by contrast much more enjoyable.'  
(Grimes, 2009, p75)

This was the first time I had heard such a response and when I shared this with Lao colleagues in the project team they were also very interested in the perspective being offered. After some discussion with both parents and local teachers and advisors, we were able to establish that for some children in this particular district, if they didn't go to school they would be sent into the fields to work or catch food – in this instance, frogs. Incidents such as this highlighted that the way in which reality is interpreted by individuals at a local level may differ greatly from not only my interpretations as a western consultant, but also from those of colleagues in Laos.

As a consultant, I wanted to evolve practical strategies which might support these schools in developing more effective ways to engage with parents and develop a more cohesive working partnership between school and community. These incidents were critical in that they enabled me to begin mapping the areas which I would need to understand on a deeper level.

#### **Incident 6:- West meets East**

One of my initial impressions from both settings was that there was a focus on changing or developing the existing approaches to teaching. This is related to a key feature of my typology of the features of inclusive development:

*An emphasis on the development of a curriculum for all, which is reflective of student diversity and seeks to minimise and remove barriers to participation and achievement for all pupils (See Chapter Two).*

Ana described the system of education in Thai schools in the 1970s as being based upon 'instruction': 'the teachers gave the students information which they then memorised' (Witoonchat, 2000). In her view this had a negative impact on the development of Thai society in that it discouraged children from learning to think for themselves. Ana also identified competition as an outcome of the way teachers taught. She believed that children and young people were experiencing high levels of stress as they competed with each other for a limited number of places in Thai High Schools and universities. In order to satisfy the demands of middle-class and professional parents, teachers were using instructional or rote-learning methods to teach students to pass entrance examinations for secondary and Higher education. This led her to question the purpose of education and she concluded that the education system needed reformation to include more creative, creating school environments which focused on activity-based learning methods (Witoonchat, 2000, p.9). Supported by her husband, a prominent and wealthy member of the local business community, Ana began visiting schools in other countries in order to develop her understanding of how her school might, in addition to academic development, 'improve the education of humanity ... (and) develop our students spiritually and physically'(ibid). Between 1996 and 2005, some of the teachers in Market were able to visit schools in a range of countries, including Australia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Israel, US and Japan. The schools they visited worked in a range of traditions including Steiner and Montessori. Consultants from a number of countries also visited the school to run training workshops for staff and parents.

Ana summarised the change in pedagogy in the following way:

'We looked at many different schools and theories and realised that a child-centred approach – that is one where we encourage children to think for themselves and solve problems together - was one which might work for us in our school. Looking back now, I feel that we took some of the more positive things from western education and incorporated them into Thai culture. It was very important that we maintain our Thai identity and we can see this in our Buddhist approach to spirituality – head, hand, heart – which underpins everything that happens in the school.' (interview transcription, 2005)

This quote typifies my experience of the school at this time. On the one hand, I was able to identify key features of the school – what Ana refers to as '*the more positive things from western education*' - which related to my own background and understanding of child-centred teaching approaches and were connected to my own theories about how schools might be supported to become more inclusive. However, the second half of this quote re-enforced other observations I had made in the school which made me realise I needed to immerse myself more fully in the setting if I was to understand the

cultural and spiritual beliefs which were central to much of everyday life in the school. In a conference paper which I presented with Ana in 2005, she described aspects of the way in which this took place:

'With a Buddhist approach to learning, moral ethics were strongly emphasized in all areas of school life. During each school day there were regular short meditation breaks during the study day, which helped students to develop self-awareness as well as peace of mind. In the kindergarten classes, students prepared each morning by passing a lighted candle to each other. The students sat in a large circle and focused their minds on the coming day's activities while passing the candle to each other, giving the traditional Thai Wai greeting when receiving or giving the candle.' (Grimes and Witoonchat, 2005, p62)

As a researcher observing this practice, I had written in my field notes that 'it was not possible to spend time in the school without becoming aware of the deep significance of these spiritual rituals' (Field Notes February 2004). They seemed to connect the everyday life and business of the school with local culture, beliefs and values in a way that went beyond language. As a researcher, I began to recognise that my awareness of the significance of what I was observing, did not necessarily mean that I fully understood 'how' and 'why': 'How did culture in terms of beliefs, spirituality and tradition, interact with the way in which the school was undergoing a process of change? Why were these different aspects of culture so important to the teachers and community?' (Field notes July 2004). My view of schools and inclusivity at that time was based partly on a notion that diversity and beliefs systems should be respected and celebrated but I had to acknowledge that the importance of Buddhist values and rituals at Market went beyond my understanding. I gradually came to realise that only over time and with the support and help of my local research participants/partners could I hope to begin to integrate these beliefs and cultures into my understanding of the ways in which inclusion might be interpreted in a Thai setting.

### **Incident 7 - An Inclusive School Leader**

Ana, became Principal of Market School in 1973, when she was only 20 years old. The significance of this is interesting for several reasons. Over the course of several interviews with her, I was able to build up a detailed picture of her perspective on this process. Clearly she was very young to be appointed. However she had been trained as a teacher, whereas the other teachers who taught in the school when she began her career, had not. She also presented herself to the community committee as enthusiastic and motivated, something which she believed was in contrast to other teachers in the school. Ana was also considered by parents to be successful in the way she taught the students and was widely respected by them. When it was suggested that Ana be appointed as Principal some members of the committee objected, pointing out that several previous male Principals had been unsuccessful in leading the school, questioning how a 'young girl' (Witoonchat, 2000, p7) could be successful where they had not. In addition the assistant Principal was still working in the school and the rest of the teachers were older and more experienced. A senior member of the community committee pointed out that Chinese people used a different set of criteria in choosing a leader. One of

the most important of these was having a particular type of physique which she possessed. This incident, which I became aware of early on in my research in the school, made me realise that the cultural aspects of decision making in this particular context were more complex than I had imagined.

### **Incident 8: Refusing to Intervene**

One particular incident which I tracked through from classroom based observations to interviews with the different participants, including Ana, enabled me to view this in close detail. This involved a particular teacher who was finding it difficult to work in the way that her more experienced colleagues in a team of 3 teachers expected her to. She did not follow the routines they had set up and had different expectations of student work and behaviour. The two experienced teachers in the team felt that they had tried to support her, but she did not follow their advice or adhere to agreements they felt had been made. Many complaints were made by the two aggrieved teachers to Ana, who would listen and talk to them but refused to intervene; her consistent message was that they had to work it through for themselves. She argued that if she came and sorted it out, it would not lead to sustainable change or real development and the disagreements would not be truly addressed. In an interview with me she explained that she felt it was her role to support teachers but sometimes this meant that they had to be trusted to work through a difficult process for themselves, so that they could take true ownership of the end result.

Through my interviews with the staff and also visits to other schools in Bangkok, I became gradually aware that Ana's leadership style, as well as her vision for a school which supported active learning, had to be interpreted against the context of the education system in Thailand at the time. I concluded that she was unusual not only in her commitment to child centred education, and advocacy for the disabled, but also in the way she tried to run the school. Although not a one party state, Thailand was and is, socially hierarchical and in other schools, it seemed that the Principal would be expected to wield complete power and control. Ana's approach did not follow this pattern, although I also observed that she was held in great respect by the teachers, indicating that if she chose to insist upon something, it would probably be done. This helps to make sense of her response to the incident above; she felt that if she did intervene, her view might be interpreted as the final decision which would have to be followed. This would negate the possibility that the teachers learning about themselves and each other and the way in which they worked together, could be developed a problem solving process. The complexity of Thai socio-cultural factors is also explored in the next incident.



### **Incident 9: Ana is ousted from Market School**

Perhaps the most dramatic event of Phase 1 of my research occurred in March 2005. The following is an extract from a conference paper, presenting a brief account of the incident, written in collaboration with Ana and presented in December 2005.

'As a Foundation School, Market School was managed by a Foundation Board comprising local community leaders, amongst others. In March 2005, the board of foundation, with no notice or discussion voted Ana out of her position as Principal of the School with no explanation. Various interpretations were offered as to why this happened. The chairman of the board was said to be looking for political election and some thought he wanted to use the reputation of the school to support his campaign. Others believed that the move was motivated by the desire amongst some Board members to turn the school into a more financially profitable business.

We cannot be sure what motivates individuals to behave in destructive ways. We can only document what happened within the first months after Ana's removal from the school:

Around ten committee members both from the board of foundation and the board of administration have been replaced by outside personnel, who have political influence. A number of teachers and educational staff have been sacked, due to disagreement with the policies of the new administrator; Three hundred students, including most of the students with disabilities, have been taken out of the school by their parents or been told to leave. The students with disabilities have been described by the new administrator as 'the patients'. The new teams of teachers and administrator have argued that it is not the schools responsibility to work with students with mental or physical disabilities as they believe that these children deteriorate the school's development, and they should be monitored by doctors instead.

Teaching and learning methods and activities have all returned to 'chalk and talk' approaches, which are memory based, and offer no opportunity for the child to develop creativity or critical thinking. The schools approach to healthy living and eating has been sacrificed to financial gain as soft-drinks and salty snacks are now liberally sold in school in place of the fruit and vegetables that were previously available.

The school no longer supports training and developing teachers on the grounds that this is too expensive and not conducive to effective school development.

Teachers and students are not allowed to express their opinions on school administration, or participate in the discussion of curriculum contents freely; as a result, teachers, students, and parents are under pressure and stress. The few students with disabilities who remain in the school are no longer making the good progress they were.' (Grimes and Witoonchat, 2005, p65)

When I was told what had occurred, I was shocked and distressed on a number of levels. This was an incident which affected me very deeply and although, as a researcher, I had tried to prepare myself for unexpected events, this was unpredictable and also emotionally upsetting. The above account is a carefully written version of events. The view of Ana and those teachers who moved with her to Hope, her new school (built between 2006-7 and opened in 2007) was that the school had been taken over by a local crime syndicate. They described how some of the teachers who had protested had been threatened with physical violence and even the possibility that they might lose their life. Cultural factors which affect the development of inclusive schools, do not usually appear as starkly as this. At the time it was very difficult to make sense of what had happened and why, but over time and through

a series of conversations with teachers who had left Market, it was possible to begin to engage with the complexity of the socio-cultural factors which had led to this occurrence.

The complex structure of the ownership of the school, being managed by a community board and part funded by parents and the state seems to have allowed individuals with contrasting motives from Ana to take power. Ana later discussed what she referred to as her 'naivety' in not realising that key personnel on the community board were being strategically replaced over a period of time and that there were competing agendas. It seems clear in retrospect that the main motivation for this event was financial, in that the school was seen as generating a healthy turnover. Ana had chosen to re-invest the profits from the school in resources, curriculum and teacher development. This was seen by the new owners as an irrelevance and led directly to many of the main distinguishing inclusive features of the school being discontinued. It is not possible to generalise from this incident and make any judgements about the respective merits of the systems and structures, values and beliefs which underpin Thai society and specifically educational settings within that society. However, it did serve to illustrate to me that understanding the way in which schools might develop inclusively in this society was going to be problematic and that there were clearly a number of structural barriers within the social structure which needed to be understood in order to develop useful theories about the ways in which schools might become more inclusive.

## **Reflecting on the incidents**

In the final section of this chapter, I will summarise and discuss the findings reported in the previous sections, in relation to the different sections of my typology. In these critical incidents all aspects of the typology can be seen to be helpful in understanding events, but there are also areas where it needed to be developed in order to enable a more clearly theorised interpretation of the development of inclusive schools in these settings. As far as possible I have tried to organise the discussion around the specific areas of the typology, but in several cases, I have identified issues which are relevant to a number of areas as well as issues which do not fit the typology clearly.

### **An Inclusive culture**

The schools I visited in Thailand and Laos shared certain aspects of this feature. In that there was evidence that both settings were attempting in different ways to engage with the concept of participation and achievement for all students. In Market, there was a focus on developing a responsive curriculum and teaching approaches which engaged the students. In Laos schools were

trying to respond to the policies of the IE Project and develop their teaching through the 5 Point Star techniques. There were also forms of collaborative activity evident. In Market there was a sense that the teachers were used to working and developing teaching approaches together; in Laos teachers were used to collaborating in certain areas such as the making of resources and organising, decorating and looking after the school. Teachers in both settings seemed comfortable to discuss their work with different disadvantaged groups and there was an impression that they were familiar with, in Market's case, the aims of the school, to offer a quality education to all children attending the school including those with disabilities and, in the case of the Laos IE Project, the aims of the project to admit disabled children and to try and ensure quality education for all. All aspects of the typology described these settings to some extent, but there were also significant differences.

The concept of an inclusive school culture as I understood it, did not translate easily into either of these settings. Market was a school which charged fees to a large proportion of parents. In this sense it did not fit the definition of an Inclusive school which I carried with me from the UK. If it did not admit all the children from the locality, I questioned whether it could still be described as Inclusive. This view was balanced by the knowledge that fees were waived to parents from poor families and that Ana was very concerned that as many children living locally as possible, should be attending school, as seen in the case of the children whose parents were building the flyover. Another challenge was that the language used in both settings concerning disability, seemed to originate from a medical model. The use of the terms 'regular' and 'slow learner' seemed to indicate a deficit discourse. Investigating this seemed to indicate that the roots of the language used were varied and owed much to the influence of NGOs, Aid Agencies and consultants in both settings. I also became aware of a methodological challenge in relation to this, whereby I became aware of the significance of the interpreter's viewpoint. If an interpreter was used to a certain translation of a Thai or Lao phrase, they would apply this consistently, but not necessarily discerningly or critically, as with John the interpreter in Market's use of 'regular'. I came to understand that I could not rely on this translation as an accurate interpretation of what the speaker had originally intended. I discuss this in more detail in relation to methodology at the end of this chapter. This also relates to the variability of interpretation of language when ideas or concepts are translated generally across cultures. A word such as equality can be interpreted very differently in Laos than in England. For example, the government of Laos describes itself as a 'Peoples Democratic Republic' but the concept of democracy is interpreted in a very specific way which does not necessarily mean the same as within a western interpretation; for example, there is only one political party although there are 'free' elections where voters can elect representatives to sit on various committees. Therefore, words such as equality, participation etc are also likely to have a different range of interpretations as well.

There is also a significant amount of evidence from the Lao data to indicate that when discussing the concept of values and inclusive principles, the influence of the NGOs and Aid Agencies is very pervasive. Save the Children were the driving force behind the initial development of the IE Project and although the Ministry of Education worked closely with them to manage the project, the aims and desirable outcomes were set by a series of donors. This raises a question of agenda and whether or not individuals and groups within the educational system fully share or even understand all the principles which are being advocated.

### **An emphasis on the development of a curriculum for all**

The data from Market indicated that there was a concerted attempt over a number of years to tackle aspects of the Thai education system which the school identified as creating barriers to participation. This seemed to have led to the evolution of a new approach to teaching and learning which drew on a range of influences. I was able to identify ways in which teachers used different approaches to keep the learning activities varied in order to engage the children. There was also a strong sense in the school that teachers were trying to respond to the needs of children to have a balanced day with stimulation of the mind and body, alongside a spiritual content to the day coupled with a healthy food and exercise policy. However, Ana's assertion in Incident 6, 'West meets East' that she took the 'best' of western education and then merged it with Thai culture to incorporate Buddhist teachings and spirituality challenged me to try and understand exactly what their approach entailed. I argued above, that as a researcher, whilst I could describe what I see, this does not mean that I will be able to understand it. This supported my conclusion that the concept of a curriculum for all carried a different set of meanings with it in Market than that envisaged in my typology. It would require further engagement with a new set of theories and philosophies as well as deeper engagement with the school to begin to be able to analyse and describe it accurately.

In Laos, the concept of a curriculum for all was also built into the IE Project policies and training programmes, in the form of an attempt to move towards child centred teaching methods. The five point star of the IE Project emphasised 5 approaches to learning involving a range of different activities which should take place during the lesson; an increased use of resources; the use of a range of student groupings; the use of different questioning styles; and the development of lessons which had relevance to real life or to the learners own experiences. As I noted above, posters of this five point star could be seen in all schools within the IE Project and all teachers received a 5 day training course, with a 3 day booster after a set number of years, to support their understanding of this. The policy envisaged that schools would be supported by local Pedagogical Advisors who would work within each district to visit the IE schools. However, the advisors received broadly the same amount of

training as the teachers and it is questionable how far they were able to actively support the schools in developing practice. The evidence collected through my observations of IE schools and conversations with teachers and advisors, indicated that although there was a growing understanding that the approaches advocated through the IE Project might support student participation in lessons, both teachers and advisors had a lack of confidence in their own agency. They seemed to feel that they were supposed to be changing practice but were not quite sure what the new practice might look like. This then led to a greater sense of expectation of a consultant such as myself, who might then be expected to provide answers and practical ways forward for the development of practice in the classroom.

This raised significant questions in my mind, about the assumptions behind the IE training programme in Laos, in relation to the way in which it would support and enable teachers to develop their practice, but also in relation to their own perspectives of themselves as professional and active agents within the education system. During this period, I was drawn to the contrast between the two sets of teachers I was working with, in the two settings. The teachers in Market appeared to be enabled to develop their practice through a combination of visits to other schools, input from visiting consultants, ongoing in-school training opportunities and a form of distributed leadership which encouraged them to take risks and try out new ideas in their own classrooms. The teachers in Laos had an apparently supportive policy context and were provided with training, support and encouragement but were finding it more challenging to make changes. I understood that this was problematic and needed to be examined on closer detail to understand what the barriers to development were and how they might be addressed.

### **School leaders, committed to inclusive values and a critical mass of staff**

The way in which Ana had developed her own vision for her school and tried to implement this, suggested that leadership within the context of Market reflected the leadership aspect of my typology. As I argue above, the ideals which she subscribed to, appear to broadly reflect inclusive values and there was much evidence of collaboration and distribution of leadership throughout the school. However, my data, such as in incident 7 'An Inclusive School Leader', also suggested that there was much that I did not understand about the concept of leadership in a Thai context. The influence of Thai socio-cultural factors affected not only the way in which Ana was chosen as Principal of the school at such a young age, but also the way in which her role as school leader was understood and constructed by teachers, children and parents. During her time as Principal, a number of staff had been appointed who grew to share a number of the ideals to which Ana was committed and some of

these individuals had positions of responsibility. In this sense there was a critical mass of staff who supported the broad vision for the school which she set out.

The data from Laos collected during Phase 1, did not match the typology clearly in this regard. I met and worked with a number of Principals through the IQSA project and through visits to schools and was able to talk to them and observe them in a variety of contexts. Perhaps the most important observation in this regard is that, I realised that the appointment of an individual to the position of Principal was often political, in that it had to be agreed by the local representatives of the government, who sat on different political committees. The Principal was not, therefore necessarily an experienced teacher or someone who had taught in the relevant age group before. This was partly the case with the Principal of Leaf Lane, described in Incident 3 'An Alternative Use for Questionnaires', in that he was a secondary phase teacher in charge of a primary school. I had originally made the assumption that each school admitted to the IE Project would have a certain commitment to Inclusive values and that this would be reflected in the Principal. I soon found that this was not the case and that the Principals' understanding of the IE Project varied greatly as did their understanding of inclusive values. This was partly due to issues concerning the translation and interpretation of language across cultures but also because of the political landscape in Laos.

There appeared to be a number of factors which might be impacting on how motivated Principals might be to engage in a process of school development with an inclusive orientation. Of the 9 schools I worked closely with during Phase 1 of my research, there appeared to be a clear difference between those Principals who were engaged with the IQSA project process and those who were finding it challenging. In some of the schools, discussions with the Principal in regard to the way in which the school was using the project to try and develop their practice was detailed and there was a strong sense of engagement and motivation. One such school was River Lane, which is the subject of the case study in Chapter Seven. The Principal of this school, Lili, took an active role in the IQSA workshops and was communicative during visits to the school. The IE Project team at both Save the Children and the Ministry of Education, regarded her school as the best organised school in the Project and Lili was viewed by them with respect. Her school was one of the first schools to enter the IE Project in 1996 and all her staff had attended IE training. Lili described her team of teachers as very committed to trying to improve the school. Visits to the school and meetings with the teachers during this time, gave the appearance of a staff group of six, who all seemed enthusiastic and wanting to develop their practice. Despite this, they were still finding it difficult to make changes to the way they taught and organised the school. These were issues which contributed to my decision to approach the school as a case study for Phase Two of my research.

## **Partnership work**

Partnership working in Market appeared to focus predominantly on relationships between school and parents and, as a foundation school, it needed to maintain not only these, but also to keep close links with the local community. My impression was that parents were very supportive of the school and that they felt very involved. I gradually became aware that, as with the critical mass of teachers committed to a set of values, in this school the parent body also represented a group who had 'bought in' to a particular vision of education. As fee paying parents, they could at any time remove their children and send them to a different school and for most of the parents I spoke to, the school was an opportunity to have their children educated in a different way from the traditional Thai system. However, I also discovered that this perspective was rather limited. The number of Mattium classes (secondary) in the school was only a small proportion of the number of Primary classes and this was because there was always a significant exodus of students at the end of the Primary Phase. The reason for this lay within the complexities of the Thai education system. Entry to University in Thailand was via a set of examinations at the age of 18 and, as it was explained to me by teachers and parents, many parents wanted to ensure that their children were prepared for this through a more traditional educational approach. This seemed to me to indicate a number of tensions concerning both parental commitment to the educational vision presented by Market, but also, the socio-cultural factors which affected the extent to which parents would support the school. In regard to partnership working at Market, these examples in conjunction with the incident described in Critical Incident 9, 'Ana is ousted from Market', confirmed to me that my initial impressions of the way in which the school developed and sustained its partnerships with both parents and community were based on limited perspective. I could not appreciate the full complexity of the different levels of culture and social organisation until the more problematic tensions described began to appear. In order to adapt my typology to encompass such complexities, I would need to pay more attention to these different factors.

In Laos, I was engaging with schools in a process to design materials which would enable greater partnership working between all stakeholders contributing to a strategic self evaluation process. My initial impression of the schools I worked with was that it was difficult to see very much evidence of partnership working, in relation to the way I had conceptualised it in my typology. Working together to develop ways of collecting data which would reflect the different voices of the school community, I was reminded by my colleagues Mai and Sai that the process was very new to the participants and that I should not expect too much too quickly. As I began to work with groups of students and parents and also to observe the teachers and advisors doing the same, my impression that there was little dialogue between the different groups, was re-enforced. As seen in Incident 5 'It's Better Than Catching Frogs', parents were not used to being asked what they thought about the school and the same was true of the children. However, as in Market, the longer I worked with the schools, there was greater opportunity to talk with participants in a variety of different contexts and to understand the issues from

a range of different perspectives. As I did so, I realised that I had been viewing the process from a perspective which only recognised that which was familiar. In reality there was a great deal of dialogue between the different members of the school community but it was simply taking place in a form which I did not recognise. In some schools, such as Leaf Lane, described in Incident Two, there was a poor relationship between school and parents and the parents who met members of the IQSA team during visits took the opportunity to complain that the Principal did not meet with the parents or the local community members. In other schools, parents reported that they felt the school communicated with them well and that they knew if, for example, their child was not achieving as expected in school. There were in reality a set of structures for parent-school-community partnership working which were facilitated by the socio-political structure. For example, I discovered that schools and local committees had a political responsibility to plan and collaborate together to support both the school and also the local village. This might take the form of the village and school working together to raise funds to buy new equipment or to patrol the school at night to make sure it was not broken into. Children were expected to keep the school grounds tidy and clean and it was during these cleaning periods each day that I observed a significant amount of interaction between teachers and children, which was of a different nature to that observed in the classrooms. I also learned to appreciate that the local context and culture of a village could differ greatly from other villages, even within the same province. This affected the ways in which schools and communities learned to work together. The significance of the phrase 'It's better than catching frogs' can only be understood with a detailed knowledge of the local context in that particular area.

My research in Phase Two would need to be designed in order to allow me the opportunity to explore the local social and cultural factors in greater detail than I had been able to in Phase One.

### **Support for schools**

My typology formed the basis for the way in which I constructed my role within the IE Project in Laos and also formed a framework for the way in which I could interpret the inclusive development of Market School.

In Market my data indicated that there had been a variety of different activities concerned with teacher and school development. Teachers identified the visits to other schools as being a significant influence on them. At the time I felt that this was likely to be related to the importance of seeing changes in practice in reality, as opposed to being told about new ideas in theory, via for example a training workshop; to see new and different practice is perhaps more tangible than trying to visualize



the application of abstract theory. There was also evidence that teachers had been working collaboratively to adapt and apply new ideas which worked within their own context. This is typified by the description of the way in which the curriculum, assessment and teaching approaches had been drawn together out of a combination of 'western' ideas and Thai culture, described above. During Phase 1, my perception of the way in which teachers at Market constructed my role was that I was treated with great respect, and seen as an 'expert'. This was probably due to two factors. I came to gradually understand that in a hierarchical social structure such as in Thailand, an academic visiting the school from another country would be introduced and treated, out of politeness and respect, in the same way as an older family member. Although at the time I did not necessarily understand this, I recognised that it seemed likely to be happening, in much the same way as my notion of matriarchal leadership, in relation to Ana. This seemed to have an important bearing on the way in which I interacted with participants in the school and the way in which they were prepared to be open and honest with me about their work. This is linked to the theme of society and culture and the need to understand this more deeply. The second factor was related to the history of the school's development and the way in which Ana had used consultants as 'experts' to introduce new ideas to the school. Whenever I met with groups of teachers or parents, I felt that there was an expectation that I would share knowledge and expertise with them. I began to counter this expectation with an introduction to every group meeting which emphasised my view that 'everyone was an expert' and that nobody knew the children in the school better than the parents and teachers. I used this as a starting point for group sharing activities which are in the tradition of collaborative action research, whereby participants are encouraged to talk about their own experiences and views on a particular subject. This was successful in as much as it stimulated discussion and participation. However, it also made me question the way in which previous consultants had worked with the school and the way in which the teachers, in particular, constructed themselves and their own agency. By the time that the school changed ownership and I stopped working there, I was only beginning to explore some of these issues in more detail.

The way in which I tried to construct my role as consultant in Laos, echoed several of these issues. I had begun work there with the assumption that there would be some familiarity with the role of the consultant as a facilitator of a learning process rather than as an expert imparting knowledge. This was problematic in that many of the participants in the IQSA project had not worked with a 'western' consultant before. In addition, because the focus was on the development of self-evaluation materials, even the experienced Project staff at the Ministry of Education, who had worked on the IE Project since its formation, felt that they were very unfamiliar with the concepts. Some of the challenges concerned with this can be seen in Incident 2 and the confusion over the purpose of the questionnaires, but also in Incident 4 'I'm not being Critical but ...'. Therefore, I found that my role, at least initially, was focused on the introduction of concepts and new ways of working. This tended to

mean that I was constructed by the participants as an 'expert' and, as in Market, led to a tension between my wish to encourage a collaborative action research process and an expectation on the part of the group that I would provide the solutions to any problems that arose. In this sense, the application of this process was problematic. The reasons for this, included a number of factors which have already been identified in this discussion, including the interpretation of concepts across cultures and contexts; the conventions of a hierarchical social context which affect how confident participants might be to discuss issues openly and the tensions around an approach which depended upon the development of critical reflective practice. My experience in working with the schools in the IQSA project also raised a number of critical questions concerning the most effective way of training and supporting teachers in schools which were trying to become more inclusive. The data indicated that training alone appeared to lead to relatively little change in practice and the support offered by local advisors did not seem to relate neatly to a western concept of critical friend, given the social structures outlined and the relative lack of additional training for those in this position.

My conclusion was that in order to truly understand the ways in which a school could be supported and enabled to develop inclusively in this context, I would need to engage with a school, in its local context, more closely and in depth over a sustained period of time.

### **Reflexive Analysis**

The methodology I employed throughout Phase one, was based on ethnographic principles and also used aspects of a collaborative action research approach to generate sets of data. A number of tensions arose through my data collection, in much the same way as described above, in relation to the application of my typology. Some of these tensions have similar causes. For example, I felt that the reliability of the data which I was collecting was at times questionable because of the way I was positioned, as an expert / consultant which might lead participants to believe that I was expecting a certain set of 'correct' responses. Similarly this might be compounded by issues of social convention whereby participants may not feel comfortable to speak openly or to reflect critically on their practice and then share this with me. Because of my research approach, much of the data which I collected came through conversations and interviews and I was having to rely on interpreters to translate what was being said and then relay this to myself or to participants. A number of tensions started to arise which made me question how reliable this process was.

In Market, my interpreter was John, an English teacher who spoke fluent Thai and had lived in Bangkok for twenty years. He was self selecting as an interpreter partly because Ana asked him to

take on the role, partly because he was interested to be involved in the process and also because I felt that he would enable me to develop a better contextual understanding by discussing the interviews with me. For example, before each visit to the school, we would be in contact by email and John would ask me what activities I would like to be engaged in, who I would like to talk to, which classrooms I would like to observe, etc. Through my conversations with him, I was able to collect a substantial amount of data about the historical development of the school and general information regarding Thai society and culture. After I had conversations with different members of the school community, where there were issues or questions I wanted to try and understand in more detail, I could ask John to contextualise what I heard or observed. I began to develop some concerns about the reliability of John's translations through comparison with the way in which the professional interpreters worked on the IQSA workshops in Laos. John would tend to listen to a response from a participant and then start the translation by saying 'He says ....'. I realised that he was reporting or summarising what had been said, rather than providing a direct translation sentence by sentence, as my Laos interpreters tended to do. I started to wonder if his translations were missing out parts of what were being said; was John selecting the information he thought was relevant, rather than acting as a conduit for all information?

This impression was supported by an observation from someone who transcribed my audio files of interviews. She reported to me that it might be worthwhile trying to find someone else to listen to the audio files and checking the reliability of John's translation, as she had noticed that in places, a participant might speak for a long time, which John would then translate relatively briefly. She questioned whether he was leaving out parts of their response. It seemed unlikely that John was leaving out data on purpose, but more likely that he was simply summarising what he considered useful. However, this created a tension because I wanted the conversations to be as open and naturalistic as possible, partly so that I can engage with the different discourses which might emerge and the ways in which values and principles might be interpreted across different cultures. An example of this is the use of the word 'regular' which I discuss earlier in this chapter. I became aware that my interpretation of the common usage of this term was partly based on the fact that John used it when translating or in discussions with me. Those Thai teachers who spoke to me in English and also used the term, may have been influenced by his usage of it, given that he was the school's English teacher. I had been concerned about the way in which Thai teachers may perceive my role and how this might affect their responses to me. John was considered by the school staff and parents to be very close to Ana and the school management team and I started to question how far this was affecting the way in which people spoke to me. John could not be considered as a neutral figure in the school hierarchy; he represented aspects of political power within the school which could then in turn affect participants' response. I began to articulate these concerns in my field notes during the last visit to the school before it changed ownership and did not have time to make a strategic plan

to use different interpreters but these issues all gave me cause to think about the way in which I could develop a more reliable method for collecting data through talk in Phase Two. It led to a strategic decision to use a range of interpreters rather than relying on one or even two, and also to try and develop ways of checking authenticity of data, such as discussions with key participants such as Mai at Save the Children.

## **Implications for the second phase of the study**

My analysis of the limitations of my typology in trying to understand the development of inclusive schools in these two settings, coupled with some of the tensions within my methodology, led me to consider ways in which I could construct a new theoretical framework which would take account of factors such as local and national culture and the impact of the policy context on an Inclusive school in these settings. In Chapter Five, I present an overview of the theories emerging from research which enabled me to do this. I also decided to develop a methodology which would allow me to explore my research questions in more detail and this is set out in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven is the resulting case study of River Lane Primary School in Laos where I present a narrative of my in depth engagement with the school as a consultant researcher examining the way in which the school staff tried to develop their practice over a period of four years from January 2005, when they entered the IQSA Project, to May 2009 when staff of the school made a presentation of their work at the conference to mark the closing of the Inclusive Education Project in Laos. This is followed by Chapter Eight where I present a discussion of the overall findings from Phase Two of my research.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented a number of critical incidents in order to explore how useful the typology presented in Chapter 2 was in understanding the ways in which schools were developing inclusively in Laos and Thailand. I went on to identify tensions between this theoretical framework and my initial research findings as I tried to apply my understanding of theories of inclusive school development. I identify the need to revise the typology in order take account of additional factors such as local and national culture and the impact of the policy context in these countries. I also identified a number of methodological challenges requiring me to develop my approach to inquiry, during the second phase of the research. In the next chapter, I re-contextualise the study and develop a revised typology based on the findings of Phase 1 and my additional reading in the field.

## Chapter Five: Re-contextualising the study

In this chapter, I re-examine my theoretical framework in the light of the research findings presented in the previous chapter. Whilst the original framework represented my experience of ways in which inclusive school development could be conceptualised and supported, these findings showed that there were significant factors, such as local and national culture and the specific impact of the global policy context, which required a re-conceptualisation.

### Cultural interactions

The work of Stephens (2007) was of particular use to me at this point in my research. In relation to a case study from a participatory action research project in Laos (ibid, p193-214), he discusses the way in which a Western research agenda, such as mine, interacts with what he describes as an Eastern indigenous and institutional culture. Stephens identifies critical issues which emerge and which, he argues, need to be taken into account when theorising about this interaction (ibid, p203). The first of these is the epistemological-ideological question, which concerns the 'relationship between knowledge and power, tradition and modernity' (ibid, p203).

In the context of my research, this question is concerned with the impact of an agenda driven by a global policy such as Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), which might be seen as being mediated through an initiative such as the Inclusive Education Project, advocating democratic values such as participation, independent voice, equality and equity, through a change process. Stephens describes Lao culture as 'hierarchically ordered and growing out of political and religious traditions of obedience and consensus' (2007, p203). This raises a theoretical tension between the values of such a culture juxtaposed with those of global policy, and questions what it means for schools to be supported in developing policies and practices at a local level which might be interpreted as contravening social and political norms.

The second issue identified by Stephens is one he describes as 'the communal-individual question: the development of self-reflection within the research process' (ibid, p203). In his case study, Stephens specifically relates this to participatory action research and

'... the development of practices that encourage self-reflection, self-evaluation and the belief that the change process can be owned by the practitioners involved in the research activity' (ibid).

In the context of my research this relates to collaborative action research as an approach for supporting the continuing professional development of teachers and the development of inclusive policy and practice in schools. Stephens puts forward the argument that, in Lao culture, Buddhism is a predominant influence and that central to Buddhist belief is that the individual should be aspiring to achieve a state of no-self. This is combined with a political culture concerned with centralised and authoritarian forms of control over the community (ibid). The critical question for my research relates to the extent to which individuals and institutions within the culture can adapt to a method for educational development and problem-solving which demands critical self-reflexivity and engagement with change processes.

Therefore within this second literature review, I present an overview of some of the theory which has arisen from research relating to two specific themes: Local Culture, including religious-spiritual belief systems and socio-political traditions; and Global Policy Context, including the impact of Aid Agency agendas and global policies such as EFA (UNESCO, 1990). I then use these ideas to re-conceptualise my theoretical framework in order for it to be more applicable to a Lao context.

## **Local Culture**

Stephens identifies two specific areas of local culture which, in the context of my research, may significantly impact on the way in which inclusion is interpreted within settings in Laos. The first relates to religion and the second to political and social structure.

Buddhism as practiced in Laos is based on the orthodox form of the religion Theravada Buddhism (Gamage, 2011, p396). It is seen as the prevalent religion in Laos (Stuart-Fox, 1997, Stuart-Fox, 2002), particularly for the 60% of the country who are classified as Lowland Lao (Cooper, 2008, p39) and the religion is perceived by many in Laos as a way of maintaining Lao identity (ibid, p41) although Animism is also an important influence, which will be discussed below. Swearer (1995, p39) argues that Theravada Buddhism as practised in Laos can be viewed from two different perspectives. On an idealised level, it is concerned with achieving ultimate enlightenment through self transformation. However, on a more prosaic day to day level, it serves as a moral and ethical framework by which people manage their lives and copes with ordinary problems in their lives. Buddhism will therefore affect the way in which people in Laos may choose to behave, in that choosing the correct ethical action will not only make life easier but will also contribute towards progress towards enlightenment (ibid). This concept of the 'right' way to behave in a Laos context will need to be considered in relation

to other factors discussed below, but it suggests to some extent that there may be resistance to questioning the current norms and traditions of society. Stephens' reference to Buddhism and attaining a state of no-self, echoes the argument put forward by the representative of the donor agency for the IE Project in Chapter Four, in relation to Laos teachers and reflective practice and self evaluation critical incident number 1. Awareness of one's self, and reflecting on the learning that has taken place has been a central feature of western theory concerning both reflective practice (Schon, 1983) and action research (Elliott, 1991); there is a clear tension between this and a view of Self in Theravada Buddhism whereby true self is without form or substance and is the goal of the true Buddhist (Miller, 2009, p4); in other words, the focus is to focus on the attainment of a state of 'no-self'. Part of this process involves the individual trying to concentrate on life in the 'moment', rather than being overly concerned with what has been, or what might be in the future (Ando, 2009, p14-15). This is what Dogen refers to as 'forgetting the self' (1995, p69-70) . One implication of this for researchers engaged with educational change processes, is that participants might be less likely not only to reflect critically on their actions in the past, but also less likely to look forward; their focus may be more concerned with the present.

A discussion of religion and spirituality in Laos must also acknowledge the pervasive influence of Animism. Traditionally associated with ethnic groups such as the Hmong (Cooper, 1998), Animism is concerned with the 'existence of spirits which animate the world for good or bad' (Cooper, 2008, p45). It is argued by a number of anthropologists and academics that this belief permeates all of Lao society to some degree (e.g. Cooper, 2008, Stuart-Fox, 2006) and that 'Buddhism has merged with many aspects of Animism' (Rehbein, 2007, p133). This may at times lead to individuals analysing events fatalistically, rather than in a critical and self-reflective way. This concept of powers affecting life above and beyond the scope of human decision making is likely to support some of implications noted above, in relation to the extent to which research participants may feel that they are purposefully engaged in a change process.

Moving on to issues related to political and social structures, the view of a culture strongly influenced by a Buddhist emphasis is on behaving 'correctly' and not questioning the past. This can also be linked to a sociological interpretation of culture in the South East Asia region which places an emphasis on the way in which the influence of Confucianism can impact on day to day behaviour (King, 2008, p178-189). For example, it has been argued that a Confucian emphasis on obedience and order in Singapore can be barriers to challenging social hierarchy and open discussion (ibid). Similarly the emphasis on politeness and trying to work together harmoniously in Hong Kong 'can discourage open communication, self criticism and the use of direct feedback' (Nguyen et al., 2009,

p111). There is much debate amongst anthropologists and South East Asian academics about the extent to which Laos can be considered a Confucian Heritage country, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam or China (ibid) or whether it should be classified as having been influenced by Confucianism (Tapp, 2002, p96-8) but defined more clearly through Theravada Buddhism (Evans, 1999, p15). However, there seem to be identifiable aspects of Lao culture which resonate with Confucian influences and these can be partly seen in the social and political structure imposed by the Marxist Lao government, following the revolution in the mid seventies (Stuart-Fox, 2002, p295-322).

The key features of this structure have been that the government is formed by representatives of the Communist Party. Elections are not free as all other political parties have been declared illegal and membership of one or any formal opposition to the government is likely to be punished severely (ibid, p193, 257-262). Society is organised through a series of committees at National, Provincial, District and Village level which has supported a culture of monitoring of political activity (Pholsena, 2006, p46-73). Those who work in official positions for the government, such as education advisors and officials, therefore represent the government. In the context of my research it may be challenging to re-interpret the role of an advisor as a critical friend who supports and enables, as opposed to one who monitors and criticises. It also raises a challenge to the researcher who has been working with and for the government, to position himself as a supporter and facilitator rather than being perceived as another instrument of control. The Lao government has constructed itself as a democratic republic (Rehbein, 2007) which is owned by the people, and this raises some complex questions concerning the way in which key values and Principals are interpreted. This is also influenced by a globalisation agenda which is discussed below. There would seem to be a clear tension between a western concept of democratic society based on free elections and a Lao Marxist one party state (Stuart-Fox, 2002, p191) which has developed rhetoric to describe itself, based on words such as freedom and democratic but has also used various forms of control in order to maintain its authority (ibid, p89, p193). This seems likely to create the conditions for uncertainty when it comes to open discussion of the meanings and application of inclusive values and principles. I explore some of these issues in greater detail in the next section, where I consider the possible impact of developments in the global policy context on my research setting.

## **Global Policy Context**

In Chapter Two, I argued that inclusion as it has developed from a Western perspective has been concerned with the enactment in education of a number of key values, and in particular rights based discourse concerned with social change. Within a global policy context, this has meant that it is



closely linked with international policy initiatives (Artiles and Dyson, 2005, p38-9) such as Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2008) and the World Bank Fast Track Initiative (WorldBank, 2008). In this section, I examine the ways in which policy agendas may influence the capacity of the research setting in Laos to respond to initiatives which may support the development of inclusive practices.

In the case of Laos, it is important to be aware of the fact that the government has been exceptionally dependent on foreign aid for many years. In a study of the motivations of foreign donors in providing aid to Laos and the impact this has had on the country, Phraxayavong (2009) has argued that the last fifty years of the country's development has been dominated by aid agendas. Until recently the country was defined as one of the 10 poorest countries in the world (Holdsworth, 2003) and although the economy has improved in the last ten years, Laos is still dependent on aid to support many areas of society including education (Lao PDR Ministry of Education, 2008). This has created a complex political context whereby because of its dependency on aid, the Lao government has often been forced into agreeing to the specific agendas of donors in order to secure the funding it requires (Phraxayavong, 2009, p180-181). This includes demonstrating a commitment to quantifiable improvements in education and greater public participation in democratic processes.

This focus on an agenda imposed by aid agencies, relates to the arguments of Tabulawa (2003) and Nguyen et al (2009) concerning the way in which:

'...globalising forces, in part promulgated by multilateral aid agencies ... help to shape and influence the host educational system in ways aligned to western orthodoxies' (ibid, p110).

They argue that the priority for policy makers in this context is concerned with 'driving reform' (ibid) in order to rapidly respond to global performance indicators. This agenda does not take account of 'cultural differences and national idiosyncrasies' (ibid) but rather makes the assumption that educational theories rooted in western traditions will provide the most effective means of meeting international standards. This can result in a number of tensions between the way in which the policy is mediated (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p3) in relation to the local realities (Crossley and Tikly, 2004, p149).

The ways in which these tensions may surface are well documented in the literature on Development. Ebbutt (1998, p417), for example, discusses the ways in which new initiatives will often be accepted by participants in local settings for a complex number of reasons. These include the fact that the initiative is associated with funding and it is not deemed either sensible or polite to refuse to accept the

'help' or to point out potential difficulties. Crewe (1997) describes an initiative to introduce cooking stoves in Sri Lanka which had the effect of 'displace [ing] localized knowledge and expertise by ignoring ...' the fact that there were those in the community who possessed relevant skills and who could have had a more positive impact. (ibid, p76). The insensitive application of a set of externally driven agendas and targets can lead to not only failure but also result in new inequalities as the intended beneficiaries of development aid are disenfranchised or excluded from decision making process either explicitly or implicitly (Crewe and Harrison, 1998). The progress being made towards meeting the targets set by the Education for All policy agenda has been slow in many countries and this has been noted in successive UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports (e.g. , 2008, 2010). The focus on quantitative performance indicators, such as judging progress towards EFA by the number of children enrolled in school was noted by UNESCO has possibly contributed to a lack of focus on the quality of education being received (ibid, 2008). Miles and Singal (2010) note that EFA initiatives have also tended to 'overlook some marginalised groups of children' (ibid, p1), particularly those with disabilities, and because of this, in some developing country settings Inclusive Education has focused entirely on disabled children. Booth and Dyssegaard (2009) argue that Inclusive Education at policy level, must support the enactment of Inclusive values, concerned with rights through equal access to quality education, in action (ibid, p5). In countries such as Laos this perspective is particularly relevant because of the links between EFA progress and access to the World Bank Fast Track Initiative, whereby significant funding is released to those countries deemed to be at risk of not meeting EFA targets. However, particular pressures are exerted on the governments of these countries to accelerate particular policy reforms (Nguyen, 2010, p348), demonstrate progress towards quantitative performance indicators (Booth and Dyssegaard, 2009, p6) and to demonstrate active commitment to educational reform which might promote quality education, such as UNICEF's Child Friendly School initiative in Laos (UNICEF, 2011).

It seems possible that the accumulation of these pressures at a policy level may have some impact at school level on the way in which teachers feel they are expected to prioritise certain activities and also the way in which they are required by policy to conceptualise both inclusion and quality education. This may result in tensions between different concepts of development or change agendas as policy is gradually enacted over time (Preece, 2008, p267). It also implies a deep misunderstanding of the way in which the change process can be supported in schools. It is also likely that there will be some evidence of localised training initiatives, driven by the policy agenda, on the behaviour of the teachers.

A number of scholars have considered some these issues in relation to education projects in overseas settings, in recent years. By examining them in the following section, I will synthesise some of the

important learning which has emerged from their research, and consider its implications for the second phase of my research.

## **Enacting Policy in Local Contexts**

The significance of local knowledge and traditions in the success of educational project design and particularly in regard to the training of teachers is well documented. Dyer et al (2004) found that in a study of in service training for teachers in India, there was a particular tension concerning the motivation of the teachers and their lack of belief that 'policy ideas promoting child centred, activity based learning can actually take place in the conditions' (ibid, p51). The study argued that in order to be successful, a project of this kind had to pay attention to the local context, in this case the teachers' lack of confidence to initiate change, which meant that they were not developing a sense of their own professional agency. This is re-enforced in part by Noor's findings from in-service training in Malaysia (1991), which suggested that any attempts to change practice which do not pay attention to the way in which teachers learn and develop will only have what Noor (1991) refers to as a 'surface effect' (ibid, p125) and will not bring about 'deep assimilation' (ibid) of the desired pedagogical changes. He argues that in this particular case, the teachers were not supported experientially, but were subjected to training which relied on the transmission of information and techniques. He also found that the teachers needed to be supported in developing professional confidence in their ability to make changes (ibid).

Stuart's study of classroom based action research in Lesotho, Africa (Stuart, 1991) supports the argument that working with teachers needs to be based on an analysis of their starting points and tailored to support their development towards active, confident and independent agents. Stuart's study was based on the introduction of collaborative action research processes and she argues that that this was successful in that there was a positive impact on teachers' confidence to try out new ideas over time (ibid, p151). She also notes that it took the teachers' time to develop the confidence to become more self-critical, and that only a proportion of the teachers felt that they were confident enough to apply action research processes to their teaching after the project had finished (p148). Song's findings from a similar action research project with teachers in China (Song, 2010) also seem to support this view. Her research was focused specifically on the inclusion of children with disabilities and she was also able to identify the importance of teachers being centrally involved in the research process as learners but also as co-constructors of the emerging knowledge (ibid, p223).

The themes emerging from these studies indicate that training which does not emphasise experiential learning processes, and that fails to take account of teachers' initial perceptions about themselves and their own professional agency, will be unlikely to have an impact. However, it also seems likely that where action research or experiential learning can take place in environments which encourage collaboration, sharing, and co-construction of meaning with researchers, trainers or consultants who are sensitive and sympathetic to local conditions, then a change process may be possible. The next set of accounts concern classroom based research undertaken in Laos (of which there is relatively little published classroom based research), China and in a study of unnamed Asian settings.

Cincotta-Segi (2011) undertook research in Lao Primary classrooms, examining the ways in which teachers approached the teaching of the curriculum which, according to national policy had to be taught through the medium of Lao language to students who did not speak this. She found that contrary to official policy the teachers developed their own approaches based on their

'own understandings and preferences around language use in the classroom and the wider community, the perceived needs of their students, and the expression of the teachers identities in relation to those students' (ibid, p206).

Cincotta-Segi's research was not focused on the way in which the teachers were supported to teach, but on observations of the way in which they chose to work. She notes that the findings of her research differed from what policy assumed took place and that there was a need to focus on research which was context specific in order to understand the way in which teachers behaved and learned. Her findings might indicate that in certain contexts, Laos teachers may have more cultural space to develop agency than is assumed by the literature referred to elsewhere in this chapter. The research of Nguyen et al (2009) examined assumptions about cooperative learning in Asian contexts. Their findings indicated that where Asian policy-makers look to western paradigms to 'borrow policies and practices' (ibid, p109) they often overlook existing practices within their own cultural context. They cite the example of co-operative learning approaches, advocated, for example, through global policy driven agendas such as UNICEF's Child Friendly School initiative (Shaeffer, 1999), which overlook the way in which strong group identity and emphasis on harmonious interactions and group coherence in Asian cultures often supports self sustaining co-operative learning processes amongst students. These processes are not necessarily actively taught by teachers, but they argue that there is evidence of these forms of group learning occurring in research emerging from both China and Vietnam. Watkins' meta-analysis of classroom based studies in China (Watkins, 2000) indicated that a number of western concepts regarding effective learning such as motivation, encouraging students to participate and stay on task are viewed by Chinese educators as either irrelevant or ineffective (ibid, p161). He argues that their views are 'grounded in hundreds of years of Chinese philosophical thought' (ibid) and that 'any attempts to reform education by importing ideas from one culture to

another must consider the overall contexts of the societies involved' (ibid). The implications of these examples, seem to indicate that where researchers are identifying ways to work with teachers in the classroom, they must use a range of different lenses to try and make sense of what may already be happening, rather than making a set of deficit-based assumptions of what needs to be developed. This would seem to support the importance of involving teachers as closely as possible in any research undertaking and constructing knowledge and meaning together through collaborative working practices.

This view is supported by Miles and Ahuja (2007) who present an overview of research relevant to Inclusive Education in overseas settings and argue that as researchers we must be aware of the 'way local circumstances, histories and cultures shape ideas that are introduced from elsewhere' (ibid, p132). At the same time it is also important to be aware that culture is not homogenous within a country (Peters, 1993) and that national culture is mediated at local levels and may be influenced by a range of localised factors. This seems likely to have a significant impact on the way in which concepts of inclusion are interpreted and therefore on the way in which teachers choose to view not only their priorities for educational change but also the way in which they construct their role within that change process. Pather's research in South Africa is of particular significance here (2007). Her research showed that when concepts of inclusion linked to quality education for all are imposed upon local communities, the resulting process can be problematic (ibid, p641). Pather found that through exploration with the school communities, key concepts could be deconstructed and understood through 'an ongoing reflective process' (ibid). She argues that Wedell's notion of a response to the 'dilemma' (ibid) of inclusion needing to be based on the development of a more flexible education system which allows a range of responses to diversity to be developed, may be relevant to the South African context. In relation to the literature explored throughout this section, this implies that flexible approaches educational challenge need to be constructed and defined at a local level and that as a concept inclusion will need to be deconstructed in the same way.

## **Re-Conceptualising a Typology for Inclusion**

In this chapter I have engaged with a new set of theories regarding the ways in which a range of factors may impact on the development of schools in non-western settings. In each section, I summarised the ways in which these theories impacted on my research in Phase Two. I now present a typology for inclusion which has been re-conceptualised in the light of this. The re-conceptualised typology is designed to:

Summarise my understanding of the key features / process of inclusive development in this different cultural context; and to

Support the interpretation of the key features of such a process

I will be using it for the second of these purposes in chapter 8 following the case study.

The differences between the revised typology and the earlier one are subtle, but significant. In relation to the way inclusion is defined, for example, the revised typology points to the development of a shared concept of inclusion, based on a process involving staff in the school in question.

**Figure 3: A Revised Typology**

Chapter 2 typology	Revised typology
An inclusive culture, including a shared commitment to inclusive values and the development of school processes which support the participation and achievement of all, including evidence of a collaborative approach to problem solving.	A shared commitment amongst the school staff to the key aim of ensuring that the school is responding as effectively as it can to those children who live in the local community. There is co-construction with teachers of the values underpinning this aim, and the forms of reflection and criticality which support this aim are co-constructed. This co-construction mediates the development of the concept of inclusion.
An emphasis on the development of a curriculum for all, which is reflective of student diversity and seeks to minimise and remove barriers to participation and achievement for all pupils.	There is an emphasis on the development of a curriculum which is responsive to the particular needs and requirements of all members of the local community and which engages critically with a range of teaching practices.
School leaders who are committed to inclusive values but also forms of collaborative or distributive leadership amongst all members of the school community, reflecting the shared commitment to the development of inclusive practices.	School leaders committed to these values, and to collaborating with teachers who are developing a sense of their own agency as knowledgeable local actors, with active and supportive collaboration with local advisors including Agencies.
A critical mass of staff who are committed to a common vision of inclusion.	A critical mass of staff who are committed to responding to the needs of the local community.
Partnership work between all stakeholder	A variety of forms of engagement and

groups within the school community, including parents, students, staff, local advisors and the wider community.	interaction with the wider community which serve to support the enactment of the values and vision of the school.
Support for these schools could be enabled through collaborative action research initiatives focusing on inclusive values and removing barriers to participation and achievement, involving school based participants, local advisors and facilitated by researchers / consultants acting as critical friends.	Support for these schools can be enabled through the co-construction of collaborative action research initiatives, supported by local advisors / researchers / consultants, who need an appreciation and a commitment to building this with the tools and concepts that the local culture, including religious belief, makes available.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have re-contextualised my study by reviewing the original typology in the light of my findings from Phase 1 of my research, presented in Chapter 4. Referring to literature which examines a range of factors which may have an impact on the way in which inclusion is conceptualised in school, I have developed a revised typology which can be used to examine inclusive school development in counties such as Laos and Thailand. In Chapter Six I describe the re-designed methodology which would allow me to explore my research questions in more detail through a case study of one school in Laos.

## Chapter Six: A Revised Methodology

In this chapter, I set out the rationale for the methodology in Phase Two of my research. In the reflexive analysis at the end of Chapter Four, I discussed some of the methodological challenges which had arisen during Phase One. These primarily related to issues concerned with undertaking qualitative research in different cultures, where most of the participants in the process did not have English as a first language. This affected not only the interpretation of data being transmitted via interpreters, but also the way in which I was able, as a cultural outsider, to understand and interpret socio-cultural aspects of the research settings and the perspectives of the participants. Alexander makes the point that because of the challenges when undertaking research in a culture other than your own, researchers need to be aware of 'how little, despite their best endeavours, they end up knowing' (Alexander, 2001a, p5). He goes on to argue that if the researcher wants to make sense of a setting, as in my case, then this has to be framed within an exploration of the culture and history of that setting. Language and culture are not factors which affect the research; they are 'central and pervasive' (ibid) to understanding the distinctiveness of the setting. This is reflected too in the revised typology at the end of chapter 5. In this regard, there are strong parallels between the processes of research and development.

In order to find a way by which inclusion could be understood in a setting such as Laos or Thailand, I decided to focus on one school over an extended period of time. My aim was to immerse myself, as far as this would be possible for an outsider researcher, in order to engage with the experience of the participants (Ely et al., 1991, p4-5) as they 'feel or live it' (Sherman and Webb, 1988, p5). The challenge of understanding and communicating these experiences (Apfelbaum, 2001, p32) requires that 'we must be willing and able to imagine a world other than the one we know' (Andrews, 2007, p489). For my research this would necessitate that there would be an element of narrative enquiry, through a closer engagement with participants than had previously been possible. This would, I hoped, enable me to begin to open a window into the 'wider social and historical changes' (ibid, p491), that form a backdrop to the way in which the case study school had developed over time.

Entering into detailed and sustained examination with the school staff would support my understanding of the way in which 'culture mediates teachers understanding of their work' (Rosiek, 2006, p259). I wanted to be able to build upon the methodological learning which had already taken place by concentrating on the development of a dialogic approach based on interviewing which was 'open ended' and 'exploratory' (Warren, 2001, p86) and which allowed for interaction and exchange of views through conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p2).



The research process took an unexpected development when, for reasons I explain in Chapter Seven, the staff of the case study school were able to make a study visit to Bangkok, to spend time in Ana's (Principal of Market school, described in Chapter Four) new school 'Hope'. This presented an opportunity to engage with the professional development of the teachers through a close examination of the details of the experience (Geertz, 1973, p53). This was an exciting but also daunting challenge for me as a researcher and I wanted to try and develop some tools which would allow me to document the experience of the teachers as it was being lived but also to re-visit it later. I decided to use video and was able to bring a colleague from my University, who was an experienced camera-man to Bangkok to film the visit.

## **Defining the Case**

As I have suggested, the choice of a case study approach was appropriate because it would allow me to examine the setting in detail (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p54) . I wanted to understand how and why the school had developed in a particular way with a focus on it's unique experiences (Cohen et al., 2007, p253). This would require a focus on different perspectives through 'intricate study' (Thomas, 2011, p4). My rationale for this was that, through a close up sustained period of study, I would be able to begin understanding the how and the why of inclusive school development in this particular context. Foucault (Foucault, 1981) argues that often research examines its subject from only one perspective or direction and because of this can fail to fully appreciate the complexity of the case. He suggests that, through a more rounded approach whereby the researcher examines the issue or case from a variety of perspectives a deeper understanding, a richer picture will begin to emerge. He refers to this as developing a 'polyhedron of intelligibility' (Foucault, 1981, cited in Flynn, 2005, p39) However, he also argues that when we consider historical development, it might not be possible to argue that there is a whole or complete picture which can emerge; rather we need to acknowledge that there are a 'multiplication of events' (Flynn, 2005, p39) and perspectives. Flyvbjerg (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 219-20) argues that case study research supports the understanding of this complexity precisely because it enables close up examination in detail. He also argues for the importance of 'getting close to reality' and keeping focused on the subject of the study but also thinking critically and creatively about this as a researcher, using one's own experience and intelligence to develop a 'critical, creative approach to problem solving' (Thomas, 2011, p4).

In what follows, I apply a series of critical questions, in order to support my rationale for the choice of case for the study (Stake, 1995).

### **What is my case?**

The case is based on my interaction with the staff of River Lane Primary School between July 2004 and May 2009. It is the case study of a school and its development, related to the interaction with an external researcher / consultant. It provides a narrative of the journey undertaken by myself and the school; the calendar of this period includes visiting the school for the first time in July 2004, as a consultant working with Save the Children; the IQSA Project which ran from January 2005 to February 2007; a closer, in depth study of the school during February 2007 to May 2009, partly comprising of a study visit to Hope school in Bangkok in 2008 and an exploration of the impact this had on the development of River Lane and the staff working there. Throughout this period, the school was focused on developing changes in its practice and I became an integral part of that process. The narrative of the case study is developed using a series of critical incidents (Tripp, 1993), identified during the course of my time working with the school. These incidents will mostly be accounts of commonplace and routine events, but they are critical in the sense that they may be indicative of the different layers of complexity which need to be explored in order to begin to understand the case (Tripp, 1994, 65-74). In this sense, the case study can also be seen as a critical narrative documenting a process of development and change over time, providing a '...way of capturing the many complex factors involved in development work and [offering] ways in for others seeking to understand 'what it felt like' as well as what 'I did' (Durrant and Holden, 2005, p104).

In order to obtain permission and ethical consent to conduct my research in the school, I had to follow a complex process involving all levels of the education system in Laos. Initially I discussed the choice of school with Mai and Sai. It seemed important to choose a school which was actively participating in the IE Project and had also shown itself willing to engage in discussion about changes in practice. Their view was that River Lane was the most developed school in the project. It had a stable staff, a well organised and committed Principal and had been in the IE project since 1996. I then began discussions with the school, explaining the way in which I wanted to work with them and I provide more detail of this in the case study in Chapter Seven. Their agreement to participate allowed me to officially approach the Ministry of Education, supported by Sai and Mai in order to obtain support and co-operation at government, provincial and district level for the research to take place. Consent was given on the basis that I would work alongside the existing education system and share any findings which could improve or support existing practice. The fact that I had a record of successful experience working in Laos, plus support from within the Ministry of Education and from an important partner, in the form of Save the Children Norway, supported my application. I am not sure, in retrospect, that it would have been as easy to obtain permission without this.

### **What are the boundaries, limits, and focus of the case?**

The case includes the staff working in the school, local advisors working with the staff and observations of interactions between staff and children, staff and parents. The focus of the case study is on my attempts to understand and theorise the inclusive development of the school with a particular emphasis on the way in which local context and knowledge impact on this development. After my initial visits to the school in Phase Two, I chose to focus specifically on two members of staff in depth, using them as a window into the historical and cultural factors affecting the development of the school and the real lives of the teachers working there. This would enable engagement with what Howes describes as the 'human level of everyday processes' (2008, p23). This window into the everyday processes allowed me to problematise my experience as a consultant in supporting and theorising about the development of the school, by illuminating the critical difficulties / challenges / learning experiences I faced in trying to make sense of the ways in which local context and knowledge interfaced with my existing 'western' understanding of inclusive school development.

### **What is the issue?**

The case study was designed in order to facilitate the exploration of my research questions in a unique context (Stake, 1995, p1-13). The questions concern how applicable theories on inclusive school development are to this particular context and ways in which the external researcher / consultant can support this development. If, as Stake argues, 'case study seems a poor basis for generalisation' it is then important to be clear that the purpose of investigating this issue in this way, is to explore tensions and challenges within these theories when they are applied in this setting. I will not be using the analysis of my data collection to attempt to prove anything conclusively. Rather the emphasis is on highlighting the tensions when trying to apply a set of universal theories to different contexts. The case will therefore support the identification of the context specific features, which may influence and enable school development in an inclusive direction. Therefore the case is primarily about theoretical perspectives and how these interact. Although I am using interaction with the teachers in the school as my primary source of data, the case is not about how the teachers and I feel about each other. The theorising is concerned with making sense within a context of differences. In the process of the engagement between the teachers and myself, I use the case to explore the ways in which theoretical perspectives or lenses shift, change, and grow.

## **Interviews: Developing a Dialogic Approach to Data Collection**

Much of the methodological learning which took place during Phase One, concerned the way in which I approached data collection through interviews and conversation. Chawla-Duggan (2007) has argued for the development of new forms of partnership between the researcher and the research participants

in non-western settings, whereby a 'deeper understanding of culture and context' (Chawla-Duggan, 2007, p185) can be developed. My initial conversations with the staff of the case study school had been within the context of a project, where I was positioned as the consultant and perceived as the expert, who was there to impart knowledge, skills and guidance. For Phase Two, I wanted to move beyond this relationship into one which was positioned on a more equal footing with both myself and the participants acknowledging that we could learn from each other. I also wanted to move beyond this relationship into one which was positioned on a more equal footing with both myself and the participants acknowledging that we could learn from each other. Knowledge would not be generated through a one way process, from the participants to myself. Rather, I wanted to try and work within a space whereby knowledge was co-created, through sharing and making sense of different perspectives and experiences (Ryen, 2001, p345). In this sense it is important to acknowledge that my research approach could not be described as non-interventionist (Stake, 2005, p12) because, as argued in earlier Chapters, positioned as an external researcher / consultant, my questions and the nature of the conversations I would have, might create interruptions in thinking and possibly contribute to a process of change. I was interested in developing an interactive relationship between the participants and myself whereby we could share ideas and explore issues without the negative influence of a power relationship whereby I was seen as the purveyor of the *right way forward*.

I envisaged my activity within the school including spending time in classrooms, watching, listening and then talking to teachers afterwards. I wanted to focus most of my time on the creation of a reflective space where the teachers and I could talk about what had been happening in the school, in lessons and in any other developments which had been taking place.

Kvale's view of the interview as an exchange or 'inter-view' (Kvale, 1996, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) where 'the interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, ask[ing] questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of the lived world' (Kvale, 1996, p4) was an important starting point. I wanted to develop an interview style which would allow me to start with participants' own stories and use this as a basis for further exploration. This was supplemented by a simple questionnaire for the teachers to complete, with a number of questions which I hoped to use as starting points in the interviews. The questionnaire was short, covering 4 -5 pages once translated into Lao (see Appendix Five) and asked a range of mostly open-ended questions including how the participant understood the meaning of inclusion and also details about their professional experience. It was developed in collaboration with Mai the IE Project Manager at Save the Children who had been working closely with me on the IQSA Project. In designing and translating it, particular attention was paid to the use of language which was clear and as easy to understand as possible; this was a result of our experience

in developing the IQSA materials and the way in which language and concepts could be interpreted in different ways. I hoped the questionnaire would not be confusing and that it would provide some stimulus for initial conversations. I also had my experiences of working with the teachers during the school's developmental journey through the IQSA Project, when they had identified the teaching of Lao Language in a more effective and enjoyable way, as a key area to improve. I had identified this as another resource to refer to in beginning what I envisaged as learning conversations.

Developing a more reliable approach to the interpretation of talk was a fundamental importance. My experience in Phase One had taught me to be wary of over-reliance on one interpreter. I had acknowledged that the notion of objectivity, in the sense that I might be a neutral researcher was not possible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p219); I now needed to acknowledge that it was also not possible for an interpreter, even if I worked with someone disassociated from the school, the project or even education. It is often 'assumed that translation is an objective and neutral process' (Phui-Hing Wong and Kwong-Lai Poon, 2010, p151) and that the process is a technical one. The use of an interpreter 'alters the nature of the research ... [because it] ... is inseparable from the application of a theoretical perspective' (Temple, 1997, p607). Interpreters will use their own life experiences and language constructs to make sense of what is being said (Phui-Hing Wong and Kwong-Lai Poon, 2010, p151) and then relay this to the researcher. Ebbutt (1998, p418) has noted that because of this, interpreters may also enhance or embellish the meaning of what is being translated, in the process losing some of the original sense. In order to maintain my understanding of the cultural context and also to try to remain constantly aware of any ethical issues arising from my research, I decided that one approach would be to build on the research of Shah in developing a cross cultural research team (2004) (2004, p569)(2004, p569)(2004, p569) by using a range of local Lao national interpreters (Ryen, 2001, p344) who were experienced in working alongside English speaking consultants with participants from the Province where the case study school was situated. This would include colleagues from Save the Children, as well as independent interpreters. All were to be paid the same normal daily fee for interpreting. The disadvantage of this would be that I would not have an interpreter who would develop an ongoing relationship with the school in the same way that I hoped I would. This would have allowed allow me to cross reference back to previous visits with the interpreter checking on my previous understanding. I hoped that I would gain a more reliable method of cross checking the accuracy of my developing understanding, as I re-visited areas of discussion with different interpreters.

An additional factor in the way I approached the interviews which had developed after Phase One was my growing awareness of culturally appropriate questioning and non-verbal behaviours (Ryen, 2001,

p345). In both Laos and Thailand I had experienced interviews where respondents were often quiet after being asked a question. An examination of the transcripts and recordings of these interviews revealed that I seemed to interpret these pauses as a lack of understanding and would therefore start speaking again, trying to clarify what I was asking. This probably had the effect of confusing the respondent. As I later learned, a pause before responding is considered polite in Thailand and also in Laos, where it is not thought polite to appear emotional (Stuart-Fox, 1997, Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005) or too hasty to reply, as one must always maintain respect for guests, as the researcher would be positioned.

Research carried out in Northern Thailand was also useful to me in preparation for Phase Two interviews (Bilmes, 1975). Bilmes' study of villagers in a region of Thailand close to the Thai border is significant because it is geographically close to the province of Laos where my case study school was based. The north of Thailand was once part of Laos and many in northern Thailand will still describe themselves as Lao and speak a dialect of Thai which is very similar to Lao. Bilmes found that villagers often gave responses to questions from researchers which did not appear correct; for example they might give the researcher the impression that they were planning to get an inoculation when they subsequently did not. Similarly, in studies of interactions between the villagers themselves in village meetings, Bilmes found that during the discussions information was given, and replies were provided to questions which not clear, incorrect or misleading. Bilmes concluded that this was for a variety of reasons but that it appeared to be more likely in these villages than elsewhere, possibly because it was easier to misunderstand the local dialect, even for those who spoke it and were local, but also for cultural reasons in that the speaker is more concerned with the 'effect of his utterances on listeners ... the need for accuracy ... is frequently subordinated to this concern' (Bilmes, 1975, p72).

Given the proximity of my school to Bilmes research site, I felt that I would need to be particularly aware of any inclination on the part of the respondents to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, in respect to my perceived status as 'expert'; or to perhaps tell me what I thought I needed to hear in relation to their responsibility to the Lao state. I hoped that my use of a range of interpreters over a sustained period of time and my attempts to emphasise the importance of our equality and building shared meaning and also ownership of the research data would help to negate this possibility. I emphasise the shared ownership because it was my intention through Phase Two to make it clear to the respondents that any writing I developed from our work together would be acknowledged and that they as respondents would be invited to share in the writing and to proof read and make any corrections. This was the case in my first publication from our work together, where I presented case studies of the school (Grimes, 2009, p106-115).

## Use of Video

A second approach to the data collection evolved through the opportunity to visit Hope School for a study visit, as described above. My rationale for the use of video was to support and document reflective activity (Haw and Hadfield, 2011a, p49). I wanted to be able to document the study visit to the school at the same time as maintaining the particular role I had set for myself (described above) whereby I would create a reflective space for the teachers to talk about and make sense of their visit at key times during the day. I wanted the camera to be able to film the exchanges and conversations with myself and the participants from both schools, including the two advisors from the District Education office in Laos who accompanied us; but most importantly I wanted the camera to film the visits to the Thai classrooms which I would not accompany. This was because I did not want my presence to get in the way of any experiences which the Lao teachers might have in the classrooms and around the school. They had to feel as if they were free to set their own agenda and I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Seven when I describe the visit. The video approach was discussed and set up with the agreement and collaboration of all the participants and in this sense it was a form of collaborative representation (Banks, 1995, p1). There was no agenda other than to try and record what took place. I did not try to direct proceedings other than to suggest to the cameraman, Phil Smith, that he might film a particular conversation or meeting. Therefore there was also an element of choice on his part; Phil followed participants around the school and moved from classroom to classroom alongside two interpreters, one translating Thai into English and another Lao into English. The video produced would provide a form of video diary (Noyes, 2008, p132) of the visit, without a commentary to camera. This use of the camera as diary as the teachers moved around the school raised some ethical issues, particularly in relation to the possibility of informed consent (Walker et al., 2008, p172-3). The consent of the teachers in both River Lane and in Hope was sought and obtained and I felt comfortable that they were aware of the way in which the camera would be used and also that the resulting footage was not for public exhibition. However, gaining consent from the parents and children on an individual basis was not a simple process. In discussions with Ana, Principal of Hope, she assured me that all parents gave their consent for children in the school to be filmed and photographed. However, I was aware that several of the children in the school might exhibit distressed or distressing behaviour. I discussed this with both Phil and Ana and we decided on a policy of trying to ensure that the camera activity would be as unobtrusive as possible (Lee, 2000, p52-4) by not focusing on the children but on the teachers and their interactions. Where children appeared to be distressed or behaving in any way that might be construed as different from the normal routine of the classroom, Phil would stop filming. I was aware that the camera might prove to be a distraction to both teachers and children but Ana's view was that the staff and children of Hope were used to filming around the school. In order to prepare the teachers from Laos for the experience of being filmed, Phil had also accompanied them on a 3 day trip around Thailand and Bangkok filming

their 'holiday' before the study visit. We hoped that this would instil in them some degree of familiarity with the process which might lessen their awareness of the camera when in the school.

In summary, I hoped that this revised methodological approach would enable a sustained and closer engagement with the case study school. I was aware that there were a number of significant challenges to developing a clearer understanding of the way in which inclusive school development might be understood in this research setting. I planned to try and respond to these through a greater awareness of my own role as a researcher consultant, the way in which I was perceived by participants, reliability issues in the collection of data and the development of a shared reflective space in which the participants and I could begin to share and understand our different perspectives.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have described my approach to collecting data from the case study school. This involved immersing myself in the school over a sustained period of time in order to understand as closely as possible the way in which the participants viewed their context and the way in which they were trying to become more inclusive. I aimed to develop my use of interviews by creating a reflective space where the teachers and I discuss our perspectives on what was taking place in the school. I also developed my methodology to incorporate a study visit to a school in Bangkok and decided to use video to try and capture elements of the teachers experience there, whilst still using reflective discussion as a method for trying to understand their experiences of the visit. In the next chapter, I present the case study of the school, describing a series of critical incidents drawn from my research between 2005 and 2009.



## **Chapter Seven: Practices of inclusion: a case study of development**

In this chapter, focusing on the processes of engagement between teachers and myself over a relatively long period of time, I explore the ways in which theoretical perspectives or lenses related to inclusion shift, change, and grow over time and in response to dialogue. The case starts from my initial visit to the school, describes early critical incidents and a shift in my approach to collaborative research. The middle sections highlight a lack of shared understanding, and then the growth of that understanding as the staff and I negotiate our roles. The concluding part describes our study visit to Bangkok, and the repercussions of that further shared experience on our practice and thinking. In describing all this, I further develop my thinking in relation to my research questions<sup>3</sup>.

### **River Lane Primary School**

The school is located approximately an hour's drive north of Vientiane, the capital city of Lao PDR. The district in which it is located is mostly rural and most families are involved in farming to some extent. The main road from Vientiane is tarmac-ed as far as River Town, the nearest sizeable village; there is then a 2 mile drive down a red clay road until you reach the small village of River Lane. The village sits on the banks of a tributary of the Mekong River and in the rainy seasons of August and September it is not uncommon for the village to be cut off because the road has been flooded. The village itself comprises two roads along which are a variety of houses, built in traditional style, on wooden stilts, with thatched palm roofs; brick or concrete houses which have been built more recently and also some less well built houses which tend to be smaller with thatched palm walls. The village has a primary school and, nearby a secondary school. The Primary school has a kindergarten school attached to it, although it has a separate administration. The Primary School was built in 1968 and joined the Inclusive Education Project in 1996, shortly after the project was established.

### **Initial visit**

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<sup>3</sup> Data is drawn from a number of school visits: July 2004, half day visit; January 2005 half-day visit; July 2005, half day visit; November 2005, one day visit; July 2006, 2 day visit; November 2006, one day visit; February 2007, 3 day visit; May 2007, 1 week visit; November 2007, 1 week visit; February – March 2008, 2 week visit; May 2008, 3 day visit; June 2008, 1 week visit with teachers to Bangkok; July 2008, 1 week visit; October 2008, 1 week visit; February 2009, 1 week visit; April 2009, 1 week visit; May 2009, 1 week visit.

My first hand knowledge of the school began some years ago, when on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2004 I visited the school as a guest of Mai, an officer of Save the Children, and the Ministry of Education. I travelled with her and officials from the Ministry and the local District Education office. They were showing me the school because they deemed it to be the most successful school in the project.

At that point, the school had 172 students on role, who were taught in five single grade classes. There were five female teachers and a female Principal. The children were split between 80 girls and 92 boys. My first impression of the school was that it felt welcoming. The children were excited to see visitors and waved at us, as we drove into the school grounds. River Lane means 'coconut' and 'there are coconut palms in the grounds which are rather lovely - it's a very, very well looked after school' (Field notes, 2005). The school consisted of two rows of concrete classrooms at right angles to each other. One row comprised a school office and meeting room, a room which was described as the library and the grade 1, 2 and 3 classrooms. The second row comprised 3 empty classrooms and the grade 4 and 5 classrooms. All of the classrooms had open windows without glass but wooden shutters which were tied to the wall; inside were wooden 2 seater desks, most of which looked very old. They were all organised in rows facing a blackboard, which also looked as if they were several years old. The blackboards looked as if they were losing their surface and that it was difficult to write clearly on them in chalk. We walked around the school and the Principal showed us each of the classrooms. My initial observation was that the desks all seemed to have text books open, usually shared one between two children; the teachers all seemed to be talking to the children who listened quietly and then responded en-masse or by chanting together. I noticed that when the children responded, it was very loud and I wondered how the teachers in adjacent classrooms managed to make themselves heard.

After a brief tour, we sat in the school office underneath an electric ceiling fan and Mai asked the Principal, Lili, if she would tell us about the school. Although this was an official visit with colleagues present who were significantly higher than her within the educational hierarchy, I was struck by how confident and relaxed she was. She spoke without referring to notes or school records and was able to tell us significant information about the school including dates, numbers of children and teachers, gender etc. Lili was also able to tell us how many children with special needs were in the school (9) and the nature of their impairments (2 were said to have physical difficulties and 7 were described by the school as slow learners). She felt that the school had changed significantly since she had become Principal, also in 1996 and referred to the importance of the training from the IE Project (5 days for each teacher) and support for her as Principal in administration.

Lili identified specific areas where she felt the school was making progress: children with special needs were identified and the school focused on trying to identify their weak areas and then to support them in this. The result was that children with special needs were passing grades. She also felt that progress had been made in using a range of teaching materials, different approaches to differentiation and flexible teaching methods. At the time I assumed that a direct translation had been made by Mai from Lao into English. In retrospect I wonder whether such specific terminology, as differentiation, had been used by Lili at this time, or rather it was language that the project team were comfortable with. I also wonder how far Lili's responses were provided in order to meet the political expectations of a school which needed to demonstrate success within the specific boundaries of the IE Project. Certainly her responses matched several aspects of the IE Five Point Star described in Chapter Four which her senior colleagues, who were present, would presumably have expected to hear. It is therefore difficult to make a clear judgement whether this reflected Lili's own language of practice, or the typical discourse from a school in the IE Project. From my perspective, the theorising did not relate to the practice I had observed, which would support the conclusion that the language being used were imported words, layered on without internal significance, and enacting an external, performative function.

In my field notes, my response was also one of admiration for the Principal in that she seemed to know the school very well and was familiar with the children as individuals. She had been able to talk in detail about each of the children with Special Needs and describe how the school had tried to help them. However, I also noted after both visits that I was surprised by the quality of the teaching in the school. I had expected there to be clearer evidence of child centred approaches to learning, perhaps children sitting in groups, evidence of activities taking place, less use of the blackboard. I was also surprised by the approach to special educational needs; it seemed to be based on a deficit model whereas I had expected there to be more of an emphasis on a social model. If this was the 'best school', it raised the question for me of how much the project had impacted on schools in order to change their practice.

Significantly, I did not share this perception with anyone at the time, because I was aware that I had only seen a limited number of schools which might not be representative but also because I was trying to make sense of the tension between a western outsider making quick judgments without understanding and the possibility that there may be more going on than I had been able to see. In retrospect, I also suspect that I was still very cautious about sharing too much information with colleagues in Laos. We did not know each other very well and I did not want anyone to have a negative impression of me; I wanted to be invited back to continue working with them.

## School Improvement

By November 15th 2005, when I visited the school again as part of the IQSA Project, I had seen a variety of other schools in Laos and was able to place the development of River Lane in a wider context. By comparing it with other schools, I was describing it in my field notes as 'a good school' and 'it's one of the more attractive schools - as you go around the classrooms there are displays in colour' (2005). During this visit, I met groups of parents, because as part of the project we were trying to collect data from different members of the school community. They were very positive about the school and described how eager their children were to come to school each day. I was struck by the range of ways in which the parents described the importance of the school; they felt that the children enjoyed school, that the teachers 'looked after them' and that they were learning and making progress. Some parents talked about the role of the school in the community and the way in which children learned 'respect for adults, respect for rules and regulations, they learn manners and they also learn about wanting to be something in the future ... the children learn cleanliness and ... make sure the school yard is clean and that they respect it.' Other parents talked about their role in the community to look after the school and make sure that it was safe and secure at night and that if anything was damaged they would make sure it was repaired. An impression was emerging of a school which was at the centre of the local community both geographically but also in terms of the life of the village. This parental respect for, almost honouring of the school as an institution challenged my experience of parental perceptions of school. The Principal joined myself and Mr Tan, a local District Education Officer, with one of the groups of parents I met with. There was an interesting incident when I asked the parents what aspects of the school they felt might be improved. The parents concentrated on resources and the physical state of the grounds: 'we need an electric fan in each classroom; we want to improve the fence around the yard because it is broken'. We asked about the teaching and learning but they found this hard to answer: 'the teachers do their best'. At this point, Lili intervened and said 'Yes, but what about the teaching – some children are learning well some are not – what could we do better?' After the meeting, I asked her what she had meant by this. 'We have done a lot of work in working with parents and the parents are very positive about the school; but we need to improve our teaching. We have too many students who are doing ok, doing well, but they are not outstanding. We have too few outstanding teachers and we really need to improve our teaching.'

Although I had a broader understanding of the school after this third visit and could appreciate that it was well organised, had followed the advice received in training session and strong connections with the local community, I still perceived a contradiction between my theoretical understanding of inclusive education, what I expected from a school in an IE Project, and the state of development and practice in the school as I perceived it. I wanted to be able to understand what the barriers were to changes in practice. In the workshops for the IQSA project I had observed the Principal and the two teachers who

formed the school project teams, in discussion sessions. They seemed to me to be very active in group tasks, compared to some of the other schools. The Principal and the Grade 5 teacher would often act as a spokesperson when feeding back to the whole group and I noticed that they would join in discussions about the specific meanings of inclusive words and phrases in the design of the project materials for use in schools. For example, they were concerned about the meaning of the word 'enjoy' and wanted to make the point that they felt children should enjoy coming to school because it would help them to learn more effectively. This seemed to indicate that there was some consensus between their approach and my own and yet, I was still mindful of the examples of teaching I had observed in the school. Perhaps the significance of this was that at the time I was struggling to understand the way in which key words were interpreted by the teachers. The word 'enjoy' may have had different connotations or forms of enactment to those I was accustomed to or could readily recognise.

During the IQSA Project, the school identified the areas they wanted to prioritise for improvement, which were also linked to specific inclusive indicators in the draft IQSA toolkit (the indicators can be seen in Appendix Six). Their focus was on the improvement of their teaching of reading and writing by using a range of teaching methods; trying to ensure that teaching and learning was matched to the abilities of the students; developing more regular methods of communication with parents. When asked to consider the ways in which they would approach this action plan, the staff identified some interesting methods of doing this: 'School Principal and teachers have to work together sharing their teaching experiences and pay more attention on teaching the Lao language. Try to solve the problem and find the better techniques ... The School Principal to check the lesson plans before let them teach; there should be the internal exchange between teachers and the School Principal and among teachers themselves' (extract from school action plan). I noticed the emphasis that they had put on collaborative processes and problem solving, as well as the monitoring role of the Principal in checking the lesson plans. In setting themselves success criteria, they were not only identifying quantitative technical targets such as teachers will apply 'eight teaching techniques' but there was also evidence of Inclusive language albeit influenced by the IQSA indicators: 'All students are able to participate in learning activities of all lessons'. Again, I wondered how far the language used by the teachers was a good expression of their perceived priorities, and how far they were 'playing the game'.

In November 2006, a follow up visit was made to the school to collect data for the IQSA project, in regard to the progress made towards the action plan targets. My field notes from this time note that

'... they had really moved on a lot, they were organised and presented clearly what work they had been doing and how it was related to their action plan and also back to the indicators ... so it was very rooted in the values of the project; observing lessons at first I didn't notice

anything greatly different in terms of the range of activities, but I realised that there seemed to be more use of materials and also more use of questioning and trying to engage children in the learning. You could see that it had moved on – there was a definite shift.’ (field notes, November 2006)

I asked the Principal how the teachers had found the experience of working on the changes. She said that

‘now in our planning we try and make sure we pay attention to the 3 elements of language, reading, writing and speaking/listening. We still use the text book but try to be clear about what we are trying to teach in each lesson. The biggest challenge for us has been how we help those students who cannot read very well. We are trying to encourage families to try and support them at home and lessons we are trying to encourage the students to learn things by heart’ (ibid)

In my notes next to this I had written a question: ‘How can illiterate parents help their children to read at home?’ (ibid). I also wondered how confident the teachers were in developing new solutions to these problems, if they were turning to rote learning as a way of responding to literacy difficulties. However, overall, my impression was that the process the school had followed of focusing attention on a particular area of potential change, allowing the teachers the time and space to take ownership of the initiative could have some impact on practice. This indicated to me that the school would be a good choice for a case study where I could engage with these change processes in closer detail and also examine some of the tensions that were raised. I framed these tensions in terms of differences in interpretation of language, the extent to which theories were being enacted in practice, and the processes which might lead either to a resolution of some of these differences or at least enable a clearer understanding of them.

## **Twisted Ears**

During this visit I approached the Principal and explained that I wanted to work more closely with her school on a regular basis as part of my PhD research. I tried to explain that this would be different from my role as a project consultant and that I would be more interested in the way in which the school was trying to develop its practice, rather than trying to show them a particular way of working. Lili was very enthusiastic and said that she would be honoured if I worked with them; she also said that the whole village community would be honoured that they had been chosen to be in my research project. This made me feel anxious that the school would have a very high expectation of what they might get out of the process and that they might view me as someone who would show them ‘how to teach properly’.

I discussed this with Mai, who increasingly became a critical friend to my own research process over the coming years; someone who I could take discuss my ongoing findings with and get alternative viewpoints or clarification of interpretations. Her response to this concern was typically straightforward

'What did you expect? You ask if they will be in your research – of course it is an honour for them. What else could it be? A punishment? – they feel that you recognise that they work hard and try their best to be a good school and you want to know more about them. They also know they will learn a lot just by working closely with you. This is a good choice of school – they are organised and they will work hard – that is why you chose them. Stop worrying so much ...' (field notes 2006).

I was sure that this was a well organised school who would be enthusiastic and committed and also confident that if I was going to have a case study school in Laos, it was doubtful that I would find a more suitable one than this. Nevertheless, the school's expectations of my role and what they might gain through being part of my research became an ongoing theme for me as a researcher, which I returned to subsequently.

One other critical incident occurred during this visit of November 2006, which the Principal continued to refer to until the end of my data collection in 2009. During a student voice session with some of the Lao education advisors, one of the children in Grade 5 reported that the teacher sometimes used corporal punishment by twisting students' ears. Hearing things like this was not uncommon in the IQSA project visits.

On this occasion the Ministry advisors raised it with the Principal and school project team at the end of the day. I was present at this meeting but did not take part in any discussion regarding corporal punishment, as the Ministry of Education team felt that it was a very sensitive subject. They believed that the best way to deal with it was not through a punitive approach but rather to encourage schools to examine other ways of disciplining children. I had not previously seen any evidence of corporal punishment in the school and so had been very surprised by this development. When the school team were told of the incident they were visibly upset and said that they were sure it was not true. I thought that the response from the Ministry was very gentle, as they simply said 'well this is what we have been told – whether it is true or not please talk with your teachers so that you make sure these incidents do not occur.'

The ramifications of this incident seemed to reverberate through subsequent visits to the school, whereby the Principal would often return to this and try to re-assure me that it was not true. At the time I assumed that the incident had occurred and that the school were in denial either because they did

not believe the teacher in question could have used corporal punishment, or because they were embarrassed and had 'lost face'. However, over time I began to accept the possibility that the student had been lying or perhaps exaggerating, since I found it difficult to understand why the Principal would maintain that it had not been true. The incident highlighted a possible tension between the way in which the school wanted to be represented, and the reality of practice; and also a question around their perception of the consequences of failing to live up to others' expectations of them.

## **Collaborative Case Study Research**

On 22nd November 2006, I returned to the school again to meet with the teachers and discuss my plan for undertaking research with them. This was a problematic visit because of issues with my interpreter. I was not using someone I had worked with before because of a shortage; nor had this person had educational experience, although they were a professional.

The meeting with the teachers, was held in the school office, as all our meetings were over the coming years, and I approached it by asking everyone to sit in a circle with myself, the interpreter; five teachers and the Principal. The transcription of the session reveals that there seemed to be confusion concerning the way in which my explanation was translated. I repeated what I had already said to the Principal and tried to convey that I wanted to work with the school over the next two to three years; my role would be researcher not advisor and this meant that I would not be making judgements about whether something was good or bad practice, but that I would be talking to them about their work in the school, asking questions, listening to them, watching lessons and generally asking them to help me understand the way in which they were approaching their work in school. The teachers responded with silence and looked very confused. I tried a number of times to re-phrase but with similar results.

Eventually, I asked the Principal if she still re-called the details of our conversation about my research and asked her if she would mind trying to explain to the teachers what I was planning to do. Lili said that she had already talked to the teachers about the plan and that they understood and were very happy to be part of my research. I asked them if they had any questions to ask me about the way I would work and what it was I was trying to find out. Again there was no response.

I found this a difficult meeting and was very troubled by the possible implications, relating to the potential barriers to ongoing collaborative research with the schools if we could not establish a



dialogue. I was concerned that the teachers had not understood properly, but there was no possibility of checking this quickly. I was also worried by the lack of response to my questions and the fact that they had also not offered any questions. When I returned to Vientiane I discussed this with Mai. She suggested phoning Lili and asking her how the meeting had gone. Her response was that the teachers had been confused by some of the things the interpreter had said and that they thought he may not have understood me properly. Lili said I should not worry, the teachers were very positive and excited and looking forward to working with me. I had intended to take some questionnaires for the teachers to complete but had decided during the meeting not to introduce them because of my concerns about understanding. I asked Mai if she would accompany me on another visit to meet the teachers again and introduce the questionnaires.

Mai had helped me to design the questionnaires and had translated them from English into Lao. At the subsequent meeting, she translated for me as I talked, again, about my plan for the research, and also the questionnaires. Although there was not much discussion or questions about the way in which the research would work, the teachers did ask whether I was working with other schools for my research. I explained that I hoped to be using a school in Bangkok as a case study (Hope, Ana's new school, which was currently being built). The teachers responded by asking a number of questions about the 'other' school, which they repeated on my subsequent visits: 'what is it like there?'; 'are they different from us?'; 'are they better than we are here?'; 'are they doing the same things as us?'; and perhaps most interestingly 'can we go and visit them?' These questions created a useful space in which to begin to explore with them the distinctiveness of my research approach and the way in which I wanted to construct the concept of school development and school change.

I identify this meeting as being significant for two reasons: the raising of the possibility of a study visit and my growing awareness of the way in which both mine and the teachers understanding of each other would develop gradually over a series of conversations rather than through a single interview. It was very encouraging that the teachers were beginning to ask questions and felt as though they were beginning to shape their own understanding of what this research process might involve. It was an example of the inter-view being constructed as we spoke, and I felt that for the first time a dialogue was emerging where I was being asked questions as well as asking them; I needed to explain and position myself similarly to the way in which I was requesting this of them. The language used in the questions: "different" 'same' 'better' 'what is it like' suggested to me that a discourse was being developed within this staff which was partly concerned with trying to imagine or envisage ways of working other than current practice.

My reaction to the suggestion of the study visit at this point was that it would be impossible because of a lack of funding (which was subsequently resolved) and also because I felt it might undermine the reliability of my research. The main concern was about the ethics and reliability of the visit. I worried that it would be unnatural or contrived to remove the teachers from their setting and by taking them to visit a better funded and resourced school, possibly set up an unrealistic set of expectations for what they felt they should be expected to achieve. However, over subsequent visits, the teachers returned to the possibility of a study visit so often that I started to consider the possibility. I began to think about ways in which the visit could be constructed. In my mind, at this point, the 'construction' of such a visit might be based on exploring different approaches to teaching, rather than a visit to a 'better' school where the practice was exemplary and could be imported back to Laos.

## **The Questionnaire**

The Questionnaire was introduced to the teachers as a way of me getting to know them as individuals. I had already talked about the exploratory nature of my research and the fact that I did not have an expectation of there being a correct set of responses which I was looking for. I wanted to understand their work from their perspective. I was aware that this was demanding a level of understanding from them that was perhaps not possible given their lack of experience but I believed that there was no other way to proceed other than to be as honest as possible. I also hoped that their experience on the IQSA project had equipped them to some extent to enter into more open discussions and that they may not be too constrained by cultural conventions. I asked the teachers that they try to complete their questionnaire individually and not alone and not to feel that any response could be interpreted as incorrect.

The questionnaires were completed over the course of one week and I was able to collect them the following week and have them translated so that I could analyse them before beginning my next set of visits and interviews. The completed translated questionnaires are presented in Appendix Five. Mai accompanied me to collect the questionnaires and we sat with the teachers at lunchtime to discuss how they had found the experience of completing them. The teachers told me that they had found the questionnaires interesting to fill in and that they had completed them on their own, away from school. Mai looked through them as we spoke and said to me, in English: 'they have not done these on their own, they are nearly the same answers; some of them are exactly the same'. Once she had translated them, it was evident that this was mostly true. Many of the answers were similar and some were exactly the same. I asked several colleagues in the Save the Children Office to check the translation to make sure that there were no inaccuracies so that I could be as clear as possible about the reliability of Mai's judgement. At the time, I felt very down-hearted about this, as it seemed to

indicate that the teachers had not told me the truth; it seemed that they had clearly worked together despite their assurances that they had not. It also seemed to indicate that the pressure on them to conform to what they perceived as my expectations of them and, possibly, those of other agencies within the educational system (NGO and Ministry), was much greater than I had envisaged.

A close analysis of the content of the questionnaires indicates that whilst there is little difference between the general answers of the staff - in some cases the answers are identical - there is a variation in language used. This may be a sign that whilst there seemed to be a group approach to the questions, there may also have been some element of individualised engagement. For example, a close analysis of the questionnaires of Lili, the Principal and Ms. Jo, the newest and youngest teacher in the school suggests some differences in reply:

Question 10. Why do you think this is (some children do not enjoy going to school)? Lili replied that 'we think these children lack motivation to study and they don't feel happy to study because they are faced with some problem in their family, do not have enough food to eat and their family cannot afford to buy the learning material for them.' Ms Jo replied: 'This is because these children have received limited attention from their family and they think different from other kids.' (Inclusion Questionnaires, Appendix Five)

My overall feeling at this time, was that it was likely to be the result of a combination of factors. The staff had probably discussed the questions together, perhaps some had also made notes, which might have accounted for the similarity in language, and then individuals had written their replies on their own. I also thought it likely that the response was also due to an undercurrent of consensus and there was a level of concern amongst the staff that they wanted to present a cohesive whole school response and also that they did not wish to write anything which might be politically unacceptable, to either the District Education Office, the Ministry of Education, or the NGO.

I began to perceive more constraints on the representation of practice in language. The language of the responses seems to partly reflect the discourse developed through the IQSA project and one interpretation is that it is suggestive of the positive impact of the schools project involvement and a gradual familiarity with the project's inclusive concepts and language. The definitions of inclusion presented by the teachers reflect a broad view of its meaning, concerned with discrimination, ethnicity, poverty, gender and disability. There is also evidence of the teachers' awareness of the importance of children learning together, teachers working closely together and the development of close links with the community. As I note above, however, the language does not necessarily reflect shared understanding between myself and the teachers; there would seem at this point to be a difference in theoretical lens being used, an example being the difference between what the printed word conveys to me and how the teachers enacted this in practice. There is also a question of the way in which the

questionnaire itself becomes a form of disturbance which influences the teachers in a particular way, perhaps encouraging them to begin to question their own views and shift their position so that they are more open to beginning a dialogue around meaning and shared understandings of inclusivity. I began to think of this shift as a move into a shared reflective space.

Another example from the questionnaires which relates to the way in which we were looking at issues through different theoretical lens relates to the improvement of teaching. All of the staff identify in questions 13 and 14, the desire to improve their teaching and there seems to be a perception that there are 'new teaching methods' ( Lili's questionnaire answer to question 13) which they thought would improve their practice. In my field notes from March 2007, I reflect on this within the context of the teachers' prior experience and training:

'Most of the teachers in the school have been working there for over 10 years, some as long as 17 years. It is likely that they only received a broad training course lasting 1 year before they entered school as a teacher and this may have included very little practical or pedagogical input and no teaching practice. Their view of teaching is often concerned with a series of technical competencies which need to be mastered.' (Field Notes March 2007)

A model of teacher development based on technical competencies did not link easily with my view of inclusive teaching, which was partly based on flexibility and responding to diversity. There seemed to be an acknowledgement on the part of the teachers that their IE training had not supported the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, but there was something they were still missing. Given this context, I became aware that the teachers may have high expectations of me:

'... am I seen as an opportunity for on-going professional development for the teachers? Do they want me to observe their lessons and give them ideas on how to teach more effectively? – after all I am an 'expert' and must know how to do it properly.' (ibid)

This is also evidence of the way in which the case study is revealing that it is I, as much as the teachers, who is being disturbed, influenced, distracted, and (perhaps) enabled as an influence on inclusivity. This sets a tone for the rest of the case study, whereby there is a sense of both parties moving into a space where they are beginning to exchange views and in doing so creating a series of disturbances to existing viewpoints and assumptions which enable news ways of understanding and co-construction to be developed.

## **From Interviews to Conversations**

Interviews with the teachers individually gave me a chance to begin to explore their view of the school and also the way in which they perceived my role. The following extract is from an interview in April

2007, with Ms. Jo, who was just coming to the end of her third year of teaching, the first in this particular school.

PETER: My first question is what do you think I am doing here? What I am doing this for?

MS JO: To help the students to learn more about Lao, to learn Lao language.

PETER: I'm coming here to help the students learn Lao language?

MS JO: To help students to learn more, clear on Lao – (there follows a technical description of Lao vowels and grammar)

PETER (to the translator): She thinks I am interested in how they technically teach Lao language? You don't have to translate that, I'm just checking that with you.

TRANSLATOR: Yes.

PETER: (to Ms C.) So what did you think I was interested in finding out from you when I give you the questionnaire and when I talk to you?

MS JO: About Lao, too, you are interested in CSN (Children's Special Needs) and discrimination on any minority, because of increasing education, it's discrimination about the poor student

PETER: That's very helpful, thank you. The kinds of questions that I'm asking you now, and that I asked you in the questionnaire, has anybody ever asked you questions like that before?

MS JO: No.

PETER: What do you think I'm going to do with all the information I'm finding out?

MS JO: To help the teachers, or improve the teaching.

PETER: How do you think I'm going to do that?

MS JO: The teachers here are not very good on the teaching, so everybody needs to improve.

PETER: So how am I going to do that with the interview and questionnaires, how is that going to help you?

MS JO: It's like we want you to take us to do the exchange visits. (extract from interview, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007)

This is a good example of some of the issues that emerged during the first year of the closer collaborative working with the school. I was very interested to try and understand how the teachers perceived me, what they thought my agenda was and how they thought this might be purposeful for them. In this extract, Ms. Jo still seems to be concerned with providing what she thinks might be the correct response. Most of her answers reflect the action plan the school drew up in the IQSA project or language which had been generated through the project such as 'discrimination', 'poor children'. This impression was confirmed by the fact that as we finished she said to my translator 'If there is any

mistake, say sorry' (ibid). At this point I was trying to use the interviews as a way of getting to know the teachers, establish trust and develop discussions where we could start to share ideas. At the time, I thought I was not exploring too much too quickly with them as I felt that this would make them uncomfortable and possibly make them more defensive; I tried to use the response from each question to develop my next question but I also sometimes chose not to follow these up. However, it is also clear here that the conversation is still very much driven by my agenda. There is a sense in which I also styled the interview as an 'interrogation'. My anxiety about the way in which the teachers perceived me and my role in the school perhaps led me to adopt a probing questioning style where I seemed to be trying to elicit particular responses. Although I continued to be concerned about the way in which I felt the teachers had particular expectations of me, over a series of visits I learned that I needed to allow more time for issues to be explored. Here, Ms Jo also seems to believe that the quality of teaching in the school is poor or that it is perceived by others as poor and needs to be improved. She also links my role in helping them improve with the arrangement of study visits.

An interview with the Principal on the same day offered a perspective on the way in which she saw my role in a different way. She replied to my suggestion that I would interview two teachers on the following visit, stating that she was

... very happy, it's motivational for the teacher. If it's something they didn't do [meaning a question about their practice] they might think they should start doing it. It motivates them to get try and get them to think about their work.

The conversation continued:

PETER: Yes, I'm trying to get them to think about their work but I'm not trying to motivate them.

PRINCIPAL: No, but what you do is motivational' (ibid)

This exchange followed on from a description of the way in which the Principal had been supporting Ms Jo as a new teacher in the school. She had described how she had observed her lessons, checked her lesson plans and given advice to her. Both she and other teachers had 'tried to explain how to deal with a good student or how to deal with the special needs' (ibid). In the Principal's reply, there is a sense of the interview as a space which is influencing the teachers although I questioned to myself, the meaning of the word motivational in the way that the Principal used it. It felt as though there was again an underlying agenda which influenced any theoretical discussion and which was concerned with what the teachers believed I 'thought' they should be doing; that there was a correct approach and a wrong approach. The implication seemed to be that if I asked about something that must mean the teachers could be doing it better.

These extracts are both examples of the way in which I was trying to navigate the tension between the way in which I wanted to be perceived and the way in which I felt I was being positioned by the school. Where the Principal suggests the motivational aspects of my interviewing the teachers, I immediately say that this is not what I am aiming for. I think that this was rooted in my anxiety about not wanting to be positioned as someone who was advocating the importation of particular ideas or theories. It seems indicative of a tension within myself regarding the possibility of supporting the school without instructing them or solving problems for them. This was a partly pragmatic response to my view of the IE Project and the way in which I was trying to understand the ways in which it had or had not impacted on practice in schools. It was also reflective of my concern about being positioned as an expert, when I did not really feel comfortable in this role.

A further interview with the Principal in October 2007 enabled me to explore this tension, when we spent a significant amount of time talking about the teaching of Lao language, following my observations of this being taught in all of the classrooms. One important issue which emerged was that the local District Pedagogical advisors would suggest methods and ways of working for the lessons and the teachers would try to implement these. After some time, the Principal said, 'I need some recommendation from you what is the best way to teach them language, a technique' (ibid). We spent most of the rest of the interview talking about this. I tried to explain that I did not know anything about the teaching of Lao language and also that even if I suggested a teaching technique it would not necessarily be useful, but the teachers might feel compelled to use it because I had suggested it. However, the interview did begin to move more toward a conversation, with the Principal asking me questions about what I had seen in the classrooms and what I thought could be done to improve practice. One outcome was that we agreed that a good way forward would be for the teachers to meet with me in a group and to try and have a discussion together the teachers could discuss issues things they wanted to change in their classroom.

On one level, this case study is a narrative of the journey from the edges of a shared reflective space towards the middle of one; the middle being a dialogic space where the teachers and I viewed each other in a more equal relationship and could discuss ideas in an explorative and open way. At this point we were still on the edge of this space trying to understand what the other thought but the conversation with the Principal and the prospect of group discussion with the teachers was an indication there was room for some movement. This also concerns their expectations of me which are linked to their view of what they felt was needed, what could be done and what had to be done in the school at the particular time. Their perceptions around these questions were also likely to have been affected by a range of other pressures and constraints. The movement into a shared reflective space

was a slow process, but as dialogue, through conversations and interviews developed over time, there are clearer signs of this, which can be seen through some of the incidents described later in this account.

## **Responding to Poverty**

Through a series of interviews with all the teachers in April 2007 (shortly before the end of the school year) and October 2007 (the beginning of the new school year), I was able to identify a small number of students who had dropped out of school. They were all from poor families and I wanted to explore this in more detail because I had also identified that most of the students identified as having disabilities in the school also came from poor families. I went for a tour around the village with the Principal and asked her to show me where these families lived and to talk about some of their history.

'The first house we went to see was the house of two twin children, who were in Grade 4 last year and hadn't moved to Grade 5. One is repeating Grade 4 and the other twin has dropped out. They live with the grandmother and the mother, but the mother has some mental health problems. As you stepped out of the car you could smell this stench of human waste and we walked away from the road past another house towards a sort of straw and wicker very traditional Lao house in very bad repair, and sitting on a raised platform behind the wicker screen we could see the head of what looked like a relatively young woman and this turned out to be the mother of the two twins. Apparently she just sits there all day, doesn't speak or move and even goes to the toilet where she sits which is where the smell is coming from presumably.

The grandmother wasn't there, nor was the twin who dropped out of school and we assume that they had gone out to gather wood or vegetables or sell what they had found or gathered to get some money. Possibly they were working in a field somewhere. Apparently the grandmother is very very thin and is in her fifties and must find it extremely hard to look after the two children and the mother. My thoughts were around how does the school work with that family to even begin to persuade them ... or to get the community involved ... so that the child who has dropped out comes back to school. Having come away from that house and seen the reality, my thought is that it's amazing that they have even got one child still in school, given the level of poverty' (Extract from field notes 16<sup>th</sup> October 2007).

We also visited the mother of a 13 year old girl who had also dropped out after Grade 4. Initially I wanted to understand why the mother had let the child drop out of school. However I listened to her explain that her daughter found it hard to understand anything in school; she had repeated Grade 3 and then repeated Grade 4 three times and could not see the point of returning to school for Grade 4 again. I discussed these two cases with the Principal and she said that although the community, in the form of the village committee, had a statutory duty to ensure all children went to school, in practice it was not enforced. The village recognised that in some cases it was too difficult to expect parents to make their children go to school.



I asked about ways in which the school and the village supported poor families to allow children to go to school but there appeared to be a consensus that little could be done in these cases. The Principal also talked about another very poor family where the parents were farmers with four children, but they all went to school, even the two eldest who went to secondary. She described how these children

‘... do all kinds of things to try and make money to get the things they need for school, even to the extent that they’ll go out and try and catch insects that they can sell in the market. (ibid)’

Their parents also saw education as purposeful to the extent that they had allowed the children to stay in school. This seemed to support the importance of responding flexibly to diversity, rather than grouping certain sections of society together as, for example, vulnerable. Although these two families both lived in poverty, their circumstances were very different and they also had different attitudes towards prioritising education. I felt that this would make it potentially challenging to form a useful strategy which universally responded to all children from poor families in the same way. Any effective school response would need to be contextual according to the circumstances of each individual or family. This would raise critical questions, in turn, about the way in which a country-wide policy was formulated.

The school perspective was that many of these children formed the group who were most difficult for them to teach. They were usually the ones who were categorised as slow learners and who struggled to keep up in class. In interviews the teachers reported that they tried to use a range of approaches which included asking them different questions, or giving them easier tasks to complete; sometimes they might ask other children to help them. I observed some of these approaches myself, although I also found that once the teachers became aware that I was interested in children from poor families, as with disabled children, if I went into their class, they would usually point them out to me, loudly and in front of the rest of the class. Although they identified discrimination against different groups as a concern for them as an inclusive school, this did not appear to translate into practice which actively tried not to stigmatise these children. From my perspective, this indicated that there were attitudes present, possibly deep rooted in the school culture, which did not exactly match the assumed meanings behind much of the language associated with inclusion as a western theory. It also seemed to suggest that there was possibly a different set of ideas concerning the way in which children feel and how this may affect their learning. In western schools, I would usually have interpreted the identification, labelling and stigmatization of particular children as having a detrimental effect on their self esteem, as well as disempowering them within the socio-political context of the school. I wondered whether the teachers in this school had a concept of self-esteem and individual political power, or whether individuality in this sense, was subsumed into a wider view of the individual as part of a collective group. If this was the case, or even partly true it not only raised questions about the way in

which western theory was being interpreted and applied, it also challenged my view that all the teachers had the individual capacity to develop a sense of their own agency.

These are both examples of the ways in which I was being disturbed and distracted by the way in which inclusion might be understood. At this point I had been working in Laos for four years and considered myself relatively experienced. The engagement with real families living in extreme poverty and struggling to find enough food to eat each day forced me to try and think through what I believed should be an inclusive response to such a challenge. There seemed to be a policy response, in that the country EFA targets aimed for 100% enrolment of primary aged children and government rhetoric indicated that it identified poverty as a concern, expecting communities to take responsibility for educational drop out, this did not appear to be enacted in practice. This seemed to leave schools in a very difficult position. However, I also wondered how much the school were enabled to take no action themselves beyond small changes in pedagogy, because no other state agencies were taking effective action either. This view was re-enforced by a comment I often heard from officers in the Ministry of Education in meetings and workshops 'Please remember we are a very poor country, we do not have much experience or money; you must not expect too much of us'(Field notes 2006).

Although this developing understanding of the complexity of the case disturbed and challenged me, it did not make me change my view that developing teacher agency was part of the solution to complex educational challenge. Where the teachers were taking responsibility for their own actions and making changes which they believed would improve the quality of education in the school, then I believed there was more likely to be sustainable inclusive development. This was a belief I was maintaining, in the face of some counter evidence.

## **The Idea of Group Work**

An important incident occurred during a visit to the school in February 2008, when I noticed during lesson observations that after twenty minutes, several teachers asked the children to stop work and turn around to work with the children sitting behind them, creating several groups of between 6 – 8 children. Two examples were: in a Lao language reading lesson, the children continued to do what they had already been doing as a whole class which was to read aloud from their reading books in chorus; and in another lesson, the children were asked to talk about the sums which had been written on the blackboard. I noticed that few of them said anything and that the behaviour of the teacher in

this part of the lesson, as in the reading lesson, appeared confused. They continued to stand at the front of the class and did not enter into dialogue with the children.

During a lunchtime meeting with all the teachers, we talked about this. I asked what had led to the change and what they felt the purpose was. A local pedagogical advisor had recently visited and told the teachers to put the children into groups for 20 minutes in the middle of each lesson. Their impression was that the local advisor didn't really understand the principles of the approach either. Interviews with local advisors confirmed that they had recently been trained as part of UNICEF's Child Friendly School Initiative which was being introduced to all schools across the country with an emphasis in its first phase on the training of local education advisors, who would then cascade their learning to schools.

One idea from this new initiative was to develop the use of group work in the classroom to encourage discussion and different forms of engagement with the lesson content. Advisors had been trained accordingly and were passing this new approach on to schools. The teachers in River Lane explained

'... we know it's a new idea and seems like it could be helpful because the children can talk to each other. But we don't really understand it properly' (field notes, February 2008).

The advisors I spoke to responded in a similar way:

'There are a lot of new and good ideas being introduced but sometimes it is hard to understand very quickly how we can use them in schools. In training we are told these ideas and then asked to show our schools what to do. We do our best and we need to do our job, but, yes, we also think that the schools are probably a little confused. Maybe some advisors are too' (Interview with Mr Tan , local District Education Officer, February 2008).

In retrospect, in terms of the way language was being understood and applied, the concept of 'group work' was being translated without enough engagement with accompanying discourse, for example the importance of enabling student dialogue in order to support their learning. My perspective was that this was more than a case of western theory being applied in a Lao context; it was extracting an idea without paying attention to interconnected elements that would be needed to make sense of it, in any context, not only in an overseas setting.

## **Sharing Experiences**

In the discussion with the teachers, I asked them questions about group work, e.g. 'what do you think could be useful about it?' and 'does it make you change the way you behave in the classroom, do you

do anything differently?’ These were questions they found very difficult to answer and they seemed to want me to tell them how to do group work properly. The conversation developed with the teachers asking me questions about my own practice as a teacher, as they knew I had been a Primary teacher up until 2003.

This was a significant moment for me as researcher because it was the point at which I felt myself move into a more interactive position with them and started to talk about how I had organised my classroom. This became a very animated discussion with the teachers asking me questions about why I had made certain decisions, how did it affect the children and this in turn linked into discussion about curriculum, what I was trying to teach and how it had affected my behaviour as a teacher. At one point I was asked to draw a map of my classroom furniture and as I drew this, my translator told me ‘they say they can understand you better now – they can see what you are saying.’ The fact that it was their initiative to ask for more clarity from you was important, because it was an indication that dialogue was developing and the research was not a one way process with me eliciting information from them, but a genuine desire on their part to understand more about me, my ways of thinking and how this might be applied to their context.

I was aware that there were a number of important issues concerned with this development which I needed to try and address. I felt that I had spent many years trying to avoid ‘telling’ teachers how to teach and that this exchange was perilously close to an instructional discourse. At the same time, it had felt right at the time, and I understood that something within the dynamic between us as a group of individuals had moved onto a different level and that this had somehow facilitated a different kind of exchange. This is linked to the way in which as a group, trust, understanding and expectations were slowly shifting and expanding. My position as an outsider was not re-constructed to that of an insider, but I felt that through this shift I was moving towards trusted outsider and this enabled a different kind of critical discourse to develop. However, I also felt that it was important for me to continue to emphasise to the teachers that any changes they wanted to make, they had to take ownership of and make their own. They seemed to understand this in a more tangible way because of the way in which they had struggled to make sense of the advice to introduce group work. Therefore, from my perspective their notion of themselves as potentially active agents in a change process had the potential to become less elusive.

## Setting Up The Study Visit

In this section, I concentrate on the study visit to Hope School in Bangkok and the impact this had on both the staff of River Lane and myself. In my field notes, shortly before the visit, which took place in June 2008, I wrote:

'I see this trip as a key part of my research / data collection. Originally, exchange visits were not a part of the design. In fact the thought had not even occurred to me. It was the staff of River Lane who sowed the seed in my head. ...

The more I thought about this, I began to realise that if I could find a way of effectively planning the visit it could become a very useful source of data. My reasoning for this was partly based on something Mel Ainscow said at a conference in Hong Kong in 2005. He was explaining how his own research into supporting schools develop more inclusive practices had made him realise that schools cannot develop practice in a vacuum – they need to see how other schools are working and discuss practice with other teachers. This does not necessarily mean that they import practice from other schools. Rather it creates 'interruptions' in their own thinking and stimulates new ways of approaching their classroom practice. This way of thinking is also very much part of the UNESCO ROAL framework' (field notes, June 2008).

I wanted to try and enable the creation of a space where the visiting teachers could engage with new ideas and discuss them openly without political pressure to try and copy or import them. This was an extension of the work I had already begun with them whereby in our conversations together I had been trying to establish a similar exploratory space. I was very aware that there were significant differences between the two schools which I described at the time in the following way:

**Figure 4: Differences and Similarities between River Lane School and Hope School**

River Lane	Hope
State school	Privately owned
Children attend from local community / village	Fee paying parents who travel from around Bangkok to get their children to the school
Few resources – what is there has either been made by the teachers or funded through local community	Well resourced – including buildings and teaching resources
Pedagogy has been developed through IE project, most teachers have had 5 – 8 days training; trying to move away from a talk and copy / teacher orientated curriculum to a more active / participatory one	Pedagogy influenced by a variety of educational philosophies including Steiner, Montessori, 'western' educationalists. This is married together with key elements of Buddhism to create a hybrid approach to teaching and learning which reflects both western and Thai traditions.

Compelled to follow a dictated state curriculum with fixed tests	Freedom to change curriculum and develop teacher / parent /student based assessments
Teachers experience of other schools / philosophies / ideas mostly limited to local district schools with very rare visits to other provinces through taking part in national projects	Teachers exposed to wide range of schools / ideas through visiting schools in other countries and receiving training from a succession of consultants / educationalists

It was therefore important that teachers coming from a system where there may be less room for experimentation, felt that they had permission to observe, ask questions, listen and then try to make sense of what they had experienced and its possible implications for their own practice. My role would be to facilitate this but to allow them space to experience the school without me and then to reflect on what they were thinking with me. Politically I also knew that it would be important to draw the Ministry of Education and the local District Office, as well as the NGO, into the process.

Save the Children supported the organisation of the trip and took on much of the administration involved. This proved much more complex than I had envisaged, since none of the teachers had ever left the country and therefore did not have passports. They also needed written permission from District, Provincial and Ministry of Education officers supporting the trip as an essential part of their professional development and written permission from the local village committee granting them permission to travel out of their village and also to leave the country. This process took many months and helped me to understand the way in which the state exerted a significant degree of control over citizens and partly explained why some might be reluctant to question existing policy. The support of Save the Children also helped to gain access to the appropriate politicians and administrators at the other levels of the education and social systems and re-affirmed to the teachers at River Lane that the trip was seen by them as important and useful.. This was then re-enforced by similar messages from the other political levels and created a metaphorical green light to the process which allowed what followed to take place.

The other important development was that I found I had enough funding to pay for two extra places on the trip and decided to extend the invitation to Mr Tan, local District Education Officer, and Ms Bun, one of the District pedagogical advisors who worked with the school. The Principal had already asked if they could be invited as she felt it would be helpful for them to have the same experiences as the teachers; this in turn might enable them to understand better any subsequent work the school undertook. I saw this as a valuable opportunity to reduce one of the potential barriers to any

subsequent school development initiatives since it was possible that the District officers could have stopped the school from trying out any new ideas they themselves did not understand. The trip was also accompanied by Nong an officer on the IE Project with Save the Children, who would act as a Lao-English interpreter.

## **The Visit**

My experience of the visit was limited to a series of windows into the teachers' perspectives at critical times of the day. The video was useful in that it enabled me to re-visit certain discussions and visits to classrooms during data analysis. I used a short series of relatively simple but critical questions to guide discussions with the teachers as a whole group. We would meet before the morning and afternoon teaching sessions to share where people had chosen to spend the morning and, if possible to talk about what they hoped to see. After each session, at lunchtime and after school, we would meet to discuss what had been seen, how the teachers felt about what they had seen and any implications they thought it might have for them in their own work. In my field notes written in the week the teachers arrived in Bangkok, I wrote:

'I have regularly asked them why they think I have agreed to take them to visit Hope. On the last occasion we discussed this, in March, they laughed and said, 'We know – you don't want us to copy what they are doing; but we're interested to see what they do and how they do things. We want to see their classrooms and how they teach'. This makes me feel that they have 'heard' my concerns about taking other peoples approaches and trying to replicate them in a different context' (field notes June 2008).

I still felt that there was a tension between my concerns concerning the limitations of importing practice and their concern to see new approaches which might improve their own practice. The discussions around my critical questions would be the first opportunity I would have to see the way in which this tension might be enacted or partially resolved.

I was also aware of the potential impact of political hierarchy on reflective discourse and decided to be open and honest with the teachers and advisors about the structure for the discussion sessions. I was forthright and active in doing this and was consciously shaping events for my own purposes. I explained that at some of the discussion sessions I would only ask the staff of River Lane to attend because I wanted them to talk openly without worrying about speaking before their colleagues in the District Office. Mr Tan was the senior District advisor and said in a discussion with all the visiting team that he thought this was a good idea because it was important that the teachers were able to say what they thought and to speak honestly. Politically he was giving permission for the teachers to speak openly, which supported my design.

As outlined in Chapter Six, all the discussion sessions were videoed as well as some of the teachers, visits around the school. An analysis of the discussion sessions afterwards revealed that social convention had a significant impact on who spoke and when. During sessions where the advisors were present, the teachers from River Lane would not speak until Mr Tan had responded to a question; if the advisors were not present, the teachers would not speak until the Principal had spoken. The only time this pattern would change was when I directly addressed an individual with a specific question about their recent experience in the classroom. On these occasions I generally found that the respondent would only provide a short answer and discussion would not develop until the most senior person present had answered. My analysis was that I had recognised and planned for a potential challenge to open discussion and had been partially able to work around it, but it seemed that cultural convention was not so easily transformed.

### **The Teachers' Responses**

The only guidance I gave to the teachers before they went to visit classes was:

Watch

Join in

Talk to the children

Notice things – write down or make a mental note of anything that interests or puzzles you

Be prepared to discuss what you have noticed

Both Nong and Mr Tan wanted me to give the teachers very clear guidelines on what they should be looking for in the classrooms. I resisted this as I did not want to put ideas into their heads or point them towards what I thought they might find interesting. It seemed to me that they had to make sense of the experience for themselves; I could support this by getting them to talk about it but I could not tell them what was or was not important. My experience of working with the teachers up until this point led me to question how far language used by me could describe adequately concepts or ideas I wanted to explore with them. By resisting the call for a more detailed structure of questions I wanted them to address, I was reinforcing a hope that they would feel free to construct their responses themselves and that this would be the most beneficial approach.

Judging from my notes from the first meeting after the teachers had been on a tour of the school and had a talk about the school's approach from Ana, I felt that my approach had at least been reasonably successful,:



'I asked the Lao teachers what their first impressions of the school were and was pleased that they all spoke and seemed quite happy to share their thoughts. I am positive that I would not have got so much from them had the advisors still been there. (field notes, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008)'

I also summarised the comments from the teachers on what they had observed, these were taken from the transcript of the discussion and edited into a single paragraph:

'Teachers are doing their job teaching, ok they enjoy teaching, not scolding at the student, they are smiling, they are being kind to them. The children were mostly doing different activities. It was not always teacher directed and the teachers seemed to be able to decide on the use of different techniques or forms of classroom organisation. Students were given a variety of activities, most of these were activity based learning. Students were doing different things and using multiple skills at the same time; may be drawing, talking, learning English, while they are colouring and drawing pictures. All the teachers seem to be very attentive to students who were motivated and engaged in whatever was going on. There was a wide variety of teaching aids used. Students with special needs were learning with the group of normal students but they are also getting help from teachers, so the teachers know how to deal with them to help them learn. At the same time they get along with the class as well, they are not left out'(ibid).

I include these comments because they gave a clear indication of the detailed way in which the teachers were engaging with the school. They did not seem to need to be told what to look for, they were able to identify a broad range of areas that they could identify as being important. I was particularly interested in the way in which they had identified aspects of teacher behaviour including the attitude towards the children but also the feelings of the teachers towards their work. They focused on the fact that teachers seemed to enjoy their teaching and had freedom to decide what the best approach was. The notion of 'enjoyment' had been an issue raised in River Lane since the IQSA project and it was coming up again here. Subsequent discussions returned to these themes in more detail, with evidence that the teachers were joining in when they visited classrooms, sitting with children and talking to them, talking with the adults and helping with the activities which were taking place. The issue of Thai-Lao interpretation had not been a problem according to the two interpreters because the Lao teachers found that their knowledge of Thai enabled them both to understand what was being said and to speak fluently enough to be understood. I also wanted to move the discussions on to a stage where the teachers would ask each other questions about what they had seen so as to encourage a more discussion which was driven by them rather than me asking them questions.

The Principal returned to the theme of enjoyment at the end of the day, having spent the afternoon in classrooms. She said that she felt that the atmosphere in Laos classrooms was much more serious, whilst in Bangkok, the children 'really seemed to enjoy their learning – they laugh, they talk, they share, they interact joyfully' (ibid). At the end of the visit, I spoke about this in a conversation with Mr Tan who said

'I agree with Lili – in Lao the teachers like the children to learn academically, but the activities that they use are not always appropriate for child development or child involvement. Their

focus is more academic, but the results of pupil achievement are not as high as here in Bangkok. It's because the teachers have been trained in Laos in a particular way, but they have no opportunity to experience anything different – they only know one way of teaching; also teachers do not think about how to improve their teaching – they do not see how other schools organise their teaching differently, so they don't think about themselves in a different way' (ibid).

Mr Tan's views seemed to re-enforce why the study visit was an important activity; it was interrupting the Lao teachers' thinking in a very tangible way and they were 'seeing' 'hearing' 'experiencing' teaching and learning in a completely different environment, helping them to stand back from their own practice. His observation that teachers in Laos do not think about how to improve their teaching, seemed to be indicative of the argument that there might be a lack of capacity for reflective practice referred to in Chapter Four of this theses. Mr Tan's reflections suggest that he too is being 'interrupted' and is having to re-think his own view of what might be possible for Lao teachers. It raises the question of whether the River Lane teachers are beginning to, as he phrases it, think about themselves in a different way;' or at least think about what might be possible in a different way.

Mr Tan spoke these words during a recorded conversation which was later transcribed. I felt that that he was offering a fascinating perspective and asked if he would mind repeating the interview so that it could be filmed. By this point in the trip, he had been involved in several episodes of filming and had seemed very relaxed about the process. The camera was set up and I repeated my question in regard to Lili's comments. Mr Tan's response was very different from before and I quickly realised he was much less comfortable being on camera and asked to comment on Laos. He began by providing a very detailed historical narrative of the way Laos had fought and won the civil war and had then developed its public services. He spoke for several minutes without my being able to interject or ask a question that might bring him back to the original focus on enjoyment. I realised that I had unwittingly caused him a great deal of anxiety and that he clearly felt that if he was on film he needed to present the communist party's historical perspective. After he had spoken for ten minutes and come to a natural break, I thanked him and ended the interview.

My view of this incident was that because of his relationship with me and his experience in the projects we had worked on together, Mr Tan had previously been able to operate within a shared reflective space, discussing ideas and offering his perspective on 'enjoyment'. The camera created a different arena which was potentially public and because of this, any comments he made about education in Laos could possibly be interpreted in a different way if seen by those in more powerful political positions within the country. By reverting to a politically acceptable response he was ensuring that he could not be accused of anything subversive. The incident helped me to contextualise some of the pressures which both he and the teachers must have continually felt under in terms of the socio-

political expectations on them to conform. In this case, it seemed to be the emphasis on comparison between Laos and Thailand in Lili's remarks which he felt would be potentially problematic, combined with what might be perceived as a criticism of teachers in Laos.

### **Plants and Maths Worksheets**

On the second day, after the morning visits, I asked Ms Jo, the River Lane Grade 3 teacher, if she would share her thoughts having observed G3/4. I later learned that 3 Lao teachers had observed this lesson:

'The lesson started outside the classroom – the students were doing a relaxing activity to de-stress them; they sang a song about flowers, did movements with their fingers, hands, muscles and then relaxation - breathing, closing eyes. The teacher asked them to think about flowers and plants in their back yards at home. Each student was asked to name a flower or plant they had thought of. We joined in as students and named a Lao flower (field notes 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2008)'

This was an interesting description as she provided a lot of detail about the content of the lesson and I noted that she had identified a number of significant details which were very different from lessons in Laos. I later spoke to the teacher who had been observed. I had known him since 2003 and had observed his lessons and interviewed him many times about his own practice and I felt that we had a reasonably open and trusting relationship. I asked him for his observations of the lesson he had just taught and he gave some interesting insights into the participation of the Lao teachers.

'The Lao teachers participated as students, joined in and were asked to name a flower / plant; I asked all the children to think of a variety of plants / flowers but to name only one. All the Lao teachers named the same plant, 'Champa', 1 after another. This made the children think that maybe there was only 1 kind of plant in Laos and they asked me if this was the case. It made me wonder about Lao teachers and their training – the way that Lao teachers are taught – is it just 'one line' - everyone doing the same thing with no individuality? (ibid)'

This was a very interesting incident and raised a number of questions including the issue of individuality, as the Thai teacher indicated. I suspected that if he had said that the rule was that a different plant had to be named each time, then they would have felt more comfortable to provide a variety of responses. My view of this, was that it probably there were a number of levels of response occurring at the same time. The teachers were in a classroom situation which they had never experienced before and may not have been clear how they were expected to respond. They were not used to being placed in the same position as the children and may have been concerned with behaving correctly, in the way they thought they were expected to. When the first teacher named Champa, a common local plant in Laos, the second teacher had a choice to either say the same thing or name something different. I wondered whether they were anxious that if they named a different plant that this might indicate the first response was incorrect in some way; the safest response was to repeat the same plant. For the third teacher, having heard the first two responses, they may well have

felt unable to offer a different plant. I felt that this resulted in their retreat into a group response, in which they felt safer. It felt to me that on one level, it was indicative of the ways of thinking that the teachers had been used to culturally, in that there were expected responses to questions and correct solutions to problems. Activities such as this, as with much of my previous engagement with them, were actively removing them from a space where they felt safe and comfortable and requiring them to respond in new and different ways. The view of the Thai teacher was fascinating and seemed to link to Mr. Tan's comments previously, regarding Lao Teachers: 'they have no opportunity to experience anything different – they only know one way'. I felt that there was enactment of cultural conditioning through these episodes whereby the view of the teacher as no more than a member of a collective group was being gradually challenged; in this incident the teachers were being given the space to think about themselves and their colleagues differently, as independent learners. They chose to respond as a group, but this did not necessarily mean that it did not have an impact on them.

I was unable to explore this incident in more depth with them at the time, but in the same feedback session Ms Jo, went on to describe how, after the flower episode the children had moved into the classroom for a maths lesson, where they were given worksheets with problems to solve.

'At this point I stopped the feedback and said let's look at this in more detail. I repeated what Ms. Jo had already said about the maths lesson and opened the discussion up to the rest of the group. 'What more would you like to know about this maths lesson? What other questions would you like to ask your colleagues who were there?' I had not planned to do this, but it seemed like a good idea – I wanted to look at the maths lesson in more practical detail but I didn't want to be the one directing the questioning or identifying the practice – it felt that the group should be able to ask searching questions – if they didn't that would tell me a lot about how much they were learning and the kinds of questions they themselves were asking as they visited the classrooms.

Several people wanted to ask about the details of the worksheet – what was in it, what kinds of activities the children did, how they were asked to approach them, how the children with special needs were planned for. This attention to detail and the way in which several people wanted to know more encouraged me to feel that there was worthwhile engagement taking place – clearly some at least of the teachers are actively analysing what they see and hear in the classrooms.

One of the teachers who had observed the lesson said that the worksheet allowed the children to decide if they wanted to concentrate on addition, subtraction or both. The children with special needs did some drawing activity, colouring

Another teacher who had also seen the lesson interjected to explain that actually all the children were engaged in maths adding and subtracting; some of the children were working on a maths game where they could colour squares, but the process still involved them deciding which operation to choose and in accurately counting on or back (ibid).'

The way the teachers were talking in this discussion was different not only from earlier question and answer sessions about what they had observed, but also from our discussions in the school in Laos. From my perspective at the time, I felt that they had moved further into a shared reflective space in

that they were driving the discussion adding to each others' observations, questioning and correcting each other. Conversation in this context involved listening and when speaking, taking what has been heard into account. There was also some evidence of the teachers trying to enter into the thinking of those who had been in the lesson, examining what they had seen, heard and what meanings they had attached to it. I began to think about what this shift might look like once they had returned to Laos. I hoped that they would be able to explore and discuss what they had seen in Bangkok, without me there to lead the discussion and that this would in turn generate ideas for new practice in the classroom.

### **Leaving Bangkok**

On the last day, we had a session together to share what the teachers final thoughts were; what did they think they had gained from the visit and what would they hope to concentrate on in the new school year starting in September 2008. They were very energised and excited about what they had seen and were full of ideas about what they could think about. They listed a number of different areas including making games, resources and new learning materials; different ways of grouping the children, planning work without using the blackboard or text book so much; trying to encourage the children to talk more together; finding ways to talk to the children more themselves as teachers; making sure children enjoyed school more; making learning more activity based so that the children could move around more often; re-arranging the classroom so that children not sit in the same place for too long; finding different ways to encourage the children with special needs to participate more and activities which would help them to learn the same things as everybody else. Although the teachers were enthused and all of them contributed to this list, the Principal took a strong lead following this part of the discussion and was very clear that the first point of action would be to take some time to think and then meet in two weeks time to share their thoughts. 'We will need to think as well how we can involve the community' (extract from field notes 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008). I felt that that she was being very pragmatic and thinking about ways in which the teachers could make sustainable change. As the discussion came to a close, she also made an interesting comment to me:

'I know you worry that we will try to copy what we have seen here but I know that is not possible. They have more money here and it is very different – the system is different, the government is different, the children are different. The teachers have had many different experiences from us. This trip will be so useful to us but I know that if we just try to copy them it will not work in our school. That's why I know we have to take the time; if we take the time to think more and think about the visit and then about our school then we can make a plan that will be better' (ibid)

At the time, I was very relieved that Lili was so clear about my own anxieties. She seemed to understand what I was going to say before I said it, because I wanted to emphasise to the teachers that although I was pleased they had enjoyed the trip and found it useful, they needed to think about their own context and make plans for ideas they wanted to experiment with, rather than think they

should copy the Thai school. In retrospect, her perspective was fundamental to the subsequent success of the schools endeavours to develop practice. I believe now, that she had developed an understanding of the need to focus on a pragmatic and achievable process at local level as the most effective way of supporting changes in practice.

## **The Impact**

The school's subsequent development seemed to me to be quite dramatic. Before discussing the way in which this occurred, I would like to present a brief window into the school; the following is an extract from my field notes nine months after the study visit:

'The first thing I notice is, (grade 3 classroom), is that the children are sitting at grouped tables, engaging in their work. There is conversation, they are talking to each other, and writing in their exercise books. The teacher is sitting at a table with a group, actively talking to children about what they are doing; I'm seeing children who are talking to each other about their work, pointing at their exercise books, and asking each other questions and discussing and writing. One child has just left another table to go and talk to a child on another table and is pointing to a picture in the book and she is showing him how to draw something. The teacher is moving around the class, talking to different tables. What you get a sense of is purposefulness. She has just moved across to another table and she is writing in a child's book, modelling something I think, showing her how to write something which the child has asked her to do. So there we've got an example of children actively seeking support, seeking advice from the teacher and she's just doing it as a matter of course while still talking to another child whose clearly been having some issues around focus because he's the one who moved to ask another child how to do something. He's taken some resources off the back table where the resources are stored and is using those now to help him do his drawing. So ... I'm having a sense of an active teacher, I'm getting a sense of somebody who is very engaged in what the children are doing and the children too have engaged' (field notes 13<sup>th</sup> March 2009).

In this extract, the teacher has developed her practice in a number of different ways, including: the way she organises the classroom, which has shifted from rows to groups of tables; use of resources, which are now actively used in the classroom; the expectations of the children, who are talking to each other, sharing work, discussing their tasks; the behaviour of the teacher who now appears more active within the classroom, talking to individual children, moving around the room engaging with and modelling learning for different children and groups. In other lessons, I observed maths being taught through colourful games which the teachers had been made, combined with a range of different activities which meant that the children had to change their working places a number of times during the lesson. In another classroom, a reading lesson was taught using a combination of song, oral storytelling, drama, drawing and independent writing. This was a significant shift but it was not simply a case of the teachers returning to Laos and trying to replicate what they had seen.

When I visited the school in October 2008, there were some obvious developments to practice, but the teachers were still struggling to make some of the changes they had wanted to put into place. They had put a lot of energy into making games and resources using a charitable donation of £100 to purchase not only card and paper, but also glue, staples and stapler, sticky tape and rolls of transparent sticky plastic. These were in evidence in classrooms although the teachers did not appear very confident in using them. They seemed to be displayed in each classroom on a special table at the back of the room with a sign which read Learning Corner. I visited each of the classrooms with Lili:

‘... in grade three ... they were engaged in Lao reading; the children are sitting in groups taking it in turns to read out loud, and the teacher was trying to respond to the children if they asked her anything, but was sitting at her desk. These are teachers who are used to teaching, they are used to standing up in front of the class and doing a lot of talking, a lot of engaging with everybody so if you have got the children working in groups, what do you do next?’ (Field notes 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008)

The Principal explained to me afterwards that although the teachers had changed their practice they were not sure where to go next and there were times in the lessons, such as the extract above, where the teacher was not sure what to do. I knew that what she wanted from me was a solution, the answer to the question ‘what should we do next?’. Previous to the study visit, I think I would have felt very uncomfortable about this but during the visit, I felt that both myself and the teachers had been able to move into a more open and reflective, dialogic space and this had the impact of making me feel that I could share more of my thoughts about the challenges the teachers were now facing in the classroom.

Peter: what do you think is different from last year?

Lili: Changes are still little but are different, like in the way of students studying together, we have improved this.

Peter: That’s something new?

LILI: That is not very new, but we have introduced the games, or the activity cards, and this is part of what we have learnt from Bangkok.

Peter: Ok so what I am hearing is that I might see children playing games in groups.

LILI: Yes.

Peter: So what that sounds like to me, is that for your group activity, maybe sometimes you have got a clear... a clear activity for the children to do. Whereas before, sometimes when I saw group work it wasn’t very clear to the children what they had to do in the group, but now you have got a game for them to play.

LILI: They have got an aim for the activity, the teachers now make that very clear, before ok, maybe the children sat in a group but the teachers didn’t have a very specific objective – so it was not clear for them: what is this (group work) for? But now they are quite clear what they want to do.

Peter: Ok.

LILI: But when you see the classrooms, you will see in the something that is not yet good, maybe you have to more advise the teachers because they still need your advice. They will still want advice from you, not just you come to ask them what did you do? What did you change? I think we all still need to learn from you.

Peter: Ok. Last time we had quite a long conversation about the organisation in the classrooms, around furniture. Did that have any impact on the teachers?

LILI: Yes sometimes we change how we organise the classroom. Sometimes we have the group of two or group of five, or make them to sit, organise the table around, or sometimes try to make it very different, and also we use the activity room for grade five, especially on mathematics they have to move them to study there at the activity room' (extract from interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2008).

We then discussed different models of the teacher actively working with a specific group for a different activity, sitting herself with that group, having a learning focus for her time with them but still being able to monitor and watch the rest of the classroom. I also gave Lili a copy of the newly translated Lao edition of the UNESCO Embracing Diversity Toolkit (UNESCO, 2004, 2009). This had been developed over a number of years by UNESCO Asia Region and although no training had been provided to support its implementation in Laos at this point, I felt that it might help the school to think about some of the things they had seen in Bangkok. I also felt it was more likely to be useful because they had been to Bangkok since they would have a strong impression of how different classrooms might look. The difference between this and previous training initiatives was that it might not be abstract or purely theoretical and therefore easier to relate to their own practice. Secondly, I was not talking to them about the materials, but allowing them to use it or not depending on how helpful or accessible they found it.

## **What was my role?**

During the period between October 2008 and May 2009 I was able to make several visits to the school and I found that, as with the visit described above, my role had shifted from one where I was anxious to make concrete suggestions, to one where I was more comfortable to work alongside the teachers in the classroom. An example of this is a conversation with the Grade 3 teacher Ms Jo and the Principal, where we examined the elements of the lesson that they were trying to develop. The aim for them was to develop their teaching of Lao language so that it was interesting and engaging for all the pupils. The text book page for the lesson, was a written story about a Tiger and some animals who decide to punish him for eating them. The teacher had already decided that the best way of starting this lesson was through engaging the local community and making sure that the children read the story at home or had it read to them, so that they were familiar with the content. She then wanted to develop a lesson where the children worked in groups, were active and there was also a range of sensory engagement, including music. I listened to her describe this and then helped her by breaking the lesson down into different sections, such as introduction, thinking about the story, finding a way of



being active with the story, exploring the story through different mediums. I was taking my cue from her suggestions and so I felt comfortable that I was not imposing a theoretical perspective on her. We then took each section of the lesson and discussed ways in which it could be developed, with my role to ask questions and to try and draw out their ideas. The structure which evolved began with the singing of a local song about animals; introduced the story and reminded the children that their homework had been to read it or hear it in the village; oracy, the children talk about the story in their group and try to remember the different parts of it; extension whereby different children offer to tell parts of the story out loud to the rest of the class; drama where different children take it in turns to act out parts of the story; drawing, where the children choose an animal or aspect of the story to draw, supported by pictures of the animals prepared by the teacher; writing, where the children choose one part of the story to write in their own words; sharing where children volunteer to read their work out to others in their group or the class. I saw my role as part guide and part facilitator of problem solving as the lesson took structure over a period of discussion and exploration. The teacher then was able to put the lesson into practice and to try out some or all of the different elements which had been discussed. I also suggested that when she tried this, that the Principal came into the classroom with her and that they worked together to teach the lesson, as team teachers. This lesson was later written up in collaboration with the school as a case study for a Save the Children publication (Grimes, 2009, p106-111) with a series of photographs illustrating the lesson.

This seemed to have been the stimulus for a number of developments. When I returned in March 2009, I discovered that the teachers had decided to begin planning detailed lessons together and then observing each other teach and also sometimes team teaching together, whilst the Principal covered their classes. In addition Mr Tan and the local advisors had been to observe lessons which were followed by discussions with the teachers. This had led to teachers from other schools coming to visit the school and River Lane teachers being invited to visit other schools. Lili told me that she was now meeting the other local Principals on a regular basis each month, using a different school to meet in, in turn. I also discovered that the teachers had been using the UNESCO materials I had given them previously and were trying out different ideas in practice. This seemed to me to suggest that their experiences had enabled them to engage with the materials in a practical way. I had also visited a number of other Lao schools in the previous months, who had been given copies of these materials and there had been no evidence that they had been able to apply the ideas.

I was pleased to hear about these developments, but more so because I had not suggested any of them. My view was that my approach had facilitated new ways of working and sharing and that these initiatives were supported through the active engagement of the local education office. It was

evidence that the decision to take Mr Tan to Bangkok had been an important one. If he had not understood what the school were trying to achieve he would not have encouraged his colleagues to visit the school nor facilitated the networking which was beginning to develop with other schools. It also demonstrates a deeper level of cultural transformation, whereby I felt that there was a culture of participation and collaboration emerging. Together with the school Mr Tan was, in a self sustaining way, beginning to enable others to participate in the changes in the school, allowing teachers and advisors to think about education in Lao in a different way. Earlier, in Bangkok, Mr Tan had questioned the extent to which Lao teachers could develop, reflect and 'think differently'. His involvement in the visit and the subsequent development activities has been motivating for him allowing him a strong sense of ownership and involvement in the school's development. This in turn has created the space for him to develop his own response, sharing the work of the school, involving other professionals. In the system within which he has to operate, this is significant because it has enabled him to value the developments and to take some of the credit for sharing good practice within the District and the Province. In order for the school to change in this way, there has to be space within the system and at this level it is Mr. Tan who provides that space.

## **Leaving the field**

My last visit to the school was in May 2009 and I had a final meeting with the teachers to discuss the development of the school over the years I had been working with them. I had been accompanied for part of the morning by a Principal from another school in the IE Project who was struggling to follow the project's philosophy and it had been suggested she come to visit River Lane. During her visit she had told Lili that she found it hard to understand how the teachers in River Lane were approaching their teaching. The following quotes are all extracts from the conversation with the River Lane teachers:

' Lili: It was hard to explain to her about new approaches and pedagogy

Peter: I see. Why do you think you and your teachers have been able to make these changes and other schools or teachers sometimes find it difficult to understand?

Lili: The reason why we can do what we are doing now is because we have had different training like on the IQSA project and from you so we have a better understanding of what we are doing. Second reason is the study tour in the IQSA project and to Bangkok, we can see a lot of good examples especially in Thailand. I can understand what this Principal is saying – sometimes when you see new things it is difficult to understand' (extracts from interviews May 2009).

Lili goes on to explain how she feels that teachers have to be motivated to develop and learn but that they also need stimulus from outside their own experience:

'it will build up what they already have and they try to integrate what they learnt from outside to actually improve the methodology of teaching' (ibid).

Ms Jo: Training is not always enough; I don't have much experience but I can get the lessons from you or from Bangkok and it gives me a broad variety of pedagogy so once I come back I can start to develop my lessons to be more enjoyable for the student and to make the student more active in the class. I would like to add that the reason I can improve is, the key is the Principal and the teacher in the school. They must be very dedicated and active and dedicate themselves to the development of the school. We also have the close support of the community or it is very hard to improve. Theory is not enough (I ask her to expand on this) ... we might get theory from training but I have to see it in the school here or in the school visit to help me understand it. The other part of our development here is the close working relationship with you. You come and maybe you point out something, maybe it's a small detail we overlook; or you ask us a question which makes us realise that 'oh we need to improve that'. When we get asked your question we look at the details and this helps us to think and to understand what we want to do; so we can decide we want to improve but we are not sure how so these things all help us to make small changes, little details all the time ...' (ibid).

This response from Ms Jo was very interesting to me. The contrast between the way she was talking here and her conversations with me earlier in the research is striking. Her use of language has changed; there is clarity in her use of key vocabulary and the way in which it is applied to the school. The use of the words 'development' 'dedication' 'communication' 'active' 'close working relationship' 'pedagogy' , as well as 'theory' and 'training', I felt was also indicative of the development of a key vocabulary within the staff team, which was central to the way in which they were mediating concepts of inclusion and school change. Ms Jo also seems to be looking at herself professionally in a different way. There is a strong sense of the teacher as an active agent, someone who is identifying what she thinks are important issues. When she identifies that training and theory are 'not enough' Ms Jo is also questioning assumptions about teacher development, and in doing so is asserting herself as an individual, demonstrating a transformation in how she feels and thinks. This seems to indicate that in certain circumstances, teachers in Laos do have the capacity to develop as professionals and to develop reflect critically on this.

A final conversation with Lili was also very revealing, particularly about her view of the role of the Principal and the way in which she felt the school had developed.

Lili: The Principal who was here before me was a man and very authoritarian. The teachers were scared of him. I didn't want to be like him and I knew I had to think carefully about how I would be in my new role – I wanted to show the teachers what I thought was important. So, on the first day, I came early and I cleaned the toilets myself and as the teachers arrived they could see I was doing this (Peters note: the toilets were very basic, outside and not very pleasant). I wanted this to send them the message – look, we are all equal, I am the same as you, we are partners and I will not try to tell you what you must do. We will work together to make sure this is a good school ... As Principal, I see it as my role to support the teachers in developing their skills, but I feel the best way forward for this is to work together as a team' (ibid)

Lili's description of her approach to leadership is very interesting because it does not reflect the hierarchical structure of Lao society. Her commitment to inclusive values such as equality and team work is very striking here, but it was particularly interesting to me, because it had taken several years of discussions for her to share this information with me and to articulate her vision for the school in such a clear way. This may have been due to the fact that she knew me well by this time and felt relaxed and able to share her thoughts more openly and honestly. It may also have been influenced by the way in which we had been sharing ideas and discussing the meaning of inclusive language, which had helped her to articulate these ideas more clearly herself. I asked her to discuss the way in which she felt the school had developed and what my role had been.

You come and you ask us questions, so we start thinking about how we can improve and after you have gone we think and maybe we try something or we talk together and we plan something new ... but its more than that it's both ways communication; we feel like we both learn from each other, you from us and us from you. We are so happy to have been in your research project and we feel very lucky and privileged for that .. We have learnt that you cannot watch somebody teach in another school and then take it back to your school to try and copy them. It doesn't seem to work that way. You need to adapt ideas so that they work in your school and in your classroom .... All children are different and so are teachers and schools. If you want to be a really inclusive school, then you need to understand that. To make sure they all enjoy and do well at school, then we need to make sure our lessons are fun, lively, full of activity and that they are different every day' (ibid).

Lili's reflections on what she feels it means to be an inclusive school and particularly the way in which the school has learned and developed, seem to re-enforce the views of Ms. Jo. In articulating the importance of developing responses to inclusion, as an individual school, she is questioning the assumption that practice perceived as 'good' can be transferred and replicated in other schools; it needs to be understood and then applied and adapted. She is also arguing that, even in Laos, teachers can be individuals who can respond differently from each other. Her reflections on the importance of my role also seem to suggest the significance of developing a dialogic approach to supporting school change.

My feelings on leaving the school were complex. I knew I would have to draw a line somewhere and this date seemed as good a time as any. It seemed to me that there had been a development not only in the practice in the school but more importantly in the way that the teachers and I understood each other. We had moved from a set of positions which were rather polarised, with me constructed as the outsider expert and they as the school which needed to improve, to a more equitable relationship where, as the Principal said we learned from each other and it was this recognition that allowed most of the significant developments to take place. I think in retrospect that it was only over time, where relationships had been developed, barriers gradually broken down that an understanding of each other had developed which allowed more explorative conversation and this in turn facilitated a collaborative

problem solving approach. The socio-political context was potentially problematic but because of the position that I was working from, as someone trusted by both the NGO, the Ministry and the local District Office, we were able to navigate slowly through the issues and challenges. This created a space whereby we could interpret and develop discourse at a local level, both mine and theirs.

Having now explored the case in further detail, in Chapter Eight I will be examining this in relation to the new typology with a view to seeing how far this is appropriate in making sense of this particular context.

## Chapter Eight: Using the case to highlight significant features of inclusive development in this context

The original typology on inclusive school development set out in Chapter Two was developed from literature drawn from western research and theory. The revised typology, set out in Chapter Five, attempts to frame inclusion in a less Eurocentric way. In this chapter I use the case study to explore how useful the revised typology is in highlighting significant features of inclusive development in this context. This analysis relates specifically to research question 1: *How can the development of inclusive schools in countries of the South be usefully theorised and understood?*

I begin by making the assumption that the typology is useful and apply it to examine what it reveals about the inclusivity of the particular school. There are two critical questions which need to be addressed in this examination: firstly, does the case study school match the revised typology? And, secondly, where it does not, what does that suggest about the value of this typology applied in this way to such contexts? Following this I will then identify some critical themes that have emerged and will then discuss these in relation to my three research questions.

### The Revised Typology

The revised typology is divided into six sections, which I use to structure the following discussion.

<b>A shared commitment amongst the school staff to the key aim of ensuring that the school is responding as effectively as it can to those children who live in the local community</b>
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|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-construction with teachers of the values underpinning this aim; forms of reflection and criticality which support this aim are co-constructed.</li><li>• This co-construction mediates the development of the concept of inclusion.</li></ul> |
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The case study seemed to indicate that there was a strong group commitment to a range of values which were broadly concerned with participation and achievement in schools, although the way in which the staff of the school conceptualised these values developed over time. This statement also needs to be contextualised by observing that it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between group commitment and group conventions. At the beginning of my research, most of the school staff were relatively experienced and had been working together for many years. As we have seen, during discussions there was often a sense of a group response, rather than an individual response. Indeed, this pattern can be seen throughout the case study, through: the incidents of the questionnaire, where many answers were similar if not the same; the teachers' behaviour during group discussions in the

early part of my work with them, when individuals often appeared reticent to speak out and would allow the Principal to speak for the group; and the flower incident during the visit to Bangkok where the teachers repeated the name of the same flower.

All of this relates to the issue of the individual versus the group, which is a key issue in Laos, as I argued in Chapter Five. These incidents and others in the case study can be interpreted as providing evidence that rather than demonstrating group commitment to a set of values, the staff were reflecting a complex set of social and political levers which made it difficult for them to express individuality. The question raised then is, what does it mean to be committed, when choices as to how to behave are socially constrained in this way? And so how useful is the notion of 'commitment'?

However, this is only part of the story. At the same time, it is also possible to argue that there *was* a strong commitment to a set of values which were centred on the local community. The fact that the teachers all lived in the village meant that they knew all the children and their families very closely. The comments from the parents demonstrated that they believed there was a close relationship between the school and the community and that they trusted the teachers to 'look after'<sup>4</sup> the children and teach them important values, associated with the socio-political conventions such as respect, manners, rules and regulations'. During her tour of the village with me, the Principal spoke in detail about the individual lives of a number of families and the way in which the challenges they faced created barriers to participation in school for many of the children. This re-enforced the impression that I had when I first visited and she spoke in a very detailed way about the school and specific children identified as having special needs without notes. The commitment as a group seemed to be centred round trying to improve the school by concentrating on the curriculum and the way teachers taught, as well as the school environment.

It also seems likely that the local policy context had a significant influence on the way in which the staff had been working together to make sense of the agendas which were introduced to them through both the Ministry and the NGO. An example of this is the reaction of the teachers to the introduction of group work and Mr Tan's reflection on the way that advisors had been trained. The teachers had been discussing the advice given to them by advisors and their statements that 'we know it's a good idea.... we don't really understand it properly' indicate this and also demonstrate the tension between the policy intention and the reality in practice. Mr Tan confirmed that it was difficult to assimilate and

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<sup>4</sup> Any direct quotes related to my research findings in this chapter are taken from the case study in Chapter Seven.

apply new ideas quickly and that this resulted in confusion for both teachers and advisors. Later, in Bangkok, he went on to discuss in more detail the way in which teachers had been trained in Laos and identified that the focus on academic attainment was not always appropriate for childrens' development. This seemed to reflect a tension within the EFA agenda as it was being implemented in a country such as Laos, whereby one arm of EFA was setting targets, and trying to raise levels of pupil achievement and enrolment in schools, whilst another arm was trying to increase the quality of teaching. The policy rhetoric of the Aid Agencies was arguing that these are the same thing, but Mr Tan was articulating the reality of the way he perceived the issue, which was that in striving for increased results the teachers were not paying attention to the quality of the childrens' experience. In this case he was arguing that they were not getting either result – quality in provision or rapid progress towards quantitative performance indicators.

As the case study progressed, there was increasing evidence that the teachers were engaging in a process of co-construction by engaging with the language of inclusion and different approaches to teaching and learning. We saw a shift from the mismatch of language and practice around the 5-point star, and the anxiety over the language of inclusive values, to the evidence of discussion between teachers in responding to questionnaires, and the embedding of activities of co-construction such as mutual observation, collaborative planning and problem-solving. This shift is well illustrated by Lili's comment 'we start thinking about how we can improve and ...we think and maybe we try something or we talk together and we plan something new'

**The development of a curriculum which was responsive to the particular needs and requirements of all members of the local community and which engaged critically with a range of teaching practices**

The development of the curriculum in the case study school was closely linked to the development of shared values. Much of the teachers' focus in discussions and conversations, as well in their action, was concerned with the curriculum and how it was taught. Their curriculum-focused activity shifted: starting with a textbook orientation, it moved to active use of the textbooks as a starting point for lesson planning, taking their knowledge of pupils into account.

There was a shift from the presence of pupils defined as having SEN, without support or adaptation, to active attempts to facilitate their participation, based on knowledge and understanding of individual pupils. To this extent the teachers were becoming more responsive. However, in terms of the



enactment of values such as participation and achievement, they were also not receiving any apparent additional support and the teachers did not appear to behave in a different way in order to ensure they were understanding and engaging in the lessons. The case of the student who had repeated a number of grades several times and eventually dropped out also seems to indicate that this was problematic for the teachers. The evidence at the end of the case study indicates that there was a significant change in the way the teachers were conceptualising an inclusive classroom. Their focus was on trying to find ways in which all the children could be engaged and motivated to fully participate in the lesson. In terms of their behaviour, the teachers were starting to move away from dependency on the text book and the blackboard towards more detailed lesson plans which incorporated a wider range of materials, activities and which also demanded that they, as teachers, began to engage with the children in a different way. One example, is the way in which children with SEN were actively supported through a range of strategies including materials, support from other children and individual attention from the teacher both one to one within a class-based group and in a group setting. These children were still being perceived as having SEN but they were being actively supported.

### **School Leaders and Teacher Agency**

- The Principal would demonstrate evidence of her commitment to the inclusive values set out in the first section of the typology.
- There should also have been evidence of her collaboration with the teachers in developing a sense of their own agency as knowledgeable local actors, with active and supportive collaboration with local advisors including Agencies.

The role of the Principal in the case study appears to have been instrumental in driving the development of the school. Lili presented throughout as a key factor which enabled the teachers to develop, through her belief in particular principles and also her growing understanding of the way in which teachers could be supported. She described the way in which she set out as a new Principal to demonstrate her commitment to a certain set of values by cleaning the toilets, establishing that she did not want to be seen as authoritarian or hierarchical. The statement that she wanted to demonstrate equality, commitment to team work and support for her teachers seems to resonate throughout the case study. She also identified that it was important for her that the school was trying to be the best it could. Lili's learning as a leader also seemed to have supported the creation of a space in which her teachers could begin to develop themselves professionally and as active agents of change; this is discussed in more detail under the research questions, below. I believe this was linked to the fact that as a leader she was aware that she did not necessarily have the solutions to problems and challenges. For example, although she believed that the teaching of Lao language needed to be improved, she was also aware that neither she nor the teachers knew exactly how to go about changing this. Even when they had made some developments following the visit to Bangkok, she said

'they still need your advice. They will still want advice from you'. This partly links to tensions within the theme of expectations which is discussed below, whereby there was a tendency on the part of both Lili and the teachers to believe that there were always better solutions and expert advice to be found from outside the school. The value of her agency in persuading me to provide examples and solutions is underemphasised in the typology. It is also evidence of an openness on her part to new ideas and different ways of approaching problems, which she encouraged the teachers to adopt as well.

### **A Critical Mass of Staff**

- Evidence of a critical mass of staff committed to responding to the needs of the local community.

The staff of River Lane appear to reflect this in that they presented as a closely knit group who shared a view of what the school was trying to achieve. At the beginning of my work with them, there tended to be group responses to initiatives. As the study progressed there was increasing evidence that the teachers felt more able to develop individual responses and the development of Ms Jo is indicative of this. However, the question of how far the different members of the group can be seen as active and independent agents is a complex one, reflecting the social and political culture of the local context and this is explored in more detail below.

### **Engagement with the Wider Community**

- Evidence of a variety of forms of engagement and interaction with the wider community serving to support the enactment of the values and vision of the school.

River Lane's connections and engagement with the wider community were a evident in a variety of ways throughout the case study. Ms Jo's comments in the last interview, when she says 'we also have the close support of the community or it is very hard to improve' reflect this. This comment echoes the statements from the parents earlier when there was a sense emerging of the school at the heart of the community, a central institution to the village, with very specific responsibilities for the growth and development of the children. My view was that, on one level, the school played a deep cultural role as guardian of key values such as respect, socially acceptable behaviour and responsibility for both one's own actions and for the community. This then is the key difference from the typology: It was very much a two way relationship. The village committee and the parents appeared to hold the school in high regard as an institution and the teachers were trusted not only with the care and education of the children but also in the enactment of these deeper values. This was typified by the comment from one of the parents that the children needed to 'also learn about wanting to be something in the future'. I felt that this was linked to a very deep rooted cultural belief in the importance of the country over the individual. Lao's history as a country decimated by civil war and

poverty had created a collective awareness of the importance of making the country 'better'; and in this context this statement from the parents is a form of advocating a collective work ethic. The children needed to be made aware of their responsibility to work hard and contribute to the development of the country. The community's link with the school was also a two way process, with the members of the community taking responsibility for looking after the grounds, keeping it secure, raising funds to make improvements and so on. These cultural aspects of the school-community relationship reflected the village structure within the socio-political context of Laos and, as such, are discussed in more detail below. The typology does not go far enough in naming the reciprocal relationship between the school and the community, in relation to values. The community relied on the school to uphold their values and this is not a feature of the typology.

### **Co-construction of Collaborative Action Research Initiatives**

- Support for inclusive schools can be enabled through the co-construction of collaborative action research initiatives, supported by local advisors / researchers / consultants, who need an appreciation and a commitment to building this with the tools and concepts that the local culture, including religious belief, makes available.

By the end of the case study, the Principal was talking of two-way communication and learning, and the relationship with myself as researcher / consultant is seen as an important part of this process of school development.

The development of the dialogic relationship between us over the preceding years had been a slow one but the gradual development of trust, understanding and sharing of reflections enabled both parties to change their view of themselves and each other. There were also clear links between this development and changes in the classroom supporting the argument that a collaborative action research approach was possible in Laos and that it could lead to the development of reflective practice and in particular changes in approaches to teaching and learning that were concerned with the participation and achievement of all the children. The evidence from the lessons observed during the last visits in 2009, would support this assertion.

The case study also demonstrates that, as a researcher consultant, I had developed a greater awareness of the importance of local culture and that this had supported my work with the school. I had over time become aware that there were tensions between western theories and my own experience of school development and the way in which the teachers in the school approached their professional work. I had tried to build this growing awareness into my own engagement with the school staff so that I tried to avoid giving responses which might lead them to believe I thought there

was a particular approach which was correct. I hoped that this might allow them to create and develop their own responses to challenges they identified.

My facilitation of the study visit was based on the hope that the experiences of a stimulating and creative curriculum in a somewhat similar cultural and religious context would interrupt the thinking of the Lao teachers allowing them to reflect in a more critical but also practical way on the challenges they faced in their own setting.

## **Typologies are Problematic**

The process of developing a collaborative action research approach and a dialogic, reflective relationship with me as researcher consultant was also, as with the other areas of the typology, problematic. The danger of a typology, when applied to a case such as this, is that it is not a straightforward process of matching the typology to certain features of a school or its development. A typology of this type is, at best, indicative of what may or may not be present in the case study. In this case, there are important areas where the typology was not equal to the task of judging what was happening in a culture which was very different from what I had previously experienced. In the next section, I explore some of the themes and tensions which emerged from the case study, using my original research questions as a framework for discussion.

## **Themes and tensions**

My research questions were originally constructed to support me in investigating the way in which inclusive school development in a country such as Lao or Thailand, could be usefully understood, from the perspective of a western consultant. By identifying the main themes and issues which arose through my engagement with the case study school in relation to the typology, I will discuss what I consider to be the main issues and learning points from this thesis. These are concerned with the questions of language, space for interpretation, the subtleties of understanding each other, and a developing awareness of the importance of contradictions, transgressions and negotiation, suggesting that as researchers, there are, perhaps, unavoidable limits to our interpretive power.

### **How can the development of inclusive schools in countries of the South be usefully theorised and understood?**

The previous section provides a substantial part of the answer to this question. As I have shown, the revised typology provides a helpful framework for understanding many of the key processes and characteristics of this development. However, in this section I want to focus on those areas where the typology does not do justice to the lived experience of the teachers and myself in the case study.

A number of themes emerged from the case study, which illustrate the way understanding inclusive development in a Lao context is problematic. Although I discuss these in separate sections, as with the research questions themselves, there is significant overlap between them.

#### Changing Language

One of the most important themes which emerged from the case study was the way in which ideas and concepts were understood and enacted. This changed over the course of the study, but it was a slow and tentative process, not smooth or always logical. It required a significant amount of exploration, and trying to understand different perspectives from both myself and the teachers.

The role of discourses was crucial. As I argued in Chapter Four, concepts which might appear to be relatively simple, could be interpreted in a number of different ways, not just from English into Lao, but also in different parts of the country. The way in which inclusion was conceptualised through the IE Project, drew on a rights-based discourse and also a discourse associated with deficit models of learning difficulty. These discourses would seem to have had a significant impact on the way the school staff were trying to make sense of inclusive language. For example, at the beginning of the study, inclusion was linked with the identification of children experiencing difficulties in the classroom many of whom also came from poor families. International research supports the association between poverty and disability (Braithwaite and Mont, 2008), as well as between poverty and low levels of attainment (Raffo et al., 2009). However, there was little evidence that the school staff were problematising these links and asking critical questions about how these children could be better supported in the classroom.

Discussion through IQSA and examples such as the questionnaire incident were, as I suggested in the case study, part of a series of disturbances and interruptions (Ainscow, 1999) which encouraged the staff to look at language through a different lens. This enabled the development of the dialogic reflective space in which the teachers and I could explore ideas and practice. This was, I believe, central to the way in which I began to understand the change processes taking place. The incident of

the discussion which emerged in relation to my sharing details of the other school in Bangkok was interesting evidence of the way in which a discourse was beginning to develop which enacted Kvale's concept of dialogue as inter-view (1996). I felt that the teachers' use of certain language in their questioning was indicative that they were considering the potential differences between themselves and another school. Developing the capacity for stepping outside one's own context and imagining other possibilities is a key part of the process of making sense of interruptions to thinking. The teachers use of questions including comparative language such as 'different', 'same', 'better', 'what is it like', supported this analysis.

Incidents throughout the case study continued to arise, whereby I found myself questioning the way in which ideas were being interpreted and inclusive values being enacted in ways I could not understand. The stigmatization of children by identifying them as being from a poor family or having special needs in front of the rest of the class raised questions, for example, about the conceptualisation of self-esteem. One interpretation would be to argue that this was something the teachers were not familiar with but that, as with other aspects of new theory, they needed to learn about it. However, viewing this incident through a different lens, one can question the extent to which a western educationalist can understand the cultural significance of such an incident. As Nguyen et al (2009) argue, in taking the former view, we are interpreting according to our own limited cultural experience. It is possible that a concept such as self esteem is understood in a completely different way in Laos. The influence of Buddhism as discussed in Chapter Five and the notions of self and no-self (Ando, 2009) may mean that not only might it not occur to a Lao teacher that the behaviour described above would have a negative impact on the way a pupil perceives himself, but it may also not occur to the student either. This example emphasises the importance of proceeding tentatively when trying to explore such incidents and attempting to use a series of different lenses to try and understand what may be underneath initial appearances.

### Expectation of themselves

I note above that the influence of other factors on the way in which the teachers were engaging with new ideas and concepts was significant. This is concerned with their own expectations of themselves and also and what they thought other people expected of them. This was in part affected by policy context and social structure and in turn is linked closely to the next section on motivation and agency.

In trying to understand the way in which the school may have been affected by what they felt expected to do and say, it is important to begin with the policy context. Laos' dependence on foreign Aid meant

that the IE Project was not only viewed as an educational project which could support education for disadvantaged children and the development of teachers. It was also the face of international policy agenda and an important source of income for the government (Phraxayavong, 2009). Although the staff were proud of their involvement in the project and saw it was an important way of supporting both themselves as professionals and the school itself, it seems likely that there was a significant pressure on them to say and do the 'right thing' and to make sure that the school and the Ministry were shown at their best. This would have been re-enforced by the hierarchical social structures and expected deference to social superiors and also to 'guests' which would have made it difficult to challenge or say anything other than what they thought they were expected to say. Therefore, when Lili described the school at the beginning of the case study, she was not only presenting what may or may not have been a true picture of the school. She was also presenting the audience, representing the NGO, Ministry, local advisors and the important Western guest, with what she knew the Ministry and NGO expected her to say. This was significant because understanding this, enabled the data presented in the case study to be interpreted in a particular way and partly helped to explain why I was being disturbed by what I was encountering.

An incident such as interviewing Ms Jo for the first time (see page 132) trying to understand what she thought about my research in the school, is a good example of the way in which her perception of my agenda shaped her responses. As she saw it, I was there to help the children learn Lao language better, perhaps based on the IQSA Project action plan; I was interested in special needs, discrimination and improving the teaching because the teachers were not very good. She was also anxious that if she had said anything 'wrong' that the interpreter told me she was sorry.

This incident also helped to make sense of the teacher's reactions to the questionnaire. It is possible that it was interpreted as a test of how much they had learned from their involvement in the IE Project. This in turn can be linked to the way in which in Laos, support, through the local pedagogical advisors, can also be interpreted as a form of monitoring, whereby schools are judged on their performance. In this sense, my role as a researcher trying to position himself as a critical friend is another form of monitoring.

The incident regarding group work (page 138) illustrates how the Aid agenda also impacted on teachers practice in the classroom and is also linked to the theme of language. The influence of the EFA targets and the World Bank Fast Track Initiative were behind the introduction of the Child Friendly Schools Programme into Laos. In order to demonstrate it was actively trying to meet its EFA targets

of improving literacy attainment and developing the quality of schools the Ministry of Education had signed up to an agreement which aimed to turn every school in Laos into a Child-Friendly School (UNICEF, 2011), securing significant funding from both UNICEF and the World Bank. As part of this initiative, advisors were being rapidly trained to introduce new teaching techniques which they would then support schools in applying.

My interpretation was that the introduction of theory, in this case around group work, was being managed without due consideration of the way in which it might impact on schools. There seemed to be an assumption on the part of the Aid Agencies that group work could be introduced without significant attention to an accompanying theoretical discourse or a variety of forms of support in schools, which would enable both teachers and advisors to explore how it might be interpreted and applied in practice. The significance of this is twofold. It was clearly confusing for both the teachers and the advisors, as noted in the case study. In the context of this research, it also served to create an additional barrier to myself and the school staff trying to understand each others' perspective. In their eyes, I suspected that they saw me at the time of this incident as another part of a very confusing process where things were being 'done to them' which they did not understand. It also seems likely that this re-enforced their view articulated by Ms Jo above, that they probably did not understand group work because Lao teachers were not very competent and needed to improve.

The longitudinal aspect of the research enabled the gradual development of trust and understanding, which perhaps went some way to facilitating the diminishment of some of these barriers, although I remained aware of the way in which the staff were constrained by how others viewed them through to the end of the case study. This is in part linked to their expectations of me which I discuss in relation to the second research question.

### Motivation and Agency

'The reason I can improve is, the key is the Principal and the teacher in the school. They must be very dedicated and active and dedicate themselves to the development of the school'. (Ms Jo, May 2009)

In comparison with the early interviews with Ms Jo, by 2009, she presents as a teacher who is motivated to do the best that she can and seems to have a strong sense of her own agency. As part of a strong staff team she feels empowered to make changes to both her approach to teaching and the way she organises and presents the curriculum. She works collaboratively as part of an active team who share her motivation and awareness of their own agency. Whilst these impressions are reasonable and reflect the way in which the teachers have developed, the significance from the



perspective of this study, is to try and understand the way in which motivation and agency developed, because it was not a clear process, nor easy for me to understand as a researcher. In a different cultural context it is not easy to develop a clear picture of people's motivations and what constrains them. Over time it may be possible to begin to develop a clearer picture of their selves and the way in which cultural factors impact on them, but this is gradual process. I discuss this further in relation to my third research question.

At the beginning of the study, the teachers appeared to be motivated in that they were engaged in processes which were aiming to develop the school. There was significant rhetoric present which reflected this, although, as I argue above, it is not possible to be clear how far this was influenced by competing socio-political factors. Much of the language of change that the teachers were engaging with seemed to be generated by the IQSA project. At the same time, there seems to be good evidence that the project had focused their attention on practical ways in which they could think about change processes. This may have supported them in becoming aware of the possibility for active agency. The fact that the IQSA project advocated action research processes centred on a schools individual development, and that this was advocated directly by the Ministry of Education, probably helped to break down a potential political barrier to the development of agency. Once they were engaged in a change process which they could begin to drive themselves, there was more likely to be increases in motivation.

However, the case study also demonstrated that this process was often confusing, both for the teachers and myself, as they struggled to change and develop the areas they had identified, and this continued into the second half of the case study. Ms Jo commented in May 2009.

'Training is not always enough; I don't have much experience ... Theory is not enough ... we might get theory from training but I have to see it in the school here or in the school visit to help me understand it.'

This seems to indicate that if one makes the assumption that teachers can be trained to change their practice and that new theory can be introduced to them simply through training workshop interventions, it is likely to create confusion and have limited impact. As with the Group Work incident described above, such assumptions are more likely to de-motivate teachers and undermine their sense of their own agency, confirming that they are not good enough or clever enough to understand what they are expected to do.

Key factors in supporting the developing sense of agency seem to have been those which enabled the staff to develop what Lili described as 'a better understanding of what we are doing'. These included the creation of conditions which allowed the school to set their own agenda, whether this was the identification of school improvement targets, or the open agenda they had when visiting Bangkok. I believe that this was particularly important in the Lao context in order to offset the influences of the socio-political factors and their previous experiences of training and support. They needed to believe that they were in control of their school development process. The ways in which I worked with them, the permission given to them by the Ministry of Education and the NGO, the developing confidence and understanding of Mr Tan, all contributed to the development of agency, but the essential ingredient needed to be their own motivation to develop and their trust in the freedom they had to explore their own agenda. This seems to reflect the findings of other researchers in Lao, such as Cincotta-Segi (2011), and in other countries of the South, such as Dyer et al (2004) whose work I discussed in Chapter Five.

The final visits to the school in 2009, suggested that there had been a significant shift and that what I characterise as confident and independent agency had developed. By this I mean that the teachers had moved to a point where they were driving the change process with support from local actors. I was, therefore, a much more superfluous figure and although our discussions were clearly still a useful aspect of their development process, they were much less reliant on my role to support them.

Theorising and understanding the development of an inclusive school in this context is clearly a complex process and whilst there are features which can be readily recognised from a western perspective, it is important to look more closely and carefully at the change processes which are taking place. It demands that the researcher consultant adopts a position of reticence to make assumptions and indicates that it is important to be tentative and cautious when trying to understand the factors which may affect school development. I will explore these factors in more detail in relation to the second research question.

### **What are the difficulties, challenges and learning experiences facing consultants in supporting such theorising and development?**

In my discussion of the first research question, I covered some important issues which could also have been included in the following discussion. When I consider the difficulties and challenges I faced during my research, the issues concerning language and the way in which different concepts were

understood and trying to make sense of a different culture were significant. Therefore, it is inevitable that they will feature to some degree in the following themes.

#### Expectations of me

In the same way in which the school staff felt constrained by the expectations of others, I also felt constrained by what I thought were their expectations of me. This concerned the way in which they constructed my role and what they believed my agenda was, which in turn impacted on the way in which they behaved. The significance of this relates to a number of different issues, all of which I have already identified in relation to the first research question. The first of these is the cultural context where I was constructed as a guest and this meant that in Lao culture I had to be welcomed; it would have been considered rude to have disagreed with me in a discussion, for example. This issue was re-enforced by the hierarchical aspect of Lao society, where I was initially representing the Ministry and the Aid Agency which would again make it difficult for the school to resist any ideas or suggestions I might have made. Thirdly, I was also a westerner and a so-called education expert. This meant that I was positioned by the teachers as someone with more experience of education and more importantly, someone who had been brought into Laos by the Ministry and Aid Agency to improve education. These were significant barriers for a consultant primarily interested in developing critical reflective practice and collaborative action research processes, both of which depend on developing open and honest dialogue.

My experience during the first Phase of the research had made me aware of these barriers to some extent. Because of this, I approached the case study research very tentatively and this led directly to the next theme, which is very closely connected to expectations.

#### The fear of cultural imposition

This refers to an aspect of my tentative approach to working with the teachers from late 2006 onwards, which was based on trying to develop an exploratory dialogue with them. The factors I described in the previous section had made me very sensitive to any hint that I might be imposing ideas of how they should improve onto them. This was partly based on my reaction against the way in which I perceived previous training had tried to introduce western theory into the school; this had in my view failed and therefore it seemed important not to repeat the same mistakes. In addition, the more aware I became of the complexity of local culture, the more I wanted to avoid the suggestion of imperialist importation of ideas. This anxiety was, then, both politically constructed and pragmatic. I wanted any changes that developed in the school to be owned by the teachers, because if this was

the case it was more likely to be sustainable. Therefore, as I worked with them, I was trying to make sure I did not actively try to solve their problems for them, nor could I allow them to sustain any expectation that I could be seen in this way.

The early stages of the case study were characterised by a series of incidents which reflect this fear. For example, I was concerned over whether the suggestion of the study visit could be problematic in that the teachers might perceive this as my directing them to teach in the same way as the Thai teachers. I also struggled to understand the way in which Ms Jo seemed to be constructing my role, where my fears about being constructed as someone who would provide practical solutions, seemed to be confirmed. At this point in the case study, one of my responses to this anxiety was developing a probing questioning style, trying to elicit how I was being perceived. As I explained, this may well have contributed to the problematic nature of the situation, as I perhaps encouraged the teachers to think that I was looking for a particular 'correct' response.

The conversation with Lili (see page 133) also illustrated the way in which I was questioning the use of language, as I focused on her use of the word 'motivational'. I became concerned that simply by asking about an area of practice, the teachers could take this to mean that I was identifying it could be improved.

My fear became less obvious as the research developed, and the teachers and I came to understand each other better. However, it was still present after the study visit to Bangkok, when Lili was asking me for specific advice:

'maybe you have to more advise the teachers because they still need your advice. They will still want advice from you, not just you come to ask them what did you do? What did you change? I think we all still need to learn from you.'

Only in the visits in 2009 when the teachers had moved on to a stage of confident and independent agency described above, did I feel aware that I was not anxious about saying too much.

The gradual development of relationships between us over time - based on deeper understanding and the evolution of conversations constructed as dialogic reflective space - was fundamental to the dissolution of the fear factor and is discussed in more detail below.

### Developing Deeper Relationships Over Time

In this section I discuss in more detail the way in I tried to navigate these tensions. I pay particular attention to the dialogic reflective space - a term I developed to describe the way in which I believed the conversations were developing in response to the pressures identified above.

I was able to dedicate almost three years to the case study research from 2006 onwards. This allowed me the time to work through some of the tensions describe above. Sometimes I was successful in this, as when the teachers began to discuss more openly in the light of their experience on the visit; at other times I was less successful, as when I became too probing in my questioning. I will now use these examples as a method for discussing the way in which the dialogic reflective space began to develop.

I envisaged the distance between myself and the teachers in terms of our lack of understanding of each other and misconceptions regarding our agendas and perspectives, as a space. It seemed to me that we sat opposite each other, in an interview, or in a circle if it was a group discussion, and there was a space between us. My concern regarding the way in which I was perceived and the wish not to lead the teachers in a particular direction was preventing us from getting to know one another more closely. At the same time, the teachers' preconceptions of what they thought I wanted to hear and the pressure on them to behave in what they felt would be appropriate ways was having a similar effect on them.

My agenda was concerned with encouraging the teachers to speak openly and honestly, critically and reflectively about their professional selves and their practices, and, in doing so, begin to open up the possibility of exploring what inclusive school development might look like in their classrooms. An analysis of the case study reveals that there are certain points where this appeared to happen. The first is the incident mentioned in the previous paragraph, where the teachers asked questions about the other case study school. The reason they were able to ask spontaneously was partly due to the fact that I had shared some information with them whereas previously our conversations were concerned with me asking them questions and trying to encourage them to talk about their practice. At other times in our conversations I reacted against something that was said which made me feel concerned and I needed to be resolute or refuse to engage in a particular way. An example of this is the reaction to the expectation that I might be in the school to improve the teaching of Lao language. This could not be ignored: I could not allow the teachers to have such an unrealistic view of my role.

Therefore, gradually I was doing two things which helped to move both myself and the teachers away from the edges of the space and tentatively towards the middle. Both of these involved me revealing something of myself, which perhaps helped to de-construct any assumptions they had about me. Firstly I was beginning to tell them something of my work starting with the other case study school but gradually including my work as a teacher in 'I Begin to Share More of My Own Experience with the Teachers'. Secondly I was actively correcting certain misconceptions and these helped to create disturbances and interruptions in the way I was being constructed. I believe that this had a particular impact in that it allowed the teachers to share more of themselves with me which improved a little every time we met. The incident where I shared more of my own experience, is described in the case study as 'perilously close to an instructional discourse', such was my anxiety at the way in which I had developed my approach. At the same time the teachers were telling me that following my use of my own experience in discussion with them, 'they say they can understand you better now – they can see what you are saying.' The important point was that the teachers had requested information from me, asking me to clarify and to use examples from my own teaching to help them understand. In this sense, this supports the views of Lili and Ms Jo at the end of the case study, where they describe the importance of seeing things in practice to help them make sense of theory. My drawing diagrams and pictures of my own classroom was a similar process. However, it also seems likely that this could not have happened any earlier in the process than it did; had I started with this kind of approach it would have been likely to send the message that I wanted them to copy what I had done as a teacher. At this point they were beginning to think about how different ideas might be applied to their context.

I argue that my approach moved through a number of different stages, building on the developing understanding between us, so that by the time the teachers went to visit Bangkok, they were familiar with my agenda. This is shown in the following comment:

'We know – you don't want us to copy what they are doing; but we're interested to see what they do and how they do things. We want to see their classrooms and how they teach' (case study, page 142)

By this point I trusted that the teachers were likely to make sense of the school visit on their own terms. I hoped that they would not try to replicate what they saw but that it would prove a stimulus for realistic discussions. The critical reflective space had a very specific function during the visit in that it allowed the teachers to share with each other what they thought they had learned. My role here was different from before in that I trying to facilitate critical discussion and to encourage the open sharing of experience which we had begun between us in Laos. The final stage in the development of my role and the construction of the space, seen in 'What was my Role' in the case study, was the way in which I began to work much more closely with the teachers on de-constructing lessons. I used the same approach of critical reflection and critical questioning but it was directed at their aims for the lesson

using this to try and identify specific activities which they could use to achieve their aims. Again, this could not have been achieved earlier in the case study because there were too many tensions which needed to be navigated. The developments in the later stages of the case study were built on the trust and understanding which had developed over the preceding years.

The methodology employed to explore the first two questions was closely linked to the role of the consultant. In the final section of this chapter, I reflect on the learning which emerged in regard to this and also provide a reflexive analysis of the limitations and successes of my methodological approach.

### **How can these issues be investigated?**

As with the previous two questions, there is significant overlap of critical issues. The fundamental methodological challenge when investigating inclusive schools in a culture other than one's own is centred on the problem of understanding and evaluating something when you are not party to the cultural framework which underpins the research setting. This means that as a researcher you are consistently faced with situations where you do not understand what is happening. Although research accounts of studies in overseas settings all emphasise this point (e.g. Vulliamy et al., 1990, Crossley and Vulliamy, 1998, Alexander, 2001a) it is only possible to completely appreciate its significance when experiencing it first hand. I explore in the following section important themes which emerged in relation to this research question.

#### Time

The research developed into a longitudinal study over a number of years and this was one of the factors which allowed me to develop my methodological approach. Reflecting back over the period of time I worked with the case study school, I am not sure that it would have been possible to develop the level of understanding in a shorter period of time. It might be argued that had I been able to completely immerse myself in the setting (Ely et al., 1991, p91) for a period of time I would have developed some of the cultural understandings, but this does not allow for the significance of development over time, as it applied to both myself and the teachers. One of the benefits of the longitudinal approach was that it gave the teachers time to explore ideas in practice and then share the outcomes with me after a certain interval of time. Action research processes often require significant periods of time in order to allow professionals to explore fully the area they are focused on (Reason and Baradbury, 2001, p12). In this case, it is interesting to reflect on what a significant amount of time might constitute. For example, at the point I began working with the school, they had been in the IE Project for nine years, since 1996 and the staff then worked with me for a further five years. The process of change seems to have been a slow one, at least until the last year from 2008-9. This seems likely to have been because the wide range of factors which I have identified in this

chapter created certain tensions in the processes of understanding and development required for the teachers to change their practice. From my perspective, the collaborative action research processes as described in the case study required that I had significant amounts of time for school visits and in between school visits. This was partly to do with the fact that I needed to be able to create space for myself away from the field in which to reflect on the experiences I had and also to share my developing analysis with my supervisor. I was then able to return to the field having made further sense of my ongoing data collection and the research setting.

The question of how far collaborative action research processes are useful to researchers engaged in similar studies is an important aspect of the revised typology. In the first section of this chapter I referred to evidence emerging from the case study which indicated that key aspects of this research process had been present in my work with the school and that there had clearly been some positive outcomes in terms of educational change. However, it should also be clear, that there are some limitations to this research approach when one is a cultural outsider and that these should be taken into account when contemplating collaborative action research in such settings.

#### Awareness of contradictions

It seems inevitable that in any inter-cultural study there will be constraints on mutual understanding. Following my experiences in Phase One of my research, in Phase Two I tried to remain as aware as possible of contradictions. These were between my assumptions about what was or was not inclusive and also between what I thought the teachers were telling me and what I subsequently understood. For example, in 'I visit the School For the First Time', I describe how the visits to the school initially led me to wonder why it was considered the best school in the project, since the practice did not appear particularly inclusive to me:

'I was surprised by the quality of the teaching in the school. I had expected there to be clearer evidence of child centred approaches to learning, perhaps children sitting in groups, evidence of activities taking place, less use of the blackboard. I was also surprised by the approach to special educational needs; it seemed to be based on a deficit model whereas I had expected there to be more of an emphasis on a social model.'

Awareness of the apparent contradictions between the ways in which we were interpreting inclusion gave me starting points to explore later. However, these contradictions also caused disturbance in the view of the school I was trying to construct. As a consultant who is trying to support the development of inclusion, based on assumptions of shared understanding, these contradictions then become very disorientating. It perhaps needs to be emphasised that in the context of ethnographic fieldwork, this disorientation is also emotionally charged. Coffey's work on the relationship between the self and fieldwork (1999) was of significance to me, as I reflected on these processes and tried to make sense of what had occurred. I had developed a strongly held set of beliefs regarding what I believed



inclusion to represent. These formed a belief system which I felt schools and policy makers should try to aspire to, beliefs based on social justice and equality of opportunity. I thought I was prepared to accept that others may have views different than my own and that culture may have a significant impact on the way in which ideas were interpreted in different settings. However, I was not prepared for the extent of my disorientation. Allowing one's self to let go of pre-conceptions and to accept that one will be re-constructed by the experience of fieldwork (ibid, p158) is a fundamental element of a research experience such as mine. Coffey argues that this emotional process is part of a well executed research project (ibid, p159) and stresses the fundamental importance of, and thus entering into, close social relationships with participants in the field (ibid). In my case, the development of the interaction and dialogue was the only way in which I could begin to move on from the awareness of contradictions to begin the next stage of my methodological learning process which concerned Negotiation and Dialogue.

#### Negotiation and Dialogue

As the case study developed, so did my relationships in the field as I 'navigated pathways and understandings through the research' (ibid). As a researcher I was maturing and allowing myself to accept contradiction and disorientation and to trust myself to find a way through the confusion through a process of negotiation and dialogue. As has been shown, this was not a smooth process and at times I contributed to making the teachers feel more confused about what I wanted from them and what I thought that they meant. In order to be able to negotiate ideas and discuss the meaning of language I was very reliant on interpreters and although I developed a strategy outlined in Chapter Six, to use a variety of people in this role and also to use Mai as a sounding board when I became confused, there were still episodes which were problematic. One example was in 'Moving into Collaborative Case Study Research' where I wrote: 'the teachers had been confused by some of the things the interpreter had said and that they thought he may not have understood me properly'. On other occasion I collected data in interviews which I was unable to use in the case study because the interpreter had made little sense to me during the data collection. There were also occasions when I felt that the interpreter was leading the participant or even speaking for them, substituting their own knowledge for the respondent, in the expectation that this was what I wanted to hear. For example, I asked some children why they liked coming to school; the interpreter asked the question and this was followed by the child replying yes (I was able to understand very rudimentary Lao by this time). The interpreter then gave me a long answer explaining what she presumably thought the child ought to be enjoying in school. I excluded this data from my case study, on the grounds that it was unreliable but it serves to illustrate that the use of interpreters is not always easy. I found that the more I worked with particular interpreters the more accustomed they would become to what I wanted them to do and this helped them to develop an understanding of the importance of reliable data. The issue was complicated by the realisation towards the end of the case study that although the teachers spoke Lao

language, spoken by 60% of Lao residents, their dialect was different from what might be viewed as Classical Lao, the language used in official texts and in Parliament. This had meant that they had found it very difficult to understand some of my interpreters, particularly those who had been educated overseas and had perhaps developed a western accent which they still used when speaking Lao. Unfortunately, these were also the interpreters who spoke the best English and could understand what I wanted to say; however this was not always communicated clearly enough to the teachers. The conclusion I draw from this, is that it was a good idea to use a variety of interpreters, but that the most important thing was to check and re-check understanding and the quality of the data I thought I was getting. If I did not understand what the teachers were talking about when we had discussions, I needed to return with a different interpreter and re-visit the discussion because it was likely that there had been interpretation difficulties.

Where we were understanding the interpretation, as can be seen over the series of conversations and incidents, dialogue was developing as were relationships. The way in which my life became interwoven with the setting (Coffey, 1998, p108) was of fundamental importance here because it was also rituals such as eating together, bringing food to share, talking about families and life at lunch and so on, that the space between us as researcher and researched was reduced. Over time, when we work closely together we also become friends with those we are researching which also makes leaving difficult and, as with entering the field, Coffey notes that this leads to a series of emotions such as guilt that we are 'no longer interested in the people whose lives I shared; confused about what my future relationships with them should and could be' (ibid). My professional work in Laos ended as my case study research drew to a close and therefore at the time of writing I have not been back to visit the school, although I very much want to. However, the Principal and Ms Jo did work closely with me to develop case studies for the book I wrote about the IE Project in Laos for Save the Children Norway (Grimes, 2009) and this has been significant for me, in that I feel that it was a recognition of what by the end had developed into a two way process between us (Kvale, 1996). They also came to the closing conference which marked the end of the IE Project in Laos after 16 years and with Mr Tan presented an overview of the way in which they felt they had developed as an inclusive school.

In the final chapter I draw together what I learned. The question I focus on is not so much whether Western theories are useful, but *how* they are used. The typology is only helpful if the user is clear about the limits on how to apply it. If a cultural outsider was to apply it without looking in detail at what is happening, then a partial picture of the school will emerge; it will be shallow and without significant meaning because the local contextual factors which exist in every community will affect the way in

which meanings are made and communicated. Therefore any interpretation of inclusion needs to be based on a serious understanding of the way the actors in any given setting see their world.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I used the case study to explore how useful the revised typology was in highlighting significant features of inclusive development in this context; identified ways in which this was useful but also explored the problematic aspects; concluded that the typology is only helpful if the user is clear about the limits on how to apply it. In the next chapter I draw together the main conclusions from my research and argue the question is not so much whether Western theories concerning inclusive school development are useful, but *how* they are used to understand schools in different contexts.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

This thesis set out to examine the ways in which schools in non-western settings in Lao PDR and Thailand were attempting to develop more inclusive practices. I argued that theories about the way in which schools do this are mostly drawn from research in western English speaking countries. In this conclusion I discuss the main findings which have emerged from my research.

### **The Usefulness of Typologies**

The evidence generated during this study suggests that the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 is a reasonable starting point, even when considering inclusion in schools in a different context. My data suggests that the notion of a school culture based on a set of shared values as advocated by Dyson et al (2002), Corbett (2001) and Kugelmass (2004) for example, was present to some extent in the schools I was working with, to a greater or lesser degree. Schools were engaging with significant inclusive language such as achievement, participation, and enjoyment and in some cases trying to explore how this might be enacted in the classroom in order to engage more students, as in the cases of Market, the Grade 1 teacher in Leaf Lane and the teachers in River Lane. The importance of leadership identified in the original typology was also significant to some degree in these settings, particularly in the case of Ana although Lili also presented with many of the features associated with this; both had clear ideas of what they thought was important in the development of the school and their enactment of their role reflected the importance of distributed leadership as advocated by Dyson et al (2002). Collaborative problem solving (Hanko, 1995, 1999) was also evident in the way in which teachers were trying to work together. In Market there was evidence of collaboration in planning and teaching, whilst this aspect of practice was seen to develop through the IQSA project in Laos. The relationship with the local community was seen as significant in both Bangkok and Laos although this was enacted in different ways with the relationship between school and community in Laos presenting as a two way process deeply embedded in the social structures of the village, whereas in Bangkok it related more closely to the political structure of the school as a Foundation with a board of management partly comprising community members. Policy in both countries was seen as an important factor; in Laos the policy of the Ministry and the NGO acted as a significant lever for change (Ainscow, 2005), whilst in Thailand the way in which policy allowed Ana certain freedoms as Principal of a partly private school, allowed her to develop the school more inclusively.

However I was aware of the limited applicability of the first typology in this context. What the revised typology offered was a greater sensitivity to different cultural contexts. It allowed me to theorise the additional factors which affect the way in which a concept such as inclusion might be understood in a different setting and to identify some of the factors which could impact on this. For example, the work of Stephens (2007) was helpful in supporting the development of a framework for identifying constraints whilst engagement with theory from historians and sociologists writing about Lao culture enabled a deeper understanding of socio-political factors to evolve (e.g. Stuart-Fox 1997, 2002, 2006) as well as spiritual / religious contexts (Cooper, 1998; Ando, 2009).

In both phases of the study, collaborative action research was found to be a useful approach to working with schools, because it allowed me as a consultant researcher to engage with teachers in a way which allowed professional dialogue to develop. Where this was most successful it supported the development of discussion which could then explore the meanings of language in more detail; this in turn supported the development of reflection on practice (Schon, 1983) and there are good examples of the way in which classroom practice developed as a result such as the Leaf Lane Grade 1 teacher. To this extent the approach to working with schools which I had drawn from the Reaching out to all Learners Project discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, was useful to me. It gave me a framework which I could use as a starting point for working with schools and which allowed the teachers to learn from each other as well as from me.

## **The Limited Use of Typologies**

The closer scrutiny and reflection made possible by the case study, however, strongly suggests that there are serious limits on the value of these typologies. Whilst they may offer a lens for examining inclusive school development, they do not 'adequately' account for variable factors rooted in the local context. Knowledge is constructed at local levels in very different ways; the example from incident 5 in Chapter Four demonstrated how the concept of 'enjoyment' in school was interpreted in a way which could only be understood through a very close engagement with the specific cultural and social context of that area of Laos. It would not have happened in districts in the middle of Laos or in the north, where frog catching was not a common activity. It also related to the way in which the role of children in the social life of the village was constructed in this particular setting, which may well have been different, even from a village a few miles down the road. A typology cannot capture the significance of such variability; it can only allow for the fact such local factors will exist. Every school and community has this kind of particular local sense-making going on, and the development of inclusion is inseparable from such understanding. If the frog in this incident is a metaphor for such local sense-making, then it could be said that *'there is a frog in every school'*. In the case of my

revised typology, I do not think that the literature which informed its development, envisaged the influence of culture on such a micro level. Stephens work (2007) was more concerned with macro level factors such as political systems and religion. If a typology such as mine was to be useful it would need to recognise that micro level factors are of greater significance at the local level than macro level. In order to truly understand the way in which meaning is constructed in individual schools and communities, then, in the end there is only the local level.

Therefore, I believe the question is not so much whether such typologies are useful, as *how can they be usefully used?* A typology can only be helpful if users are clear about the limits on how to apply it. In the case of inclusive schools, this is of great significance, because it questions the extent to which schools can be supported to develop in ways which theory assumes. In Chapter 8, I identified the challenges I experienced as a researcher-consultant when trying to support the inclusive development of the case study school. These concerned expectations; cultural imposition; relationships and time; contradictions and dialogue I would like to pay closer attention to their significance in the concluding section of this thesis.

## **Key Themes**

### **Expectations and Cultural Imposition**

Understanding the way in which schools develop more inclusive practice in different cultural settings, requires an appreciation of the extent to which individuals position themselves and position others. The significance of inclusion as a global agenda advocated by aid agencies and NGOs, means that any initiative designed to support inclusion is likely to be interpreted by school based participants as driven by politically powerful forces, in the case of my research this was evident from much of the data collected in Laos. I was positioned by the teachers in the case study school as somebody who was there to provide solutions and improve their teaching; to enable them to meet what they perceived as the requirements of their policy context. In one sense it could be argued that the original typology implies this to some extent – that there are certain features which inclusive schools are likely to have and that schools can work towards their development. The Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2002), which provided a framework for the original development of the IQSA project in Laos, set out a series of aspirational indicators of inclusive development; the IE Project in Laos set out the features of inclusive schooling in the form of the 5 point star (Holdsworth, 2003). Whilst these can be seen as active levers for change, in the schools I researched in this thesis, they have also been shown to have a different kind of impact. Schools can become places where existing knowledge and skills become devalued and teachers see themselves as needing to be improved; this was demonstrated by Ms Jo in Chapter 7 when she told me that the teachers in the school were not very good at teaching and

needed to improve. Understanding the significance of this was a crucial process for me as I came to realise that there was an expectation on me to solve problems, improve teaching and guide the teachers. There is also a significant issue concerning the value of western theory regarding inclusive schools when it is introduced into new settings. The incident of group work, described in the case study is a good example of Western theory being introduced in a very ineffective way without attention to the way in which it is being understood and also the significance of the way in which it needs to be constructed as part of a complex approach to classroom pedagogy. However, it is also the case that the imposition of such ideas can also be viewed as a form of imperialism (Nguyen et al., 2009) which do not take account of existing values, skills or knowledge. It seems unlikely that such initiatives will result in sustainable changes if they do not take account of the ways in which they are interpreted or acquire meaning in a local context.

### **Relationships and Time**

The significance of the above for the consultant researcher relates in part to the way in which teachers construct themselves as professionals and the way in which this can be understood and supported by outsiders. I believe that the single most important factor in my developing understanding of the case study school was the longitudinal aspect of my research approach and the way in which I continued to engage with them over a period of years. Theories on the development of inclusive schools, as presented in this thesis, do not acknowledge the importance of this kind of approach. Kugelmass's study of one school (2004) over a number of years in the United States was useful to me in forming the first typology. Her research emphasised the importance of developing close relationships with participants, in order to understand the deep culture of the school. In order to facilitate inclusive development the consultant needs to understand as clearly as he can, the way in which the teachers view themselves. Development of practice depends upon teachers having a sense of agency and also the motivation to make changes. In the case study, it took a number of years for me to be able to understand the ways in which the teachers viewed me and the ways in which they understood their professional role. This was a slow process which depended as much on the development of trust and creating safe spaces to get to know each other, as it did on the discussion of ideas concerning inclusion. Indeed these two processes were dialogically related, with one feeding the other. There was a developing realisation on my part that it was not just a question of understanding the way in which the teachers felt that they needed my support or guidance, but that they, for a number of reasons, believed they needed support. They were actively looking for assistance and over time they were able to relate to me sufficiently to see that I could be useful to them. In this sense, I was becoming linked into the local system in a way which made sense to the teachers and this supported the change process which occurred.

### **Contradictions and Dialogue**

As I became more immersed in the setting (Sherman and Webb, 1988, Ely et al, 1991) I was increasingly aware of the contradictions between assumptions and realities. Spending prolonged periods in the field, working alongside the teachers, observing, talking to them and exploring our different understandings, enabled me to focus in on their everyday lives (Howes, 2008) and begin to understand the ways in which they interpreted their world. The development of the dialogic reflective space supported the safe exploration of difference, the contradictions between my assumptions about the ways in which schools became inclusive and the re-conceptualisation of this through the experiences of the teachers. The example in the case study of the attempts to introduce group work, indicates that the teachers (and also the advisors) needed to experience a variety of processes which took account of their development at an individual level. This goes beyond the arguments of writers such as Miles who recognise the importance of processes which enable the sharing of experiences and ideas (2009, p24). In the case study school, group work came to be understood through a combination of factors including a longitudinal collaborative approach and the development of dialogic space as a vehicle for exploring different perspectives. This supported the teachers to explore and adapt ideas both through their exposure to practice in another setting, to trying out different elements of practice in their own classrooms. It would be easy to come to the conclusion that group work was introduced successfully in the case study school because of the impact of seeing it in practice in Bangkok. If this was the case the evidence from the incidents 'The Impact' and 'My Role' in Chapter Seven, should show that the teachers began using group work successfully on their return from Bangkok. The reality is that it took several more months of experiments and discussions, whereby together with me they de-constructed different elements of practice in order to construct teaching approaches with which they felt comfortable. At this point both the teachers and I were very actively engaged in our collaboration together; however this was only possible because we had been able to understand each other over time, through the exploration of the differences in the way in which we understood inclusive practice.

### **Implications for Policy in Supporting the Development of Inclusive Schools**

My final reflections on the learning which has emerged from this thesis concern the implications for policy. In doing so, I wish to return initially to the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2002), a document which inspired me and provided an initial framework for much of my thinking. The authors



argue that we need to be aware of the 'potential for school cultures to support or undermine developments in teaching and learning' (ibid, p8). Much of the research presented in Chapter Two indicated that schools need to engage with the values embedded within their own institutional cultures in order to support the enactment of inclusive policies in practice (e.g. Corbett, 2001; Kugelmass, 2004). Whilst my findings would support these arguments to a certain extent, it also needs to be acknowledged that the use of the word inclusion is so value laden there can be a tendency to invest inclusive processes with judgements about what is considered right or wrong. The implication of a document such as the Index for Inclusion is that an examination of practice can be dominated by assumptions about 'correctness'; e.g. one type of practice is inclusive, another is exclusionary. In the context of field work, the researcher can be overwhelmed with expectations of what should or should not be allowed to be defined as inclusive and anything which does not quite fit the preconception is discounted. This position does not allow the consultant, the researcher or the teacher to explore the possibilities of re-constructing meanings and developing practice; it is more likely to close down dialogue than to allow the possibility of evolving reflective and collaborative discussion.

Global policies such as Education for All (UNESCO 1990) and the World Bank Fast Track Initiative (2008) attempt to influence governments in countries such as Laos to implement inclusive initiatives designed to improve the quality of education for all children. Whilst these intentions may be based on aspirational inclusive values that I personally identify with and subscribe to, the findings of my thesis raise serious problems for such policies. I argue that policy is often indiscriminate and insensitive to the way in which people interpret and make sense of meanings; it doesn't take into account teachers as people and individuals and therefore it also doesn't allow for the way in which teacher motivation and agency develop. The question all of us engaged in working with schools must ask ourselves is, then, how can policy allow for the creation of space at local levels for meanings to be constructed?

The evidence from my research is suggestive that certain approaches are more likely to be successful in supporting this process than others. In Laos, it seems questionable whether short training courses designed to change attitudes and pedagogy, such as those employed by the IE Project (Phase 1), or the group work training (Case Study incident) were very successful in changing classroom practice. However, longer term processes, such as the IQSA Project, described in Chapter Four, with interventions at several different levels, rooted in local realities can have an impact. The project also advocated the use of collaborative action research processes which have also been shown to have a positive impact on teacher agency in other settings (e.g. Ainscow, 1999; Howes et al, 2009). The way in which I was able to work closely with the case study school over a prolonged period of time using collaborative action research in combination with dialogic reflective approaches to meaning making,

resulted in teachers developing their own sense of agency and making changes in their practice which they had ownership of. Policy initiatives concerning the development of more inclusive practices in schools, are more likely to be successful if they actively aim to create space for all those who support teachers to listen to them and to work with them to change practice appropriately.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix One: Timeline of Research activities**



Phase 1



Phase 2

Lao IE Project July 2004 – January 2007

Fr. Agnel School, Mumbai, India  
briefly referred to in thesis, Chapter 4

River Lane  
visit to  
Hope  
School  
Thailand  
June 2008

River Lane primary school, Lao PDR Case Study February 2005 – May 2009

Market School Thailand November  
2003 – March 2005

Hope School Thailand November 2006 – March 2009 – host  
to River Lane's study visit



2003

2004

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

## **Appendix Two: Example of Reaching Out to All Learners (ROAL) Project Materials**

### **PRINCIPLES OF PROJECT**

(drawn from original Unesco Pack materials)

Learning is more likely to occur in classrooms and staff rooms where there is:

- ✓ Active involvement of learners
- ✓ Negotiation of individual and group learning objectives
- ✓ Opportunities for demonstration, practice and feedback
- ✓ Continuous evaluation of learning
- ✓ Support for learners, teachers and leaders

#### **Reducing barriers to participation**

**Start with existing knowledge**  
*Both staff and pupils*

**Plan with all members of the class/team in mind**  
*Personalise rather than individualise*

**See differences as opportunities for learning**  
*Rather than problems to be fixed*

**Scrutinise processes that may lead to exclusion**  
*They represent starting points for increasing participation*

**Use available resources to support learning**  
*Particularly the pupils themselves*

**Seek to develop a 'language of practice'**  
*Without this it is difficult to bring about improvements*

**Create conditions that bring about risk taking**  
*Leading to a moving school culture!*

## Reaching Out to All Learners (ROAL)

Carrying out inquiry as a process of school improvement and the development of inclusive cultures, policies and practice

**KEY CONCEPTS** (drawn from experiences worldwide in Unesco project work)

- ✓ **Inquiry** (involving teachers, support staff, pupils, parents and governors as researchers)
- ✓ **Reflection** (developing 'good habits' in thinking on and in practice)
- ✓ **Collaboration** (using materials such as the Index and its data and in being creative with these)
- ✓ **Critical challenge/mutual critique** (using learning partnerships to take thinking forward, using support and challenge in balanced ways)
- ✓ **Capacity to solve problems** (creating a culture that meets challenges by seeking solutions together)

## Underpinning format of Unesco Pack material sourced activities

### **AIM**

To consider/reflect on/examine/explore/generate ideas.....

### **ACTIVITIES**

Use stimulation material/**start with people's own experiences**

**Individual** reflection/note writing/ideas

**Share** ideas in twos, threes, fours

**Group sharing** with rest of participants – envoys, reporters, jigsaws, whole group feedback, poster tours etc

**Summarise/evaluate** outcomes and consider implications for practice in context

### **EVALUATION ISSUES**

Personal/individual learning

Classroom/wider school implications

## Appendix Three: Example of Edited Field Notes

Field Notes 29<sup>th</sup> June 2008, including edits, and additional notes

This evening I arrived at the hotel the Lao group.

I had already asked them if they would meet to have a conversation before going to bed, to prepare for the next day's school visits. I wanted to see what their 'frame of mind' was, what were they expecting, had they remembered our conversations previously, where I had tried to explain that I wasn't bringing them to the school to learn and copy, to take back ideas to 'improve' the school.

I started by explaining to the 2 advisors from the District Office who were accompanying the group, that although I was happy for them to come along and that I hoped it was useful for them, for my purposes – for this research – I was mostly interested in the experiences and views / perspectives of the teachers. This didn't mean that I wouldn't be asking them what they thought, rather that in these group conversations I wanted to hear what the teachers thought.

I thought that was clear enough, but as has been my experience on many occasions, the next few minutes dispelled any confidence I might have had that I had made clear point that was understood and would be acted upon.

I told the group that the first question I wanted to ask them was 'why do you think you are here? You have had a nice time, a good holiday, but now we are starting our school visit. Why do you think you are here?'

Mr T the District Advisor then immediately answered – we are here to learn, to visit the school and see what useful ideas we can take back to Lao with us to improve the school – (he later also suggested that I should make suggestions to the teachers about ways in which they could improve their school)

I should not have been surprised by this – after all, in the context of the hierarchy, which is so much a part of Lao society, he probably felt it was his duty to speak first – it was expected of him. In a way it was also interesting that he had a set of expectations which were essentially the opposite of what I wanted for the group – it was useful to see what would happen next. Would the Laos teachers clarify the situation?

I also wondered if this was going to be the pattern of our group conversations – if so I would have to develop some strategies for de-hierarchising the discussions.

The Principle spoke next – as you would expect, hierarchy again, but she also has a tendency (supported by the group) to speak for the teachers – interestingly she was followed by the senior teacher –

They both had a clearer idea of what was expected – they would observe the way the teachers taught, their techniques, the way they worked with the children

I emphasised that I didn't want them to think they were here to learn from the Thai teachers. I wanted them to join the lessons and join in, talk to children, work with children, talk to the teachers, get involved as much as they could; whilst they were doing this, I wanted them to see

What they noticed – what is interesting to you, afterwards what do you remember. I am interested in what you think?

You may find that there are things you see that you like, that may be useful to you, that is something you think you may be able to apply in your own classroom; there may also be things that you don't like, are not impressed with and feel that you wouldn't want to do.

I am interested in what you think and how your thoughts make you think further about your own teaching.

From the conversation, I have realised that there are at least 2 issues that are going to be fascinating, which I hadn't really thought about 1 – what impact will Phil and the filming have on the Lao teachers – I had thought about it in relation to the Thai teachers, and thought that probably they wouldn't be too worried, would be used to it, though this may be completely wrong,

But I realised tonight that it's quite an ordeal, being interviewed and filmed at the same time and might affect them in a number of different ways make them even less likely to speak perhaps, nervous, more aware of what they think they are 'supposed' to say ....

I am going to really have to work hard on keeping them at their ease and finding different ways to talk to them and interview them – on the hoof perhaps as we walk across the playground, in more informal settings, as well as sitting down in front of the camera.

The other interesting issue is to observe the 'way' in which they approach being in the classroom with the children and Thai teachers – how are they going to handle it, I feel that Lao Translator and Mr T want me to give them clearer directions on how to be in the classroom, what they should do, the way to behave, what to look for.

I have been explicit – as far as I can – I don't want you sitting at the back of the class taking notes – if you can join in it will be much more interesting for you, you won't get bored and you'll find out much more.

Field Notes 30<sup>th</sup> June



We arrived at school in 2 taxis and M's car at 8.25 am. Interesting to observe the Lao groups reaction – they immediately commented on the environment – very beautiful – and the modern buildings; it all felt very new, which it is.

Dr A, (Thai Translator) was already here. The group made themselves at home in and around the school office whilst I went with M to speak to the Thai teachers; they had already started assembly, outside in the play ground. They were singing songs and also were given the task of tidying the outside area – removing any rubbish or loose vegetation from the weekend. This led up to the national anthem and the weekly flag raising ceremony. It was interesting to see that one of the boys in Grade 5, with special needs, was given the task of pulling up the flag. I looked across to the office area, to see that the entire Lao group had emerged to join in with singing and applauding the anthem and flag.

I then spoke briefly to the Thai teachers; I tried to explain that this visit from the teachers in Lao was different to the normal study visits they receive. It is usually the case that visiting teachers are at Thai School to be trained or observe and learn new teaching methods. I wanted to stress that this was different – I didn't want them to see the Lao teachers as less experienced, with less expertise and training. Their school as a good one but different – I was interested in the Lao teachers being given the opportunity to and being actively encourage to, join in with the lessons, participate, M used the phrase – team teach. It would not be useful for the Lao teachers to sit at the back of the classroom making notes – they needed to be involved, to ask questions, discuss. I am interested in the conversations and discussions you have together.

M spoke to the Lao group, very briefly introducing the school and its history. She asked if anyone had any questions and Mr T (District Advisor) asked a lot – it made me realise I was going to have a clear strategy to get the advisors out of the way, otherwise the teachers would never speak.

She then took everyone on a tour of the school - this took quite a long time as she took the opportunity to explain a lot of features of the school in great detail, e.g. asking one of the KG teachers to bring a child into the sensory room to demonstrate some of the activities that might take place there;

On our way we met a newish boy, who is in G1 / 2 but looks older – possibly 10 years old. He is obese and, apparently, has William's Syndrome. A Thai TV company are making a documentary about him, over the course of a year and when he saw F's camera he became very distressed and started crying. Apparently he doesn't like the camera filming him all the time – I guess it shows how intrusive these things can be in the lives of young people.

I had forgotten my digital recorder and needed to go back to the hotel to retrieve it; I had imagined that whilst we were away the Lao teachers would have finished their tour and joined the classes they wanted to work with for the rest of the day. When we came back, they were still in the meeting room,

apparently it was near dinner time and they thought it wasn't worth joining classes for 30 minutes and decided to wait until after lunch.

I was a bit disappointed to see this, but also not surprised – Lao and Thai love to sit and chat and in this case, the advisors were asking a lot of questions and M was going into a lot of detail to answer them. We had 20 minutes until lunch. I told the advisors that I needed to talk to the teachers and hear their views about the morning, so the advisors had 20 minutes to go and relax before lunch; M asked if I wanted her to leave too and I said yes! Maybe a bit brusque, but they understood why I was doing it) I checked afterwards with them).

I asked the Lao teachers what their first impressions of the school were and was pleased that they all spoke (see transcript) and had were quite happy to share their thoughts. I am positive that I would not have got so much from them had the advisors still been there. It seems good evidence of the hierarchy theory – you let the higher status people speak first before you say anything – or you don't say anything at all.

During my absence the Lao group had organised which classes they would visit and after lunch they took themselves off to the classrooms. I took the opportunity to have a conversation with the advisors – I was interested to see what their thoughts were. There are 3, 1 from the Catholic relief Service, an NGO working in 2 districts in Lao supporting the development of IE, in a disability context, but through community and school involvement. Interestingly he realised that he had in fact visited , M's previous school. The other 2 are from the District office. Mr T, I know from the Self Evaluation Project and he is a good man – involved in the IE project and with CRS, interested and always engaged and thoughtful. The other lady introduced herself as working with statistics on school performance but she didn't have any knowledge of IE or the relevant projects. I need to try and find out why she is here – is it just a nice holiday? Or am I missing something. She has said nothing of great interest in any of the conversations today – although she did say that she was struck by the lovely environment of the school.

The other two waxed lyrically about the school – obviously very impressed (see transcript) and would have spoken for a long time had I let them; they are obviously very inspired already; It raises a question that I have struggled with all along – have I done the right thing here? Not just in bringing the teachers but also in allowing the advisors to come too?

No matter what I say there will be the assumption that much of what they see is the right way to work – they are already identifying that it is child centred, engaging, children are enjoying themselves and participating. Interestingly, later on in the meeting at the end of the day, the Principal P made a startling comparison between the two schools. She said that Hope has an atmosphere that is full of enjoyment; in Laos the school atmosphere is much more serious:

*'The students really seemed to enjoy their learning – the atmosphere was one of enjoyment – they laugh, they talk, they share, they interact joyfully*

*In Laos the atmosphere is more serious – the students have to concentrate on the task.'* P

*Conversation with District Advisor Mr T 1<sup>st</sup> July (following these remarks from P)*

*I agree with P – in Lao the teachers like the children to learn academically, but the activities that they use are not always appropriate for child development or child involvement. Their focus is more academic, but the results of pupil achievement are not as high as in Hope even though they are trying to be more academic. This is interesting – as he was talking I was beginning to articulate in my own head that there exists a similar tension with EFA that there is within the Standards / Inclusion agenda in UK; one arm of EFA is setting targets, trying to push raising pupil achievement / participation data in schools; another arm is trying to increase the quality of teaching – the conventional wisdom / rhetoric of EFA / UNESCO is arguing that these are the same thing, but Mr T is articulating the reality – that in striving for increased results Teachers are not paying attention to quality of experience – in this case he argues that they are not getting either result – quality or achievement rates.*

*Why is this? It's because the teachers have been trained in Laos in a particular way, but they have no opportunity to experience anything different – they only know one way of teaching; also teachers do not think about how to improve their teaching – they do not see how other schools organise their teaching differently, so they don't think about themselves in a different way seems to echo a key point about why this Thailand visit is an important activity – it is interrupting the Lao teachers thinking in a very tangible way – they are 'seeing' 'hearing' 'experiencing' teaching and learning in a completely different environment – it is making them stand back from their own practice.*

*I think the teachers will want to make more materials and resources to help improve their teaching but they don't have the budget. To improve teaching there are many factors.*

*They will go back to the school tomorrow – we know that Lao is a poor country, there is no money or resources; they will look at the school and think 'ok, what are we going to do next?' What would you like to see them trying to do next? Maybe they can choose to try and develop different teaching methods and activities- to get the children to enjoy lessons – not just to be too serious; make them relaxed and also in the lessons they have to think about using more materials. Also they can work together and organise themselves to establish learning corners in the classrooms.*

*If they do this, do you think they will also have to think about how they organise the furniture in the classroom – the tables and chairs? In their school, they will have to think about this – how to re-organise the furniture.*

*But also I would like the KG teachers who are not part of the main school and therefore not part of this visit to attend more specialist training; at the moment they use similar teaching methods to the older classes which are not appropriate.*

Why am I so worried? I agree with them – this is what I think ... I suppose its because I am concerned that *I am introducing new pedagogical ideas* – a foreign influence and I am just not comfortable with this; yet I want to see change, I want to see an increase in enjoyment, participation, engagement, activity etc in Lao classrooms. *Is it me? Am I the one introducing these ideas – or am I just exposing them to new ideas – or is the same thing?* 30 minutes after writing this sentence I have ‘told’ the story of this interview to P, Dr A and F – as I speak the words aloud, it seems clearer to me that the key process that is occurring here is this ‘stepping to one side, stepping back from their experience of teaching in Lao and looking at teaching in a different way; the key question then, it seems to me, is how they then relate what they see to their own context. If this was the case - at the heart of what I think is going on here is professional reflective practice.

I keep saying that both sets of teachers can learn from each other, but the truth, which I seem to want to avoid, is that probably the Lao teachers have so much more to learn from their Thai colleagues at Hope than the other way round. I guess, that the at the end of the day, the really important point for me is to keep stressing that this is not about the whole sale copying of ideas from one school to another. The way in which this visit gets the Lao teachers to reflect on their school, their teaching, their context.

As I went around the school in the afternoon it was refreshing to see that the Lao teachers had taken my instructions to heart and were really engaged in the classrooms; they were talking to adults, sitting with children, helping children with their work – it felt very encouraging; I had been worried that maybe they wouldn’t be able to understand everything said in Thai (don’t worry they said, we watch Thai TV!) and that possibly Thai children wouldn’t understand them. This didn’t seem to be the case and both my translators P and Dr A confirmed this.

We came together as a group at the end of the day and I asked the Lao teachers NOT the advisors to share their thoughts on the afternoon, although I did allow the advisors to stay and listen.

*Feedback from the Principal of Lao School – observed G5 & 6*

We saw a wide variety of teaching methods and resources – the teaching was very interesting; The lesson was on Thai language. The teachers used child centred techniques; the students were engaged and enjoyed the activities. They were learning new vocabulary.

We found it interesting that the teachers use a lot of talk between themselves and the students; they had small, short exercises / activities and there was an emphasis on practising skills in the lesson – this mean that students are free from pressure and can explore the language *I think what she was getting at here was that there was no formal teacher assessment going on – the teacher was not trying to grade the students in the lesson.*

The teacher told the students that this lesson was an opportunity for them to work and learn together. The next lesson she said, would be different – the students would have to study independently. We thought this was interesting because the teacher was making it clear to the students that they needed different kinds of learning experience in order to learn successfully.

There were different learning corners in the classroom – areas for different activities or curriculum subjects that the students can go to - maybe when they have finished their work.

*The students really seemed to enjoy their learning – the atmosphere was one of enjoyment – they laugh, they talk, they share, they interact joyfully*

*In Laos the atmosphere is more serious – the students have to concentrate on the task.*

*After she said this, I interjected and said that this was a very interesting question – why is this? I wanted the teachers to think about this over the course of the school visits because we would return to discussing this question at a later stage.*

Feedback from Ms P, Lao G4 teacher – observed G3 & 4, Thai Language class – reading (observed P)

There was very interesting teaching and learning going on. We saw a lot of different teaching materials; the class was well disciplined, engaged and child centred – the teacher was more like an advisor *I think she meant facilitator* than a teacher.

The teacher had prepared enough flash cards for each student; every student had a chance to pick a flash card – they all had a chance to read the word on their card aloud. Most of the students can do this – then they made sentences out of the words. Some children with special needs did slightly different activities – they worked on the Thai alphabet instead.

The teacher selected 5 flashcards and put them on the whiteboard – he let the students write sentences using the 5 words. The teacher gave them a time limit for this activity – he said to us that there should be a maximum of 10 minutes for writing – more than this is not useful.

*Then they sang some songs*

*We noticed that the teacher kept changing activities to keep the students engaged and to sustain their interest.*

*Also the teacher did not focus on assessment or grading the students' performance in the lesson. He let them finish their work and then collected it in. He will look at it later after school and assess who was successful in the activities. He told us that the next day he will NOT announce who was successful but rather, he will talk to the children individually – let them see their mistakes and correct them themselves.*

*Feedback from Ms S , Lao G1 teacher, observing G1/2*

*The teacher explained to the students about addition, 10 – 100. Instead of giving 1 question to the students the teacher was asking them to construct number bonds for numbers to 100.*

*The teacher was able to design a lesson to cover a wide range of abilities; the more able worked on higher numbers, less able worked on lower numbers. The teacher also helped the less able 1-1. The more able students also helped the less able. Those finished early were allowed to colour code their answers.*

*The teacher collected the work – she does not assess the students or grade them in class – this is done at the end of the week when she has seen all their work.*

*The children with special needs cannot do all the work that the other children did, but they still did similar activities that were easier.*

*If the children needed to wander around, the teacher let them do it because they need to ...*

*Feedback from Ms C G3 teacher, observing G3/4 (Min's lesson)*

*The lesson started outside the classroom – the students were doing a relaxing activity to de-stress them; they sang a song about flowers, did movements with their fingers, hands, muscles and then relaxation - breathing, closing eyes. The teacher asked them to think about flowers and plants in their back yards at home.*

*Each student was asked to name a flower or plant they had thought of.*

*We joined in as students and named a Lao flower.*

*I later spoke to P about this lesson – he gave some interesting insights into the participation of the Lao teachers. At the beginning after singing a song about flowers, when he was asking the children to*

*relax, breath meditate and to think of flowers and plants in their garden, the Lao teachers participated as students, joined in and were asked to name a flower / plant; P asked all the children to think of a variety of plants / flowers but to name only one. He said that the Lao teachers all named the same plant, 'Champa', 1 after another. This made the children think that maybe there was only 1 kind of plant in Lao and they asked P if this was the case. P said that it made him wonder about Lao teachers and their training – the way that Lao teachers are taught – is it just 'one line' everyone doing the same thing with no individuality For me, it also raises the question of how they perceive their role as teachers and participants in this lesson – not thinking of 'modelling' for the students, demonstrating a variety of Lao plants for the students.*

*Then they moved into the classroom for maths – they were working on + and – together on 3 – 4 digit numbers. The teacher distributed worksheets with maths problems.*

*Next they worked on Lao language ....*

*At this point I stopped the feedback and said let's look at his in more detail – dig a little deeper into the maths lesson. I repeated what had already been said about the maths lesson and opened the discussion up to the rest of the group. 'What more would you like to know about this maths lesson? What other questions would you like to ask your colleagues?' I had not planned to do this, but it seemed like a good idea – I wanted to look at the maths lesson in more practical detail but I didn't want to be the one directing the questioning or identifying the practice – it felt that the group should be able to ask searching questions – if they didn't that would tell me a lot about how much they were learning and the kinds of questions they themselves were asking as they visited the classrooms.*

*Several people wanted to ask about the details of the worksheet – what was in it, what kinds of activities the children did, how they were asked to approach them, how the children with special needs were planned for. This attention to detail and the way in which several people wanted to know more encouraged me to feel that there was worthwhile engagement taking place – clearly some at least of the teachers are actively analysing what they see and hear in the classrooms.*

*The worksheet allowed the children to decide if they wanted to concentrate on addition, subtraction or both. The children with special needs did some drawing activity, colouring Another teacher who had also seen the lesson interjected to explain that actually all the children were engaged in maths + and - ; some of the children were working on a maths game where they could colour squares, but the process still involved them deciding which operation to chose and in accurately counting on or back. Ms Jo, who was reporting back is the least experienced of the Lao teachers and the quality of her feedback may reflect more on her shyness / lack of experience than on a lack of understanding.*

*At this point we had to break for lunch.*

## Appendix Four: Example of an Interview Transcript

16 October 2007

Interview with Ms P, Lao School

(Ms L is via a translator) ?? denotes that the transcriber could not understand clearly what was said

PETER: Thank you for taking us to visit those houses and families. It was very very useful. What I'd like to do if it's ok is just talk to you about those families and some of the questions it raises for me. The first house we went to was the twins house, if I'm correct, these were in Grade 3 or Grade 4 last year? Yes, Grade 3.

MS L: Yes Grade 3 last year.

PETER: Mr C and Mr Chan Th. Ch Th is still in school?

MS L: She is not quite sure

PETER: Well one of them! We think Ch Th is in school and C has dropped out. So could you tell me about that family, what you know about them and what has happened.

MS L: That family is sorry that is nearby her home.

PETER: Near the Principal's house? She lives near that family?

MS L: No, the grandmother is nearby, but her house is in different parts of it. It's sort of nearby. They have quite difficulty, very poor family, meaning for food is very hard for them. The grandfather is always drunk, he just walk about, when he didn't drunk, he just sit right down, didn't know himself. The grandma is look very thin and she have shakes all the time, when she walks she has to use the stick all the time. For the mother it's, before she get married she is fine person, not mental sickness, but after that she got the tired sickness, like the mental sickness, like the, what you call it, it's like the poo and she take to her mouth...

PETER: She's eating her own excrement?

MS L: Yes, and after she got the mental sickness, the father is ??? His father is, after he is divorce, he get nearby, after he got nearby he passed away, he died. The ???

PETER: The mother, looks like she's dead?

MS L Yes, she doesn't know anything.

PETER: She doesn't know anything?



MS L: Yes, she doesn't know anything. Even she could not have, if you put a thing into her mouth she will eat it. For the kid they can come to school because there is people around, they support them, maybe I should give example, the grandmother is in front of the house, sometime before the school opening, give the kid for some money, or give ??? to try and get some money to get from the land to sell. She have experience of from the great grandfather to the boy, when he was in Grade 1, the study is not quite good, but it's like learning slowly, learning difficulty, but when they got into Grade 2 it's quite the same, but she has after the kid, but if ok, the teacher will take you to Grade 3, but when they are in Grade 3. In Grade 3 they have to repeat grade because the kid is often absent from school and when they start, when they in the classroom the at the end, for example if they have the exam, in the classroom they have 30 student and so the reason why that the kid, one kid is had to drop out because people around the house because at one time the mother because of this mental sickness, she is just ????? form the house, people say she might die, so she need somebody to see or to take care. That's why one boy had to drop out. But this, the teacher will see that after for a while because rightly now they rely on him to take care of the mother, to take care of the family, but they see in a while if thing get better or if he could come to school again. They will take him to Grade 4, that boy to Grade 4, but they have to see.

PETER: Right.

MS L: For this issue, she also have talk with, with the ??? how to support, how to help the family but the some time is they have some small money to support the family but not very much and she also asks that they do the IE when they come, but nothing happen, she also ask if you could find another way to help him or his family in ???

PETER: How much money do you think a family like that needs to live on?

MS L: She didn't know what they want to buy or what they want but it's just like when she asks it depends.

PETER: The question is, the interesting, the important question is, what would it take to get that boy back in school? It's clearly a very sad story.

MS L: To help him, to help that boy to come to school, needs look to buy rice for the family, and have thing for him to come to school. The way to say that well that she know that they are different poor family, like maybe for example for the twin boy he is very poor because he didn't get the parent the main person who can help him in the family, he got the grandmother like that the grandfather like that and the Mum and maybe it's quite hard for him. And even the thing to support him is more than another family because another family they got four or five children over, maybe support for little things, maybe one time, but for this big thing because he didn't got the main person in the family.

PETER: Do you think it's the responsibility of the community to be sorting these things out?

MS L: Yes, it is the committee is but some time they couldn't ??? to help them but sometime what they can do is if sometime if the village got some extra help from the them, it depend on the occasion, sometime help from not take money from them.

PETER: So they help them by not taking money from them? That must help a lot!

MS L: Yes. The way of helping this family, maybe if you could support maybe \$50 for another family maybe they got parent but they didn't got the land to work on or they didn't got, it's poor family, it's support for \$50 for the poor family but for the family over here.

PETER: The first family, the twins.

MS L: Yes, maybe a little bit more, and another family.

PETER: I talked to Save the Children about this last time, and I said "what's the Government position on children who drop out because they're so poor?", What do you think the government are saying about this? What are the government saying should happen?

MS L: They got the policy, but it doesn't help for the local...

PETER: What is the policy?

MS L: What she heard from TV, that Mr ???? the Prime Minister I'm not sure, he's responsible for the policy ??? He always says, there is money but for her she never get anything from that, but maybe they bring the money to another area.

PETER: What the Ministry of Education are saying is that when children are dropping out because they're poor, it's the responsibility of the community to sort it out and get them back into school.

PETER: In this case, clearly it's not working very well. I just wonder what you think. Why is the community unable to solve this problem? Maybe it's too hard for the community. I wonder what you think?

MS L: Sometime she talk with them because even the head of the village over there, yeah, they help and then she say "oh can you please help me with this family as they got problem and they drop out", they accommodate, they go and see and for this kind of thing it's very hard for them to come to school. If they need some kind of stationery book for study, the school can support them but for school uniforms, school can provide a little but not a lot you have to think for the whole year, the main is for food to eat.

PETER: Because what you're saying when we went round the four families. The fourth family, we didn't see the house but you said they also a very poor family with lots of children, and the children only came for Grade 1. They seem to have dropped out, so there are other families as well who have a lot of economic problems. I'm just thinking that this is a very poor family, but the fourth family, we didn't see the house but you told us about it, is also a very poor family that have economic problems. Is that correct?

MS L: Yes.

PETER: It feels what you're saying to me is, the way things are at the moment, it's too hard for the community to support those families.

MS L: For the ??? like protection or ??? they do very well but for education it's, they didn't do it well.

PETER: What needs to happen to make that better then?

MS L: To like, to work with other comedy, it's tired, nothing happen. If they got the training on the work for education it sounds like they didn't get the focal person for education, just the people for, many people like, it's not my world, it's just like that.

PETER: So you're saying the community is not taking responsibility for liaising with school properly.

MS L: They got the person to work to responsible for the education but it's like they go to see them if they come but if they didn't he doesn't come. Maybe he or she doesn't have good technique or management to be responsible for thing like this, it's just like ok you responsible for education, I don't know what about education, in the village it just creates people to be responsible.

PETER: If we leave that there about the community, I just want to change the question a little bit. If we talk about the 12 year old girl who dropped out and we spoke to the mother. The girl with special needs who dropped out and we spoke to the mother. Could you tell me about that child, family, situation, what happened.

MS L: The family she said that the Principal used to teach her mother from Grade 1 to Grade 5, and it sound like that family it got slow learner, even the mother, also the sister who 15 she also slow learner. For the girl that drop out when she first come studying she got a little grade because in first year she got very little thing, she learn only a small thing that's why she got a little grade in Grade 1. After Grade 1, school take her to Grade 2 and also Grade 3, but Grade 3 for two year, and now this year is the first year. And from school the Principal also ask the teacher who got experience of teaching her from Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3 also she say that "oh she quite have learning difficultly, learning slowly". Even right now she is in Grade 3 they were like very simple work from Grade 1 she could not get, but from this, the Principal meet parent that "what are you going to do with

her?" the family said that even she learn at the school she could not study could not didn't know anything, so they wanted her to stop learning.

PETER: The parents?

MS L: The parent. From the school they also propose that if they can help her to finish in Grade 5 but ask the parent also she didn't improve anything she did not study, also they ask the question what did she think, even take her to continue in Grade 5, but she's not like the quality of the grade, what do you think about that?

PETER: We're just waiting for the Principal to come back, she's just left the room. What do you think about that?

MS L: Because of the teacher in Grade 5 she say that even you want her to come to Grade 5, even she didn't know anything but we also can help her, but in order she cannot do anything but if you think that you want her to complete the grade this is fine they can help that. This is from the teacher from the school, from the Principal, they can help that.

PETER: Yes, because the question I was going to ask you was, what is your feeling about children with special needs repeating grades?

MS L: For that, if they didn't take them to upgrade to the next grade she also thought it conflict with their policy that they got we know that they got policy for the special needs, that even if they cannot.

PETER: That they must not repeat a grade?

MS L: They must not repeat a grade, but from this, when teacher before they would take a student to go to another grade they also ask the student that, ask student idea that if you want to go to the next one or not, and sometimes they say no, they don't, because they can't study that's why they don't want. Sometimes it's like that for the family, why you take my kid to study the same year, but for the kid it's generally, they not feel confident to go to the next grade, they want to study the same, that's why, it conflict.

## Appendix Five: Examples of Questionnaires from the Case Study School

### 1. Teacher name: Grade: 3 A Questionnaire

#### 1. What do you think "Inclusive Education" means?

The inclusive education means all children learn together without discrimination whether they are ethnic group, girls, boys, and children from poor family

- All children learn and participate in many school activity together

#### 2. How does your school try to include all children?

In order to get all school into school we have to talk with the parents and school community and encourage them and explain to them so that they should understand what age their kids should be sent to school and in which grade.

- We have collected students' profile, data of school age children so that we will try to encourage them to come to school and study with their friends

#### 3. Who are the children in your school that you find it challenging or difficulty to include?

Children who we find it difficult to include in IE school are Children with learning difficulty and poor children

#### 4. Why do you think it is?

We find it difficult is because the poor children tend to miss the class. This is because their families are poor and have not enough money to support these children to come to school. These children tend to drop out in the middle of their school semester.

- One more group that teachers find it difficult to teach is the children with learning difficulty. The teachers have to pay special attention to them all the times, and use variety of activities to help them to learn.

#### 5. Do you think your children enjoy going to school?

All children are enjoy going to school

#### 6. How do you know?

We know the children enjoy going to school. As we can see when they are in class they pay attention to their study, they like to answer the question when teacher asked. All students do the activities that given by the teacher, they are all smile and happy when they participate in sport activity and so on.

7. Why do you think they enjoy it?

The reasons why they are happy include: they have more chance to meet with many friends and teacher are welcome all students to school.

- The teacher always organised group playing, group study and group game playing. As we know all children quite like these type of activities.

8. Are there any children who do not enjoy going to school?

Children who are not enjoy coming to school include students who cannot do well on their study and children from poor family

9. How do you know?

We know it because, when the children in school they don't seem to be happy, not active and don't pay attention to their study at all.

- These children are always worrying about their teacher will get angry at them, they cannot do well in class. They also often miss the class and do not seem to pay attention when teacher asked them to do activity together with their friends.

10. Why do you think this is?

This is because these children have received limited attention from their family and they think different from the other kids

- One more thing teacher also does not pay enough attention to these students. Moreover when they study the teacher do not follow up whether these children have done well or not. Therefore, these children do not enjoy coming to school

Think about your teaching .....

11. What aspects of your teaching are most successful?

Some aspects that make my teaching successful include:

- Good relationship with people, good interpersonal, always happy, be fair and praise to the success
- Come to school on time, follow the teaching method and steps when teaching, using variety of teaching techniques, delivery clear lesson and using child centre teaching method and organise group work activity.
- Prepare clear and good lesson planning
- Good classroom organise, table and chairs should be in order

- Detail of lesson planning should be clear and appropriate to the students
- Using variety of teaching and learning material through the lesson

12. Why do you think these aspects (components) of your teaching are successful?

I think they are success, because teachers have used many teaching techniques. Teachers talk nicely with the students and understand the need of all children. As a teacher s/he must develop the lesson plan and uses the children centre method. The teacher should organise group activity so that students can help each other to work

13. What aspects of your teaching would you like to improve?

- Need to monitor and provide support to children more
- Apart from teaching activity we would like to improve the IE teaching technique
- Need to monitor and provide support to children who face with different problems.

14. Why is this?

- This is because I feel that I am not doing well enough in teaching IE class
- We are not doing enough monitoring and follow up support to the children's needs

15. How do teachers in this school support each other to improve their teaching?

In this school teachers are helping each other as follow:

- School director visit teacher in each class
- School director also observe the teaching hours of each teacher.
- School director helps the teachers in preparation of lesson plan and to improve better teaching activity
- Each teacher also observes each other teaching so they that we have chance to share the good lesson with each other.

## **2. Teacher name: School director Questionnaire**

1. What do you think "Inclusive Education" means?

The inclusive education means all children learn together without discrimination whether they are ethnic group, girls, boys, and children from poor family. All children learn and participate in many school activities together. All children are cooperated well and be equal.

2. How does your school try to include all children?

In order to get all school into school we talked with the parents and school community and encourage them and explain to them so that they understand of the education work.

- We, teachers, work together with the local authority to collect students' profile, data of school age children then we encourage the parents to send their kids to school according to children's school age. For the children who do not want to come to school teachers have to work closely with them so that we can make they come to school and study with their friends

3. Who are the children in your school that you find it challenging or difficulty to include?  
Children who we find it difficult to include in IE school are Children with learning difficulty and poor children
4. Why do you think it is?  
We find it difficult is because the poor children tend to miss the class because they have to help their parents earn their living since their families are poor and have not enough money to support them to come to school. These children tend to drop out in the middle of their school semester.
  - One more group that teachers find it difficult to teach is the children who have learning difficulty. The teachers have to pay special attention to them all the times, and use variety of teaching activities to help them to learn.
5. Do you think your children enjoy going to school?  
All children are enjoy going to school
6. How do you know?  
I think they enjoy coming to school is because I observe their behaviour. They seems to be happy, interest to do the activity, they like singing, playing sport, attend the class every day, and enjoy playing games.
7. Why do you think they enjoy it?  
We think that the children enjoy their studying because they pay attention to their learning, they enjoy playing and learning with their friends at the same time. They all help each other.
8. Are there any children who do not enjoy going to school?  
Children who are not enjoy coming to school include children with mental disability who cannot do well on their study and children from poor family
9. How do you know?  
It can be seen when the children in school they don't seem to be happy, not active to give comment or answering the questions.
  - These children are always worry, they tend to miss the class and do not seem to pay attention when teacher asked them to do activities.
10. Why do you think this is?
  - We think that these children are lack of motivation to study and they don't feel happy to study because they faced some problem in their family, do not have enough food to eat and their family cannot afford to buy the learning material for them.
  - Parents do not pat attention to their own children, speak swear word and even hitting them
  - Teachers do not use /apply appropriate teaching activity and do not use teaching aids
  - Teachers do not use variety teaching activities and do not create happy learning atmosphere

Think about your teaching .....



11. What aspects of your teaching are most successful?

Some aspects that make my teaching successful include:

- Relationship with people, teacher has good interpersonal, always happy (smile to people), being fair and praise to the success of the children
- Teaching – Teacher come to school on time, apply appropriate teaching method and follows teaching steps, using variety of teaching techniques, delivery clear and correct lesson, uses child centre teaching method and organise group activity.
- Planning – Teacher prepares clear and good lesson plan, good classroom organise, table and chairs should be in order and appropriate for the group learning activities.
- Detail of lesson planning should be clear and appropriate to the students using variety of teaching and learning material in the lesson

12. Why do you think these aspects (components) of your teaching are successful?

- Teacher has good attitude and talks nicely with the student and treat them equally so that student will feel more confident
- If teacher has prepared the lesson well and uses teaching resources these will help students to faster. Teaching by allowing students to work in group is one way that they can help each other. Applying many teaching method will increase interesting of the lesson.
- Teacher teach a good lesson and provide clear explanation will help students understand and learn better

13. What aspects of your teaching would you like to improve?

We would like to improve the teachers on using new teaching method, learn more how to organise the good group learning activity, and improve the lesson preparation.

14. Why is this?

- This is because most of the teachers still new and have no experience on the new teaching method. They still not able to delivery or provide clear and correct explanation yet
- On the other hand teachers will learn more and increase their experience in their teaching
- The teachers still not able to prepare a good lesson so that they do not deliver the good lesson. Therefore the teachers need to improve this area.

15. How do teachers in this school support each other to improve their teaching?

Follow is how the we help each other to improve our teaching:

- School director check the lesson plan, observe actual teaching of each teacher. Then we share what have been found and what should be improve and how do we improve
- Each teacher also observes each other teaching in some important lesson, so we have chance to share the good lesson with each other.
- We organise the discussion between teachers, if some don't understand we will help one another to explain

**3. Teacher name: Grade: 4 Questionnaire**

1. What do you think "Inclusive Education" means?  
The inclusive education is quite important since all children have to study together without discrimination whether they are poor, disabled, ethnic group.
2. How does your school try to include all children?
  - Teachers need to collect the data on children's school age
  - Teachers have to encourage the children to come to school. They have to contact with community and parents
  - Children who are at the school age should attend school
3. Who are the children in your school that you find it challenging or difficulty to include?
  - children from poor family
  - children who are not doing well on their study
  - Children with mental disability
4. Why do you think it is?
  - Children from poor family and tend to miss the class because their family is not able to support their kids to attend school regularly
  - Children who are not doing well on their study and also don't want to attend school
5. Do you think your children enjoy going to school?
  - Most of the children enjoy coming to school as can be seen they regularly attend school
6. How do you know?
  - Children enjoy their study as can be seen from when they are studying they pay attention to do different activities and they like to answer the question and have good learning atmosphere
7. Why do you think they enjoy it?
  - Most of the children enjoy coming to school, because they have chance to spend time with many friends. They like working in group and playing game with their friend
8. Are there any children who do not enjoy going to school?
  - Children who do not enjoy coming to school include children from poor family and children who are not doing well on their study
9. How do you know?
  - This can be seen that when these children study they seems to be not happy and do not enjoy with it. They feel shy to give comment because they are afraid of mistake and afraid of their teacher will get angry at them. Moreover they often miss the class
10. Why do you think this is?
  - These group of children are not happy because they do not receive enough attention from their family since they are poor

Think about your teaching .....

11. What aspects of your teaching are most successful?  
Some aspects that make my teaching successful include:

- Teachers prepare the lesson plan well in advance. In the lesson plan teachers put activities that respond to the detail of each lesson
- Classroom management, arrange the seats properly and suitable for each group work

12. Why do you think these aspects (components) of your teaching are successful?

- They are successful because the teachers pay attention to their teaching, friendly and understand all children and praise them for their success, thus all children are happy
- Teachers prepare the lesson plan – using child center teaching method, organise the group work so the children can help each other, explain the lesson clearly and using teaching resources.

13. What aspects of your teaching would you like to improve?

- We would like to improve our teaching technique specially how to deliver the knowledge to the students by using new teaching method

14. Why is this?

- We would like to do this because we would like the teachers to have many more experiences they can apply in their teaching. The experience the teacher gain will be used in helping student to learn better

15. How do teachers in this school support each other to improve their teaching?

- The teachers in this school help/support each other
- School director check the lesson plan of each teacher
- School director also observe the teaching hours of each teacher. She also help teacher to develop the good lesson plan and advice them how to deliver the good lesson
- Each teacher also observes each other teaching so they that we have chance to share the good lesson with each other.
- Organising the discussion among teachers, if some don't understand they would explain to each other and find out the solution together if there is a problem

#### **4. Teacher name: Grade: 2 Questionnaire**

1. What do you think "Inclusive Education" means?

- The inclusive education means education without discrimination. All children learn together without discrimination
- Each child has the equal right to live together

2. How does your school try to include all children?

- In order to support the enrolment of children with special need in the school we develop the plan together with the teachers. After that we collect the data of school age children each

group in the village. Then we recorded all the children's data and send to the village authority in order to ask for their help in encouraging the parents to send their kids to school.

3. Who are the children in your school that you find it challenging or difficulty to include?  
In the past children from poor family are the most difficult to enroll in school
4. Why do you think it is?
  - This is because their parents do not have sufficient fund to support their children to learn. These children often miss the class lead to they cannot catch up with their study. As a result teacher has to spend more time to help these children to improve.
5. Do you think your children enjoy going to school?
  - All children enjoy coming to school every day
6. How do you know?
  - Teachers have tried to make the classroom more attractive
  - Create beautiful and clean school environment
  - Prepare the good lesson plan lead to student enjoy while they are learning
  - Teachers encourage the participation of all children and use variety of teaching aids in their teaching
  - Parents feel that their children interest more to come to school
7. Why do you think they enjoy it?
  - We think that they enjoy in their learning as can be seen – Students pay more attention to their study, while they are doing the group work they consult each other and helping each other. In addition they also try to compete each other to answer the question asked by their teacher
8. Are there any children who do not enjoy going to school?
  - There are some children do not enjoy coming to school
9. How do you know?
  - We see from children's behaviour in doing the activity - they are quite quiet and don't want to give idea and don't want to answer the question asked by the teacher
10. Why do you think this is?
  - These children are from poor family. Their family does not have enough fund to buy the learning material or the students' uniform. Beside that their parents are getting angry at these children or they are forced to go school. These children do not receive good advice from their family.
  - Sometime it is resulting from teachers did not prepare the good lesson plan and the teaching aids do not appropriate to the level of the students.

Think about your teaching .....

11. What aspects of your teaching are most successful?  
Some aspects that make my teaching successful include:

- Teachers prepare the lesson plan well in advance. Teachers organise the teaching activities that respond to the detail of the lesson and use variety of teaching resources.
- Well managed of the classroom, arrange the seats that suitable for the group work

12. Why do you think these aspects (components) of your teaching are successful?

- The teachers teach according to the lesson prepared and use the teaching materials in the lesson
- The students understood the lesson faster and save time
- Students have chance to help each other when doing the school activities

13. What aspects of your teaching would you like to improve?

- We would like to improve our teaching technique specially how to deliver the knowledge to the students by using new teaching method

14. Why is this?

- We would like to do this because we would like the teachers to have many more experiences so that they can apply in their teaching and they can help students who are not doing as good as the other kids to do better

15. How do teachers in this school support each other to improve their teaching?

- The teachers in this school help/support each other
- School director check the lesson plan of each teacher
- School director also observe the actual teaching hours of each teacher. She also explains to the teacher how to develop the good lesson plan and advice them how to deliver the good lesson
- Each teacher also observes each other teaching so they that we have chance to share the good lesson with each other.
- Organising the discussion among teachers, if some don't understand they would explain to each other and find out the solution together if there is a problem

## **5. Teacher name: Grade: 1 A Questionnaire**

1. What do you think "Inclusive Education" means?

- The inclusive education means we let all children learn together without discrimination whether they are ethnic group, girls, boys, and children from poor family.
- All children must receive the education. Learning together all children should participate in many school activities together.

2. How does your school try to include all children?
  - we collect the data information from parents and community
  - We collected data on school aged children within the village
  -
3. Who are the children in your school that you find it challenging or difficulty to include?
  - some children who don't want to come to school include children with mental disability
  -
4. Why do you think it is?
  - These children seem to often miss the class, because their parents do not have fund to support them. Thus they tend to drop out in the middle of school year
  - These children are quite difficult to teach, teachers have help them to learn all the times.
  -
5. Do you think your children enjoy going to school?
  - The children enjoy coming to school because they have many friends and study with many other kids

How do you know?

- We see they play with many other friends. They meet many friends while studying in school which make them happier.

6. Why do you think they enjoy it?
  - The enjoy coming to school is because they have chance to participate in school activity, singing song, playing sport and learning in group with many other friends.

7. Are there any children who do not enjoy going to school?  
 The children do enjoy their learning because they are able to do learn very well, they always missed the class and when they are in class they do not pay attention to the lesson. These children tend to drop out in the middle of the school term.

8. How do you know?
 

We know it because we observed them. While they are in class they do not really interested on the lesson. They like to go home before the finishing time.

9. Why do you think this is?
  - We think they do not enjoy the school because the do not receive a good care from their family.
  - They are not being help by their friend

Think about your teaching .....

10. What aspects of your teaching are most successful?
  - Having a good relationship between teachers and students. Be honest, fair to all students and congratulate all students on their success
  - Teachers must come to the class on time, teach according to the teaching method and using the group activity
  - Prepare the clear lesson plan and well classroom organized
  - Using appropriate teaching material in the lesson to help students understand the lesson easier

11. Why do you think these aspects (components) of your teaching are successful?

- Teachers always talk nicely to the students and congratulate them on their success
- Teachers use teaching aids in the lesson activity
- Teachers try to organise the group work in order to the student to help each other

12. What aspects of your teaching would you like to improve?

- We would like to improve how we provide the good support to students apart from our teaching activity. This is because we are not only responsible to teach students but we need to give them more support on the other issues

13. Why is this?

- We feel that we are still not giving enough support to the special need children yet
- The way we teach in the class where we have included special children is not good enough. We think that there are many issues we need to improve.

14. How do teachers in this school support each other to improve their teaching?

- The teachers in this school help/support each other
- School director check the lesson plan of each teacher
- School director also observe the actual teaching hours of each teacher. She also explains to the teacher how to develop the good lesson plan
- Each teacher also observes each other actual teaching so they that we have chance to share the good lesson with each other and find the solution on the issues found together
- Teachers discuss and share the lesson among each other, if some don't understand they would give the explanation and find out the solution together if there is a problem

## **6. Teacher name: Grade: 5 Questionnaire**

1. What do you think "Inclusive Education" means?

The inclusive education means all children have to learn together without discrimination whether they are poor, disability, girls and ethnic group

2. How does your school try to include all children?

- Teachers need to collect the data on children's school age
- Teachers have to encourage the children to come to school. They have to contact with community and parents
- Children who are at the school age should attend school

3. Who are the children in your school that you find it challenging or difficulty to include?
  - children from poor family
  - children who are not doing well on their study and children with mental disability
  
4. Why do you think it is?
  - Children from poor family and often miss the class because their family is not able to support their kids to attend school regularly
  - Children who are not doing well on their study also don't want to attend school
  -
5. Do you think your children enjoy going to school?
 

Most of the children enjoy coming to school
  
6. How do you know?
  - Children enjoy their study. As can be seen while they are in class they participate in doing different activities. They look happy and very active to answer the question from the teachers
  
7. Why do you think they enjoy it?
 

The children enjoy coming to school, because they have many friends. They are eager to learn, they keen working in group, love playing game with their friend and so on.
  
8. Are there any children who do not enjoy going to school?
 

Children who do not enjoy coming to school, include children from poor family and children who are not doing well on their study and special need children
  
9. How do you know?
 

This can be seen: when these children study they seem not being happy and do not enjoy the lesson. They feel shy to give comment, like to sit at the back seat far from the teacher, they are not confident to answer the question since they are afraid their teacher will get angry at them if they made mistake. They often miss the class
  
10. Why do you think this is?
 

These children are not happy because they do not receive enough attention from their family. Their family is also poor they do not enough to support their living

Think about your teaching .....

11. What aspects of your teaching are most successful?
  - The relationship between teachers and parents of the students. Teachers have good relationship with all students, being fair and honest to the children
  - Teaching – Teacher must come to school on time, apply appropriate teaching methods and follows teaching steps, delivery clear and correct lesson, using group work on their teaching activity.
  - Planning – Teacher, good classroom organise, table and chairs should be in order and appropriate for the group learning activities.



- Detail of lesson planning should be clear and appropriate to the students, prepares clear detail lesson plan, using variety of teaching and learning material to help in their teaching
12. Why do you think these aspects (components) of your teaching are successful?
- These aspect are success because the teachers have good personality, good communication. Therefore all students understand and learn very well.
  - Teachers use child center teaching method, organise the group work so the children can help each other, moreover teachers also advice the students to study at home
13. What aspects of your teaching would you like to improve?
- We would like to improve our teaching technique specially how to deliver the knowledge to the students by using new teaching method
  - We also need to improve how we provide the good support to special need children and support children who face with difficult problems
14. Why is this?
- We feel that we are not doing well enough in the class where we include children with special need or IE class
  - We would like the teachers to have more experiences and know more different teaching methods in order to deliver the knowledge to the students.
15. How do teachers in this school support each other to improve their teaching?  
In this school teachers help and support each other as follow:
- School director check the lesson plan of each teacher
  - School director visit teacher in each class
  - School director also observe the teaching hours of each teacher. The school director also helps to explain to the teachers how to develop the good lesson plan and how to teach the lesson well
  - Each teacher also observes each other teaching and they share the good lesson with each other.
  - Teachers discuss and share the lesson among each other, if some don't understand they would explanation and find out the solution together if there is a problem.

## **Appendix Six: IQSA Toolkit, Indicators of Inclusive Development and Clarifying Questions**

### **Indicators and Questions**

- 1. All pupils feel welcome in the school**
  1. Does the school have a policy to enrol / include all children, including students from diverse groups?
  2. Do teachers welcome all parents and their children when they come to the school?
  3. Do all teachers feel ownership of the school?
  4. Do students feel ownership of their classroom?
  5. Does the school celebrate local cultures and communities in signs, displays and events?
  6. Do all children equally exercise their rights e.g. disabled children / disadvantaged groups of children participate in all school activities?
  
- 2. All students support each other in their learning**
  1. Do Teachers actively support and encourage good relationships between students?
  2. Do Teachers encourage students to help each other?
  3. Do students willingly share their knowledge and skills?
  4. Do group activities allow students to divide up tasks and share what they have learnt?
  5. When other students in the class are troubled do students help them to calm down?
  6. Do students share the responsibility for helping to overcome the difficulties experienced by some students in lessons?
  7. Are students involved in assessing each others learning?
  8. Are students involved in helping each other to set educational goals?
  
- 3. All students are well supported by school staff**
  1. Do teachers try to make lessons easy to understand?
  2. Do teachers plan appropriately to support all children?
  3. Do teaching materials reflect the backgrounds, experience and interests of all students?
  4. Do teachers provide accessible materials or translations for students who do not speak Lao?
  5. Do teachers actively teach students in a variety of groups during the lesson?
  6. Do teachers support disadvantaged groups of children e.g. is there detailed planning to ensure disabled children are making good progress in their learning?
  
- 4. Teachers and parents cooperate well.**
  1. Do teachers regularly communicate with parents?
  2. Do teachers invite parents for consultation in order to help or solve problems related to children's learning?
  3. Do parents feel that there is good communication with school staff?
  4. Do parents feel well informed about school policies and practices?
  5. Do staff value the knowledge that parents have about their children?
  6. Do staff encourage the involvement of all parents in their children's learning?
  
- 5. All students are treated equally as valued members of the school**
  1. Teachers pay equal attention to all students
  2. Teachers give opportunities for students to select activities based on their ability
  3. Is a variety of backgrounds and home languages seen to make a positive contribution to school life?

4. Are higher and lower attaining students valued equally?
  5. Are the achievements of all students given equal support and prominence?
  6. Do disadvantaged groups of children receive equal treatment e.g. children from poor families are given the same opportunity to join after school activities which require a financial contribution.
- 6. All students feel that their opinions and views are valued.**
1. Do Teachers give the opportunity for students to give their comments?
  2. Do Teachers listen and respond to student comments and questions?
  3. Do students feel that teachers listen to them?
  4. Do students feel that teachers respond to their comments?
  5. Do teachers provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups of children to share their opinions?
  6. Do disadvantaged groups of children feel that teachers listen to their opinions?
- 7. All students can access learning in all lessons.**
1. Do teachers prepare lessons and lesson plans that are appropriate for the learning of all children?
  2. Is teaching planned to support learning rather than to deliver the curriculum?
  3. Is there an attempt to view teaching and support from the point of view of all students?
  4. Do lessons pay attention to the emotional as well as the intellectual aspects of learning?
  5. Do students feel that they are actively engaged in most lesson activities?
  6. Are children with special needs encouraged to develop their talents? e.g. some children with special needs may be talented in producing handicrafts.
- 8. All students can access all parts of the school building.**
1. Do teachers arrange seating in classroom appropriate to all students?
  2. Is seating organised according to individual needs and age of students? E.g. is the furniture the correct size for the age group? Do children with physical disabilities have adapted chairs and tables where necessary?
  3. Do students have access to all parts of school building that they need access to e.g.: classroom, toilet, play area?
  4. Are the needs of students with partial sight or partial hearing as well as physical impairments considered in making the buildings accessible?
  5. Does the school have separate toilets for girls, boys and teachers / adults?
  6. Does the school monitor accessibility of the buildings and facilities for teachers and students?
- 9. All students attend school every day.**
1. Do teachers keep a daily record of student attendance?
  2. Do teachers try to find out the reasons for student absence?
  3. Do teachers have good relationship with all students?
  4. Do teachers create an attractive school environment?
  5. Do teachers communicate well with students' parents?
  6. Do teachers monitor the attendance of children who may be at risk of poor attendance e.g. children who have been bullied, children who are struggling to achieve in school.
- 10. All students enjoy lessons**
1. Do students enjoy lessons?
  2. Do lessons convey a sense of excitement in learning?
  3. Do teachers use a variety of teaching techniques and activities?

4. Do teachers use a variety of teaching materials in their teaching?
  5. Do teachers try to make classrooms attractive, and a good learning environment?
  6. Do parents feel that their children enjoy school?
- 11. All students are engaged in all lesson activities.**
1. Do teachers clearly explain how to do activities?
  2. Do teachers support all students in classroom activities?
  3. Do students feel that they are actively engaged in most lesson activities?
  4. Do teachers encourage all students to become actively involved in activities?
  5. Do teachers organise activities according to children's individual needs? E.g. children are asked to complete tasks that are within their abilities.
  6. Do teachers evaluate their lessons to ensure that all students are participating?
- 12. All students achieve their learning in all subjects according to their individual ability**
1. Do teachers plan the lesson appropriately based on the different students' ability?
  2. Do teachers include details in their lesson planning of how they will support the learning of children who are learning more slowly than others in certain subjects?
  3. Do teachers use a variety of materials in teaching and learning activities?
  4. Do all students feel that they are making progress in school?
  5. Do teachers regularly follow up and assess students learning outcomes?
  6. Are teachers able to make judgements about the amount of progress individual students are making in different subject areas?
- 13. All students learn together.**
1. Do teachers organise learning activities for all students to be able to fully participate?
  2. Do teachers encourage all students to support each other?
  3. Do all children show respect for each other?
  4. Do all students willingly share their knowledge and skills with each other?
  5. Do students enjoy the social aspects of school life?
  6. Are students involved in assessing each others learning?
- 14. All students have access to health services as necessary and appropriately.**
1. Do teachers give advice to all students on the 3 areas of cleanliness?
  2. Do teachers regularly organise sports activities?
  3. Do teachers collaborate with health staff to check students' health?
  4. Do teachers collaborate with parents to support the development of students' health?
  5. Do students have a positive attitude to health?
  6. Do students know the causes of common diseases?
  7. Do students know how to protect themselves from common diseases?
  8. Do teachers give children opportunities to ask health-related questions? E.g. are there opportunities for discussions about health and cleanliness?
- 15. The School ensures that all students are admitted to the school**
1. Does the school try to find out if all the vulnerable children are in school?
  2. Does the school encourage the parents to send their children to school?
  3. Does the school provide the necessary support to vulnerable groups of children so that they are able to enter school?
  4. Do the teachers pay particular attention to vulnerable children to ensure they are learning?
  5. Does the school monitor and follow up students' attendance?

6. Does the school encourage and reward children who come to school regularly, particularly those from disadvantaged groups? E.g. the school gives special certificates to children with 100% attendance.

**16. All vulnerable children are successful in their learning**

1. Does the school have a policy on the annual and final grade examination with a specific expectation for vulnerable groups of children?
2. Has the school developed a plan for supporting vulnerable children in order to help them complete their study?
3. Do teachers adjust the teaching objectives, using appropriate teaching methods, to ensure vulnerable children are successful in lessons?
4. Do teachers encourage children's classmates to help vulnerable children?
5. Does the school monitor the teaching for disadvantaged groups?
  
6. Does the school monitor the achievement of children from disadvantaged groups?
7. Do teachers encourage all children, but particularly those from disadvantaged groups, to use the school library?
8. Do teachers plan opportunities for more able or experienced students to support the learning of children with special needs or less experienced learners.

**17. School creates an environment which supports all students' learning**

1. Does the school try to develop the facilities for students to access all parts of the school building?
  2. Do teachers arrange appropriate seats for vulnerable children in the classroom?
  3. Does the school create a good school environment (does school have trees, flowers, gardening, clean school yard, school compound, etc)?
  4. Does the school have adequate toilets for children (boys and girls) and teachers?
  5. Does the school have a library and allow children to borrow books?
  6. Do teachers decorate the classroom to attract children and motivate them to learn? e.g. do they display children's work and learning resources attractively?
  7. Is there enough classroom furniture for all children to sit and work comfortably?
-