A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF RESPONSES TO IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION BY VIETNAMESE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

A thesis presented in
fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Second Language Teaching
at Massey University
Palmerston North

Fiona Constance McCook

1998
ABSTRACT

This study seeks to provide an insight into aspects of Vietnamese classroom interaction and teaching practices which are identified as fundamental by language teachers. It examines the responses, among Vietnamese high school teachers, to in-service teacher education using elements of the reflective model to inform the longitudinal research design. The subjects for the study are 15 teachers nominated for an in-service course at the Binh Dinh Department of Education. The focus of this research, the primary data, comprises diaries and questionnaires collected before, during, and after the in-service programme over a period of seven months. Supplementary information, secondary and peripheral data, used to interpret and inform the analysis of primary sources, comprises observation notes, audio diary entries, teacher belief questionnaires and student questionnaires.

Content analysis reveals that teachers are concerned primarily with student response in class, that is, the displays of emotion in relation to the lesson, and student language performance. Performance is conceptualised as accurate reproduction of prescribed texts. In addition, the teachers’ reflections foreground the primacy of the teacher-student relationship and the collective orientation of classroom activity. In a culture that does not emphasise trial and adaptation teachers also show a correspondingly low tolerance of ambiguity and a rejection of anything judged to be ad hoc. “Tried and true” methods are preferred. Confidence is cited as a major reason for not attempting new techniques in the classroom pointing to a need for a mentoring relationship between teacher educators and teachers in future in-service programmes. There is a higher than expected rate of reflectivity in diary entries though this is confined chiefly to evaluations of directly observable student behaviour. There are few attempts to probe reasons for performances that fail to meet teacher expectations. The study concludes with a model of the reflective teacher educator process.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like, firstly, to thank my supervisor, Dr Cynthia White, for her professional guidance, critiques and support, together with her ongoing encouragement and enthusiasm which kept me focussed when the picture started to blur. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr Margaret Franken for her professional input as well as the kindness she showed in hosting me when I visited Palmerston North. My thanks also go to Marilyn Lewis who set me on the road to Vietnam and has followed my progress and offered advice and support ever since. I am also grateful to Sue Gray who carried my questionnaires to Vietnam, checked the reliability of my categorising and offered moral support. In addition, I am indebted to Sashi Meanger for his careful reading and thoughtful comments on my written work.

I would like to thank the Binh Dinh Department of Education and their representative, my colleague Mr Tran Van Co, who liaised with the schools and teachers and organised my observation and seminar programmes. I am especially grateful to the teachers for allowing me into their classrooms and for finding the time to share their thoughts, ideas, and dreams. Without their willing contributions this thesis would never have been written.

I am deeply grateful to Margaret Lovell who spent many days and nights and public holidays, always willingly and with infinite patience, undoing my formatting disasters and turning the thesis into a wonder of desk-top publishing. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Ha Thi My Anh who attended all my seminars, critiqued my presentations from a Vietnamese point of view and advised me, with endless patience, on the subtleties of Vietnamese culture.

To finish, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my parents, Connie and Keith McCook, who have supported me in whatever academic direction I have taken. I am truly grateful that they have always allowed me the choice to follow my heart.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ VII

LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................... VIII

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................ 1

1.1 A PERSONAL QUEST ................................................................................................. 1
1.2 CODE OF ETHICS ..................................................................................................... 3
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE GENERAL PROBLEM ........................................................... 3
1.3.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM ................................................................. 4

CHAPTER 2 TOWARDS A CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY ..................... 7

2.1 INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................... 7
2.2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA ..................... 9
2.3 THE VIETNAMESE CONTEXT ..................................................................................... 10
2.4 INSET ...................................................................................................................... 13
2.4.1 TEACHER TRAINING VS. TEACHER DEVELOPMENT ......................................... 13
2.4.2 DEEP ACTION .................................................................................................... 16
2.4.3 THE TEACHER EDUCATOR ................................................................................. 17
2.4.4 WHAT TEACHERS BRING TO AN INSET COURSE ........................................... 18
2.4.5 THE EFFECTS OF AN INSET PROGRAMME ...................................................... 19
2.5 TRANSFER .............................................................................................................. 20
2.6 CHANGE AND INNOVATION .................................................................................... 22
2.7 REFLECTION AS A TOOL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT ........ 24
2.7.1 DIARIES AS A TOOL FOR REFLECTION ................................................................ 28
2.8 MENTORING .......................................................................................................... 30
2.9 SUMMARY .............................................................................................................. 31

CHAPTER 3 SETTING THE SCENE .................................................................................. 33

3.1 OVERVIEW .............................................................................................................. 33
3.2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY ............................................. 33
3.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................................... 35
3.4 THE RESEARCH DESIGN ......................................................................................... 35
3.4.1 SETTING AND POPULATION .............................................................................. 38
3.4.2 THE PARTICIPANTS ............................................................................................ 39
3.4.3 DEMOGRAPHICS ................................................................................................ 41
3.5 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS ...................................................................... 42
3.5.1 DATA COLLECTION .................................................................42
3.5.2 DATA ANALYSIS .................................................................45
3.5.3 CONSTRAINTS .................................................................46
3.6 INSTRUMENTATION .................................................................47
3.6.1 DIARIES ...........................................................................47
3.6.2 APPRAISAL OF TRAINING INPUT ........................................55
3.6.3 POST COURSE COMMENTARY ...........................................58
3.7 SECONDARY DATA .................................................................62
3.7.1 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE ...............62
3.7.2 SURVEY: TEACHER EXPECTATIONS ....................................63
3.7.3 BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING QUESTIONNAIRE ..................63
3.7.4 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE .................................................65
3.8 THREATS TO RELIABILITY .......................................................65
3.9 THREATS TO VALIDITY ..........................................................66
3.10 SUMMARY .............................................................................67

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS .....................................................................68
4.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................68
4.2 DIARIES ...............................................................................68
4.2.1 PRINCIPAL AREAS OF CONCERN: AN OVERVIEW ...............69
4.2.2 LOCUS: THE STUDENT ......................................................72
4.2.3 LOCUS: THE TEACHER ......................................................87
4.2.4 LOCUS: THE CONTEXT .....................................................97
4.3 DEGREE OF REFLECTIVITY ...................................................98
4.4 QUESTIONNAIRE: ASSESSMENT OF TRAINING INPUT ..........100
4.5 POST-COURSE COMMENTARY QUESTIONNAIRE ..................106
4.6 SUMMARY ...........................................................................109

CHAPTER 5 REFLECTIONS ..............................................................110
5.1 OVERVIEW ...........................................................................110
5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION ONE ..................................................110
5.2.1 SUITABILITY .......................................................................110
5.2.2 THE PRIMACY OF THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP ....111
5.2.3 ROLE ...............................................................................112
5.2.4 LIMITED PROBING ............................................................114
5.2.5 TRADITIONAL ROLES UNDER PRESSURE .......................115
5.2.6 AFFECTIVE FACTORS .......................................................116
5.2.7 DEGREE OF CRITICAL REFLECTIVITY ............................117
5.2.8 OBSERVABLE AND SUPERFICIAL OR INTUITIVE AND HARMONIOUS? 118
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2: DATA COLLECTION TIME FRAME ........................................................................ 37
FIGURE 3: SOURCES OF DATA AND HOW THEY ARE GATHERED ........................................ 44
FIGURE 4: STUDENT FOCUS: KEYWORD ANALYSIS .......................................................... 51
FIGURE 5: STUDENT FOCUS: TEACHER’S INTENTION ANALYSIS ..................................... 52
FIGURE 6: TEACHER FOCUS: TEACHER’S INTENTION ANALYSIS ....................................... 53
FIGURE 7: STATEMENTS USED TO GUIDE CATEGORISE THE DEGREE OF REFLECTIVITY ........ 55
FIGURE 8: SAMPLE QUESTION FROM ASSESSMENT OF TRAINING INPUT QUESTIONNAIRE .......... 57
FIGURE 9: EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS FROM POST COURSE COMMENTARY CONSTRAINTS ANALYSIS ................................................................. 60
FIGURE 10: THE CONVERSATION SECTION OF THE POST-COURSE COMMENTARY .............. 61
FIGURE 11: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DIARIES: MAIN AREAS OF CONCERN ......................... 71
FIGURE 12: TENTATIVE MODEL OF THE REFLECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATOR PROCESS ........ 135
FIGURE 13: THE REFLECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATOR SYNTHESIS ........................................ 136
FIGURE 14: THE SEMINAR PROCESS OUTCOMES .............................................................. 137
FIGURE 15: THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS .............................................................................. 138
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION BY DISTRICT OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS IN BINH DINH PROVINCE AND OF SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS ................................................................. 39
TABLE 2: PARTICIPATING TEACHERS’ BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ......................................................... 42
TABLE 3: AN OVERVIEW OF DATA SOURCES .............................................................................. 43
TABLE 4: COLLECTION AND PROCESSING OF PRIMARY DATA ..................................................... 44
TABLE 5: PRINCIPAL AREAS OF TEACHER CONCERN IN TEACHER DIARIES ......................... 69
TABLE 6: CATEGORIES, SUB-CATEGORIES AND SPECIFIC FOCI .................................................. 72
TABLE 7: LANGUAGE CATEGORY: ANALYSIS OF TOTALS ............................................................. 74
TABLE 8: USE SUB-CATEGORY: ANALYSIS OF TOTALS ................................................................. 75
TABLE 9: KNOWLEDGE SUB-CATEGORY: ANALYSIS OF TOTALS .................................................... 79
TABLE 10: AFFECTIVE RESPONSES CATEGORY: ANALYSIS OF TOTALS ........................................ 83
TABLE 11: CATEGORIES, SUB-CATEGORIES AND SPECIFIC FOCI .................................................. 87
TABLE 12: LANGUAGE CATEGORY: ANALYSIS OF TOTALS ............................................................. 89
TABLE 13: THE NUMBER OF REFLECTIVE RESPONSES WITHIN THREE LOCI .............................. 99
TABLE 14: MEAN RANKINGS OF INPUT HELPFULNESS OF ELEVEN IN-SERVICE HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS ........................................................................................................ 101
TABLE 15: RANKINGS AND MEANS OF THE CONSTRAINTS AMONG ELEVEN HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS ................................................................................................................................. 107
TABLE 16: COLLECTION AND PROCESSING OF SECONDARY AND PERIPHERAL DATA ............... 143
TABLE 17: BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING RESULTS ......................................................................... 169