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

A thesis presented in  
fulfilment of the requirements  
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## 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.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A PERSONAL QUEST

I will begin with an *apologia* for the way in which the initial section of this introduction is presented. I have decided to dispense with the usual academic formality and to begin, instead, by appealing to the emotional side of my audience because that is the way in which my Vietnamese colleagues would start and essentially this thesis is about them. A number of arguments have been forwarded (see Calderhead & Gates, 2.7.1) that research has become too technical and has tended to ignore the emotive and the intuitive. The Vietnamese, however, constantly strive for harmony in life and a thesis that does not acknowledge the emotional side of a person could be considered unbalanced. That is one of my most lasting lessons from Vietnam. As a result, this thesis attempts to highlight the impact that living and teaching in a culture which acknowledges the joy and wonder of life and learning has had on my writing. To this end I narrate, explain, discuss and draw conclusions in the first person except in the sections where convention dictates that I use a more impersonal style.

Whether I have succeeded in interpreting the writings and actions of the teachers in a way that would be acceptable to them, I perhaps, will never know. It is not their way to criticise. However, I have learnt an immense amount in the process of writing this thesis and even if I have failed to find “a way in” I feel the following study will, at the very least, offer an insight into the world of the Binh Dinh English language classroom.

In true Vietnamese style I pause here to make a link to the past, a past that plays such a large part in Vietnamese life and which is so evident in the traditional patterns of interaction in the classroom. And like the Vietnamese I draw on literature (poetry, folk tales or proverbs) to make my point.

Ngam hay muon su tai troi  
 troi kia da bat lam nguoi co than.  
 Bat phong-tran phai phong-tran,  
 cho thanh-cao moi duoc phan thanh-cao

This we have learned: with Heaven rest all things.  
 Heaven appoints each human to a place.  
 If doomed to roll in dust, we'll roll in dust;  
 we'll sit on high when destined for high seats.

(The Tale of Kieu, lines 3241-3244)

So ends the Tale of Kieu (Nguyen Du, trans. 1983), the poem that symbolises both the struggle and the character of the Vietnamese people. As one critic has remarked, it is a tale that should be read by anyone wishing to understand the heart and mind of the Vietnamese people. While the poem is not the focus of this thesis it highlights, for me at least, some of the issues which I encountered during the two years that I was engaged in the project on which this study was based and during the other two and a half years that I have spent living and teaching in Vietnam prior to that. The themes that the above lines represent are those of Heaven's will and the concept of fate. Although they seem remote from in-service seminars there were many times I just could not understand why teachers did not protest their lot, stand up for their beliefs or were so passive about things which I believed were important. Of course, the reason is not purely a fatalistic acceptance of the way things are but also a comment on the political situation. However, I do believe that the themes are important in learning to understand the Vietnamese teacher and accepting their world view. As my Vietnamese friend would often say to me when I told her about lessons that had been less than successful:

*"You worry too much. It's their way."*

## 1.2 CODE OF ETHICS

Throughout the conduct of the study my personal philosophy of education remained simple. I went to Vietnam with teaching skills, knowledge and a culturally different background, which I hoped I could share with others. I had no wish to impose these on anyone: rather I offered an alternative view of education which could be either taken up, adapted, discussed or discarded. At the same time, I saw the interaction as two way. I wished to learn from the Vietnamese, adapting from them what could be of use in my home environment. I believe that a teacher who is able to view education as a profession where other values, beliefs and expectations are equally valid is not only a more informed and tolerant teacher but also has the potential to change the world.

At this point I return to the more formal discourse of the thesis and introduce the general problem which this study addresses.

## 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE GENERAL PROBLEM

Transferring language teaching approaches and methodology from a Western context into a context like Vietnam brings with it numerous challenges for all those involved in the process. The underlying pedagogical philosophy of Vietnamese teachers reflects a very different set of beliefs and cultural norms so these teachers may have a set of expectations far removed from those who design the content and method of delivery for the in-service education. The in-service education that will be described in this study was aimed at introducing teachers to the communicative language teaching approach. The focus therefore, was on how and why to teach the *use* and *meaning* of English rather than on how and why to teach its *form*. This was a major departure in emphasis for many teachers. New techniques that I introduced, for example, using picture cues and words or phrases to lead in to a reading passage, were designed to allow their students an opportunity to use more realistic spoken and written language than that printed in the textbooks. At the same time these techniques retained a reasonable degree of structure and were within the “comfort zone” of the teachers’ language

competence. Quite simply, I wanted teachers to encourage students to communicate.

This study focusses on the two groups of people most directly involved in such an undertaking, the native English speaker teacher educator (myself) and 15 high school teachers from Binh Dinh province. Feedback gathered from teachers' writings over a period of seven months allowed me to examine what Vietnamese teachers expected from the seminars, what they actually gained and what they felt was constraining them in their attempts to introduce new techniques into the classroom. The assumption here of course was that they did want to change, an assumption I believe may not be an altogether valid one.

### **1.3.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM**

After initial attempts to situate this study within current research in South-East Asia, I found that there was little existing research on the Vietnamese high school teacher of English and the context in which s/he worked. This was due, in part, to the fairly recent rise of English language teaching in Vietnam after years of comparative indifference on the part of education authorities. A directive issued by the Vietnamese government in the late 1980s requiring that all schools teach English from year six, had provided the catalyst for the sudden increase in English language classes but little attempt had been made to either gauge the competence of teachers or to define the needs of students before embarking on such an undertaking. The increasing demand for teachers of English meant many teachers were being asked to teach a programme for which they were ill-equipped. With little help available from internal sources the opportunity for in-service teacher education from foreign providers became one option open to local education authorities.

Binh Dinh province, in which this study took place, had had no English speaking foreigners working either in education or any other discipline until a New Zealand Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) team took up residence in 1992 as part of a health and education project overseen by the Binh Dinh Red Cross. When the

present study commenced in 1997, information about teachers, their classes and their expectations had been gathered from my previous professional experience in Qui Nhon, Binh Dinh's principal town. This experience involved teaching pre-service teachers during 1992 and 1993, running in-service seminars, and going out on observations to both city and district high schools during 1996 and 1997. The assessments made were passed on in both oral and written reports to VSA and the Binh Dinh Department of Education. However, in order to put the education component of the project on a more professional footing it became obvious that a more permanent and systematic record of this professional experience was needed to contribute to the development of a "thick" description of the local classroom culture. A thick description would extend the mainly pedagogical assessments found in the reports by taking into account social, cultural, political and any other factors which might also have an impact on the Vietnamese classroom.

The desirability of carrying out research was further emphasised by observations that in-service teacher education was having little if any impact on the classroom teaching practices of teachers in Binh Dinh province. This was in spite of the number of the aforementioned in-service teacher education workshops that had been run in the province since 1992 and additional programmes run in neighbouring provinces by other development agencies. Moreover, there had been a succession of native speaker teacher educators working at Qui Nhon Teachers College, at pre-service level, from the same year. Lessons were still dominated by the teacher; to such an extent that in at least two classes observed in the districts, the teachers, both of whom had attended previous in-service education sessions, were not only asking all the questions but also giving all the answers. Student participation was confined almost exclusively to reproduction of material in the prescribed texts.

That the Vietnamese themselves recognised a need for developing teaching and language skills was evident in that they had specifically asked for help in upgrading teachers' methodology and had been granted assistance through VSA

with funding coming primarily from the New Zealand government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

I felt that in order to develop an in-service programme, appropriate to Vietnamese teachers in Binh Dinh, a needs analysis should be carried out in the environment in which the teachers worked. Texts, materials, physical constraints, and language proficiency were the first factors to be analysed and documented as they were the most visible and most readily accessed. However, it was apparent that these alone were not the only factors to consider in implementing change in the classroom so it was decided to look at the teachers themselves, their expectations, attitudes and their classroom practice. This in turn was expected to provide the data necessary for designing an appropriate methodology for in-service education and teacher development.

Before it was possible to formulate the research questions that provided the parameters for this study, it was necessary to review the relevant work that had been carried out in the field of second language teacher education and development in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, although, as previously noted, there was little that was context specific. Previous studies identified a range of issues that could be applied to the existing situation and also highlighted gaps that still existed and which would be addressed in the current study. The following chapter therefore, contextualises the current research through a process of description and synthesis, setting out the main issues, the underlying theories and the major findings in the research area.

## CHAPTER 2                    TOWARDS A CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is appropriate to commence this chapter by relating two incidents which occurred during my time as a teacher of English at the Qui Nhon Teachers' College and as a teacher educator at the Binh Dinh Department of Education. They both illustrate, unequivocally, the intricacies and challenges of working in cross-cultural education and highlight some of the issues that must be addressed if one is to be at least partially successful in the field of teacher development in an EFL environment.

As a teacher educator at the Binh Dinh Department of Education I was asked to run a series of lessons for ex-teachers of Russian who were being retrained as English teachers. One of the lessons was on ways to introduce material from the prescribed English textbook. At one stage of the programme I suggested that the teachers should mime some of the verbs rather than giving a dictionary definition. I then proceeded to give a demonstration. However, although the teachers seemed to enjoy the performance, judging by their participation and laughter, when asked whether they could possibly use such a technique in their own classes one woman replied, with murmurs of agreement from others, that the national dress, the "ao dai", which they had to wear when teaching, made all but graceful movement difficult.

The other incident did not actually take place in a seminar but in conversation with a teaching colleague. When I offered her some swimming instruction, after she had wistfully admitted her inability to swim, she replied that a practical lesson was impossible until she had learnt the theory.

It would have been relatively easy to recount many more such incidents that occurred throughout the two years of my assignment but these would have added little more to what has already been written. Instead, as a teacher educator, my first reaction was to reflect on the experiences in an effort to understand what the teachers were really saying. Both instances were in fact, indirect refusals. The teachers were reluctant to assume the behaviours which were perceived as inappropriate. In the first instance, my approach was probably inappropriate, because, by and large, Vietnamese teachers do not move around the class vigorously, nor are they willing to be laughed at. I suspect that their role as a model of good behaviour and a disseminator of knowledge did not allow them to assume any other role. In the second instance, the teacher appeared to place a high value on theoretical knowledge and did not feel confident about tackling the practical side of the task. Practical skills for teaching in fact, do not appear to attract the same focus in the pre-service teacher education curriculum, in Binh Dinh province at least, as does the learning of complex grammatical structures and phonemic patterns. However, this imbalance is now being addressed both at pre-service level, and, as this study will show, at in-service level.

A study such as this, which examines the introduction of communicative language teaching methodology into a context quite different from the one in which that methodology was developed, raises a number of major issues which, as the anecdotes above illustrate, are not as transparent as they seem. There may be many layers of meaning beneath a particular course of action that a teacher takes. Some of these have been identified in previous research but their effect on teacher behaviour is yet to be fully understood. The following sections consider the issues as they relate to the current research problem, with the aim of framing more specific research questions for inclusion in the next chapter.

The review is organised so that the focus moves from the macro context of EFL teacher education in South-East Asia, readjusts its focus on the Vietnamese context and then re-focusses once more, quite specifically, on the level of the classroom.

## 2.2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

There is a saying (source unknown) to the effect that some teachers leave their pre-service days, go out into the classroom, gain a year's experience and then, not only teach the same thing, but teach in the same manner for the next 20 years. This behaviour seems to indicate that teachers adopt teaching methods that they were exposed to throughout their schooling: in Lortie's (1975) words "an apprenticeship of observation". However, such a stance at the end of the twentieth century cannot remain unchallenged since modern technology and ideas have touched even some of the remotest areas of the world.

In South-East Asia, where the current research is situated, this explosion in technology and the increasing need to use English has been recognised by the fact that every year a conference takes place at the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation, Regional Language Centre (SEAMEO, RELC) where the focus is on education in the region. The 1992 conference addressed the challenge of teacher education with a seminar "Language Teacher Education in a Fast Changing World" recognising not only the dynamic nature of education in a relentlessly modernising world but also the influence that it had had and would continue to have on the region. The contributors came mainly from the area. Among the countries represented were Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Unfortunately, there appears to have been no representation from Vietnam.

In his foreword to a selection of papers presented at the seminar the Director, E. Goh, stated that the papers "discuss innovations in teacher education programmes", that the hope is to "stimulate further thought and propel teacher educators to embark on new directions in programme planning and evaluation" and concluded by affirming SEAMEO, RELC's role in influencing "change in the preparation of language teachers in South-East Asia" (Goh, 1992, p. iii). The following discussion then, takes several of Mr. Goh's themes, programme planning, innovation, and change, as well as others such as the role that reflection plays in all of these and examines their relevance to the Vietnamese context.

### 2.3 THE VIETNAMESE CONTEXT

The Vietnamese educational context has been heavily influenced in the past by China, drawing upon China's Confucian models for its own system. Ting (1987) sees the Confucian tradition of education as one that aimed at achieving social stability through observance of a rigid system of hierarchy, encouraged little self-reflection and divorced academic study from reality, a situation that was very much evident in the current pre-eminence of teacher centredness, textbook-centredness and grammar centredness. Described briefly, teacher centredness required that the teacher had sole authority and was not questioned, interrupted or challenged. Activities were prescribed in advance and the teacher's judgement was final. The teacher was always correct so, in many cases, would use only what was printed in the text and approved by the authorities. Teachers would rarely if ever, ask students what they wanted to learn. The students, for their part, made notes and memorised them. Good students knew the answers and to guess meant that the student had not mastered or learned by heart the prescribed work. To ask questions disturbed the teaching plan and showed disrespect. The Vietnamese classroom was much the same and still remains much the same today, particularly in areas that are far from urban centres. However, there is recent evidence in Vietnam that the unquestioned authority of the teacher is under threat, (Ellis, 1996), as the pressure for skilled communicators in English increases and those teachers whose own skills are inadequate to meet the challenge fall back on traditional methods to preserve their status.

Equally as intransmutable, the textbook centredness of the system held that knowledge was contained in books and as such, could be taken out and put in the students' heads. A direct result of this was, and still is, the primacy of examinations which test students' ability to reproduce, verbatim, what is in the books. Hand-in-hand with this went grammar centredness which maintained that learning of a foreign language was governed by grammatical rules. This led to a focus in the prescribed texts on the form of discrete grammar points and vocabulary items which were presented, deductively, and systematically in an easy ascending order, with an explanation to accompany them. Contextualising

the structures and words was not considered important. In a study carried out in Hue, central Vietnam, Thao (1991) found that more than 90% of Vietnamese high school teachers presented vocabulary without any reference to the context. This was hardly surprising when texts contained references to foods such as cornflakes (English 7) which are sold only in shops catering for the expatriate community. Consequently, texts were read not for meaning but for extending vocabulary lists and ensuring a mastery of grammar. The natural outcome of such a system was graduates who had much knowledge about English grammar but had limited communication skills.

However, in a study carried out in Hanoi, Sullivan (1996) found that contrary to the above, there was, in fact, a less than rigid atmosphere in the 22 classes that she visited. There was a high level of interaction between teacher and students manifested in students supporting one another verbally in what might have appeared to Western observers as choral drills. Sullivan went on to say that this interaction “enabled teacher and students to validate each other’s comments by repeating and building on them” (Sullivan, 1996, p. 33). This is hardly the authoritarian atmosphere that is so often portrayed in literature on Asian classrooms. Unfortunately, the finding has only limited relevance to the context under investigation as the study was carried out in a university in a large urban area and the textbook used for instruction was far more accessible in terms of content and graphics than those used in high schools. It has been included here though, to balance the rather negative view that is often given of Asian learning styles and to suggest that there is potential for adapting methodology and materials to encourage this type of interaction at more junior levels. Furthermore, it must also be remembered that such an education system produces many very competent speakers of English who, as has already been noted, possess a greater knowledge of the structure of the English language than the majority of native speakers. There is also considerable evidence that these same students achieve better results than Western students both in their own environments and abroad, (Colebrook, 1996).

There is, however, another agenda that is not always made explicit. Any development in education, as in China, must be within Marxist guidelines. Teacher assessment schedules used to grade teachers, in Binh Dinh, have a section which asks whether the lesson adheres to ideological principles. What exactly these principles are is not stated. According to Ting (1987), Marxist ideology is more similar to the theories of John Dewey, whose philosophies gave rise to the humanist approach to teaching, than to the philosophy of Confucius. Ting maintains that Marxism is opposed to the idea that knowing is possible without doing. Instead, the way forward is through a spiralling path of reflection and action. Where Western and Marxist ideologies have diverged is in the concept of individualism and humanism. Western ideals of education are often called humanistic which, as Ting points out, implies that everything non-Western is inhuman. However, humanistic activities in the West may mean something quite different to an Asian child. The fact that self-interest, the antithesis of the Asian spirit of collectivism, is often chosen as the starting point for communicative activities based on humanistic principles suggests that such activities have a good chance of failing.

A third element in this ideological sphere of influence and an element to which the introduction has already alluded, is that of Buddhism. Its concepts of Heaven's Will and Karma have had a major impact on the character of the Vietnamese people as well as a lesser influence on their educational practices. What seems then, as a passive acceptance of fate can make change difficult to effect. As Huynh (1983, p. xxxv) notes in his introduction to Nguyen Du's "The Tale of Kieu", "fatalism ... denies the usefulness of anything to change the world". Furthermore, Buddhist teaching advocates an adherence to "the middle way" or moderation, which may have also deterred any moves to take on 'radical' new approaches to language teaching, a feature that appears to be inherent in Western education.

Whatever the rights and the wrongs of a traditional approach, and it is not within the bounds of this study to do a comparative analysis of traditional and current approaches, there has been an increasing emphasis, by the Vietnamese themselves,

on the use of communicative language teaching methods and materials in the Vietnamese classroom. This has been propelled in part by economic necessity and Vietnam's entry to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). However, the central tenets of the communicative approach differ quite markedly from those of the methods that are already in classroom use, and have created tensions for and, in some cases, rejection by, those who must use them.

The next issue to be examined is one that is central to this study and that is the role of In-service Teacher Education (INSET) in not only an EFL environment, but also in the environment of a developing country.

## **2.4 INSET**

### **2.4.1 TEACHER TRAINING VS. TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

The primary mode of disseminating the communicative approach to practising teachers in Vietnam, as with other developing countries, has been through in-service workshops and seminars, conducted chiefly by foreign providers in-country, and through scholarship programmes provided for study abroad. Based on reports from Vietnamese colleagues, initial endeavours in teacher education used a training model to facilitate skills transfer where teachers were shown various models and techniques and expected to transfer them into classroom practice. However, it has become evident that little change is taking place with demand continuing for "a method" to teach English communicatively.

Part of the problem in the approaches to training in-service teachers was that the whole notion of training itself had limitations. A more holistic developmental approach was needed. The difference between training and development, is more than one of semantics. Training is often viewed as the provision of knowledge and skills to facilitate teachers' practical work in the classroom focussing on a mastery of discrete micro-skills. It does not necessarily allow for the development of background knowledge or self-awareness of a teacher. Up to a point such an

approach was useful but if a technique or idea, demonstrated and practised at a workshop did not work, for whatever reason, the teacher did not usually have the skills to adapt to the changed circumstances.

On the other hand, the process of development, defined by Nixon as “reflection on classroom practice, interpretation of teaching experiences, viewing education process as long term and equipping the teacher to deal with change and divergence” (Nixon, 1994, p. 2) allows what Lange (cited in Bailey, 1992) calls “a continual growth, intellectually, experientially and attitudinally”. In a rapidly changing world, acknowledged by the SEAMEO, RELC conference, teacher development, as opposed to teacher training, would appear to have the necessary attributes to cope with the changes. However, in this study I have chosen to use the more focussed terms “teacher educator” and “teacher education” as these are more appropriate to my role, as a component of the developmental process.

INSET as a mode of teacher development can be a potentially disastrous undertaking. This is evidenced by the volume of literature on evaluation of English language projects which reveal some of the breakdowns in communication that such projects have encountered. As sometimes happened, projects become unsustainable because they were so “out of sync” with the host culture (Swales, 1980; Holliday, 1992; Coleman, 1992). All too often, once the expatriate or foreign input had gone the effects of the project were invisible at institutional level although on the individual level there might have been evidence that there had been an impact. Holliday (1992) calls this non-uptake of programmes and materials by the host culture, “tissue rejection”. All of the researchers cited above suggest ways of minimising the risk of tissue rejection and these provide a good guide to future undertakings. Nevertheless, the whole issue of INSET remains problematic as every nation and every culture, whether it be the culture of the country, the institution, or the classroom, has a unique set of circumstances to which no outsider can ever have complete access.

That every situation is unique creates a quandary for the in-service programme designer who must decide on a methodology that is appropriate for the context in question. To a Western trained teacher educator this may mean adapting communicative materials, which are aimed at an English as a Second Language (ESL) audience, to suit the needs of an EFL audience. As the vast majority of English language teaching materials, and the methodologies used to teach them, do not originate in the host culture the task becomes highly complex and difficult. Underlying pedagogical philosophies are often widely divergent, as are ways of teaching, background experiences, role expectations and of course the content of the textbooks. An example of diverging perceptions of practice in the Vietnamese context was given by Sullivan (1996) who, when interviewing a Vietnamese teacher in Hanoi, found that the Western concept of group work where the purpose was to express and explain different opinions ran quite counter to the Vietnamese ideal where class groups were made up of people who must agree. Harmony was paramount to a successful lesson. In the case of textbooks, even where books have been designed in-country by local educators, the content can still be very remote from the experiences of the students. This is certainly true of Vietnam where high school texts contain themes such as going on holiday in Blackpool, riverboats on the Mississippi river in the days of Mark Twain, and attending a performance of "Othello" in London. Moreover, the aim in teaching these texts, which may be focussed only on getting students to pass exams and is fully reliant on such factors as the competence of the teacher, is quite different from an ESL programme with its focus on providing the learner with communication skills to function in an English speaking environment. In the former, there may be no oral component whatsoever. Burnaby & Sun (1989) made the point that the communicative approach was considered useful, among Chinese learners of English, only for those who were going to study overseas.

Despite the problems associated with INSET, and despite what Phillipson (1992) called the "linguistic imperialism" of the English language teaching industry, it would appear that the demand for teachers of English and teacher educators is hardly about to disappear, evidenced by the number of advertisements in

newspapers and on the world-wide web for jobs with development agencies and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). These positions are often tied to donor country foreign aid policies so the political ramifications of an INSET project failure can be far-reaching. This being the case then, it is important not to offer a panacea for the problems associated with English language education. Rather, it is important to identify features of the local culture that should be included in the design of the in-service programme so it is relevant to the context in which it will be used.

#### 2.4.2 DEEP ACTION

Superficially at least, the task of developing these culturally appropriate methodologies would seem, as stated above, a matter of consulting local education authorities, the teachers themselves, observing some classes and gathering quantitative data. However, to follow such a course risks missing essential information by addressing only the surface features of the situation. There are many underlying issues that are not always visible to the foreign researcher and which, if not identified, may give a distorted picture of the true situation. The context of this study was no exception and it is probably no exaggeration to say that there were other agendas in operation besides that which was officially sanctioned. However, Vietnam is not alone in this respect as projects undertaken by Coleman (1992) and Holliday (1992) demonstrate. In both cases, the project objectives were not achieved and anticipated outcomes were far removed from the official projections, chiefly because the projects had failed to find out about the real world of the participants and the institutions in which they worked. One of the principal factors in this mismatch between the planned course of a project and the actual performance was what Holliday (1994, p. 130) called the “informal order” that existed in the institutions involved. This informal order was, *unofficial, non-professional, practical, what actually happens, and motivated by unsatisfactory institutional and physical conditions.*

Such occurrences have been common in Vietnam with the numbers of participants said to be attending seminars differing markedly from the numbers originally

advised, education advisers failing to turn up to assist ex-expatriate teachers in observations because they would not get paid if a foreigner was present, and teachers failing to teach all the prescribed school syllabus in regular class time making it necessary for students to pay to attend “extra” classes run by the same teachers at night.

Holliday (1994, p. 129) also refers to the “micro-politics” of the local culture which he described as “the internal politics of schools and departments”. In other words, the consciously held hidden agendas and political aspirations of administrators and teachers alike. Again the Vietnamese environment has provided examples: unscheduled observations of teachers who were not part of the in-service programme because their school had to have their turn, and, sudden cancellation of in-service courses because of internal political wrangles. This is an extremely bewildering context in which to work, made more so by an outsider’s unfamiliarity with what really goes on in the host culture.

These two elements of a development project educational environment, informal orders, and micro-politics constitute part of what Holliday calls “deep action”, a feature that is often invisible to the expatriate teacher.

### **2.4.3 THE TEACHER EDUCATOR**

The choice of people, therefore, to run the in-service programme is crucial. Recent practice has been to use native-speaker educators as they come with the aid and development package but they may also bring with them practices and beliefs that are very alien to the environment in which they are working:

... because of their unfamiliarity with the cognitive system of the host culture, strangers frequently find the ‘mentality’ of the people difficult to comprehend. Their difficulty stems from the fact that, during the initial phases of acculturation, their perception of the host environment is relatively simple. Gross stereotypes are salient in the strangers’ perception of unfamiliar cultural patterns (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 210).

Examples of cultural misunderstandings are easy to find but what is not so easy is finding a way to work with colleagues whose priorities and beliefs may be vastly different from the “foreign” teacher educator. This can be countered by what Gudykunst & Kim call “cultural learning” which enables strangers to recognise their cognitive structures as distinct from those of the host culture and to gradually increase their ability in perspective taking and co-orientation relation with members of the host society (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). However, this solution would obviously take time and in fact may be quite unrealistic in economic terms. An alternative is suggested by Alptekin & Alptekin (1984) who point out that local teachers, who are successful bilinguals, provide a better model of what students should aim for than the usual native speaker teacher of English who might only speak the one language. Support is given by Phillipson (1992) who argues that:

It is therefore arguable, as a general principle, that non-native teachers may in fact be better qualified than native speakers, if they have gone through the laborious process of acquiring English as a second language and if they have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners (Phillipson, 1992, p. 195).

In many foreign language environments however, the native speaker often has “expert” status which the local teacher does not.

#### **2.4.4 WHAT TEACHERS BRING TO AN INSET COURSE**

Classroom teachers, whether they are Vietnamese or any other nationality, have normally had many years of contact with teachers even before they enter the classroom as teachers themselves. They have filled the role of students where the interaction, while it has not been passive, has not been quite a true apprenticeship either as they have not been part of the decision making process carried out by the teacher nor have they played any part in evaluations. It is what Lortie (1975) calls an “apprenticeship of observation”. During pre-service education, student teachers in Qui Nhon face much the same process having to master language skills and commit theory to memory. Practical advice on methodology is limited. Learning

about teaching is gained through being a student so the experience is “intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical” (Lortie, 1975, p. 62). This then becomes embedded in the students’ subconscious and manifests itself later in teacher classroom practice as “tried and true” methods for teaching language. Lortie (1995) defines the process thus:

It is more a matter of imitation, which, being generalized across individuals becomes tradition. It is a particularly powerful influence which transcends generations, but the conditions of transfer do not favour informed criticism, attention to specifics, or explicit rules of assessment (Lortie, 1975, p.63).

In other words, there is little attempt to analyse teaching practice or to understand the pedagogical purpose behind many of the techniques that are used. Teachers, on the whole, teach as they were taught.

#### **2.4.5 THE EFFECTS OF AN INSET PROGRAMME**

What then do teachers get from an in-service programme? For many it is a chance to escape from their daily routine, meet old and new friends and colleagues, and catch up with the latest ideas in language teaching. For some though, it can be an unwelcome obligation. Saraswathi (1991) reports that in India many teachers feel affronted by the compulsion to attend, considering it a waste of time and an insult to their professionalism.

Aside from the social functions that in-service education programmes fulfil, and if cynicism is permitted, the good public relations that is generated for the sponsoring organisation, the uptake by teachers, of ideas and methods used on the course can vary immensely and over the long term may have little effect. In a short in-service course that he ran in Indonesia, Lamb (1995) found that uptake of information and new ideas, in most cases, had been forgotten by teachers. Where uptake had occurred, it was minimal and had been reinterpreted to fit teachers’ existing teaching schemata in a way that had not been anticipated by the course tutor. This is evident in the Vietnamese context where the concept of pairwork

appears to have taken on a quite different meaning from that which was intended. Lamb also found that usual classroom activities were often re-labelled with terms from the course while other techniques were transferred into the teachers' existing practice simply because they worked well and did not challenge any of the teachers' established beliefs or practices. As a result, Lamb (1995, p. 79) recommends that "INSET courses should begin with awareness-raising activities, where participants confront their own routine practice and the values it is intended to serve". Thus it is argued that once teachers are able to articulate and analyse their own thoughts they are more likely to be able to accommodate new ideas.

The final word in this section comes from Pennington (1996) who states that teachers will not "take on board" anything they do not want to, a sentiment that surely can be applied to education anywhere in the world and not just to the INSET culture:

Attempts to influence behaviour will have an impact only in areas where the input is valued and salient to the individual and where it is congruent with and interpretable within the teacher's own world of thoughts and action (Pennington, 1996, p. 340).

## **2.5 TRANSFER**

Recommending that teachers confront their own practices as was done near the end of the previous section, implies that teachers must analyse the process of teaching, a concept that may not be familiar to Vietnamese teachers. Ellis (1996) makes the same point about culturally inappropriate approaches to teacher education in his investigation into the appropriateness of communicative language teaching methodology in the Vietnamese context. This highlights one of the main underlying challenges that faces the teacher educator in Vietnam and that is, as it is in many EFL contexts, the extent to which current Western language teaching methodology is transferable into a non-Western environment. The introduction of this methodology, which varies markedly from that practised in the host culture in its underlying pedagogical principles and classroom techniques, may have far

reaching implications within the educational context and as Holliday (1994, p. 102) suggests “may well have a complex ripple effect throughout the whole host ecology of cultures”. Potentially as equally harmful is the situation where current language teaching methods are introduced without sufficient understanding of the “rationale of the method or technique being used or its application in a particular context” (Wallace, 1991, p. 54).

Nixon (1994, p. 317) in her research on Vietnamese English language teachers studying for TESOL qualifications in Australia notes that an “inquiry into the transfer of techniques and ideas acquired in host countries such as Australia to the home classroom” is still needed, indicating that a big gap still exists in understanding how and why ideas do or do not transfer across cultures. It is natural to expect that the people using new ideas and techniques should first understand the rationale behind what they are using. Then the conditions for transfer are more favourable. Therefore, what is transfer and how do teachers, teacher trainers, and teacher educators facilitate the process?

Freeman (1994, p. 14), in looking at the nature of transfer, suggests that the fundamental idea is flawed. He argues that most teacher education today is still based on a behavioural view of transfer, that is, the teachers learn a specific response to a situation which is moderated by time and place and which he maintains makes no real difference to classroom teaching. Instead, he considers transfer as “transferring allegiance from one set of meanings to another”. To do this, however, teachers need a professional language or discourse with which to move beyond their “unanalysed conceptions of practice” and into more professional realms where they are able to share a growing understanding of their own practices. This in turn would give them greater control in determining their future direction. As with many innovations though, Freeman (1994, p. 15) warns that unless support or mentoring is provided for teachers as they develop these new allegiances, “the status-quo will inevitably take over”. The reality is that in the world of INSET, development, and aid, continuing support can often be

erratic, contingent as it is upon external providers and the foreign aid policies of their respective governments.

## 2.6 CHANGE AND INNOVATION

As was noted in 2.4.1, one of the aims of teacher development is to equip the teacher for change, which may or may not happen immediately. This delayed action can be partly attributed to the fact that change is intimately linked to reflection, where teachers must first develop an awareness of their own practices, before seeing a need for change. According to Bailey (1992), change can be viewed both positively and negatively and may be random or planned. For Lamb (1995), the change was essentially negative resulting in “assimilation” where processing was superficial and behaviour stayed the same, albeit in a slightly altered form.

Alternatively, if enough deep processing occurs, new ideas or techniques are more likely to “force fundamental readjustments in thinking - through the process of engagement” (Lamb, 1995, p. 80). Lamb’s position parallels Bailey’s definition of innovation. Bailey sees innovation as fundamentally different from change, because innovation implies an improvement in an existing situation. Nicholls (cited in Bailey, 1992) also views innovation as improvement:

... an idea, object or practice perceived as new by an individual or individuals, which is intended to bring about improvement in relation to desired objectives, which is fundamental in nature, and which is planned and deliberate (Nicholls, cited in Bailey, 1992, p. 257).

*Planned* and *deliberate* are the key words here as they suggest a conscious decision to implement an idea or action.

In contrast and as noted already, change may result in a negative outcome. Negative evidence of change can, in fact, be seen in a number of Vietnamese classrooms where teachers, encouraged to use visual aids have indeed done so, for

example, hanging up wall charts of grammar exercises copied word for word from the prescribed texts (observation notes, Tay Son and Tuy Phuoc districts).

The impetus for innovation often arises from dissatisfaction with the status quo. However, first there must be a reasonable degree of concordance between the teacher and the context in which s/he works. According to Bailey (1992), this includes deciding, whether the innovation can actually be introduced, whether it fits the teacher's personal philosophy, and whether it is compatible with student needs. In the context of this research, student needs may have less to do with personal inclinations than with a general need to adhere to a structural syllabus based on passing an exam.

As a prerequisite to making these informed decisions, Larsen-Freeman (cited in Bailey, 1992) argues that a teacher needs to have the following attributes:

- awareness
- a positive open attitude
- transformation/accumulation of knowledge
- skills development

However, change can occur even without reflection increasing the potential for formulaic teaching as Wallace (1991) warns:

All too often, teachers attempt an approach or technique which has been reduced to a formula, with obviously no understanding of the rationale or technique being used or its rationale in a particular context. The teacher has not been given, or has not taken the opportunity to think the thing through, and to think it through in terms of her own context (Wallace, 1991, p. 54).

Such an unthinking application of new ideas would likely be unsustainable over the long term as teachers saw little reason for the change. If change did occur though, it might have taken on aspects that the course supervisor had not anticipated. Lamb (1995) identified seven ways that participants on an in-service

course in Indonesia reacted to the ideas that he had presented. Five of these ways involved some measure of change of which all but one were unanticipated and, from his point of view, negative.

## **2.7 REFLECTION AS A TOOL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Existing models of teacher education have viewed the relationship between the teacher educator and the pre-service/in-service teacher as essentially one-way. The apprenticeship model assumed (and still assumes in many contexts) that knowledge is fixed and therefore can be passed down from master to pupil. The applied science model while advocating a less rigid relationship between the teacher educator and teachers still sees teaching as hierarchically driven. Empirically derived knowledge about teaching is passed from experts to the trainee or the in-service teacher. Schon (1991) notes the limitations of the approach and points towards a more heuristic method of teacher education:

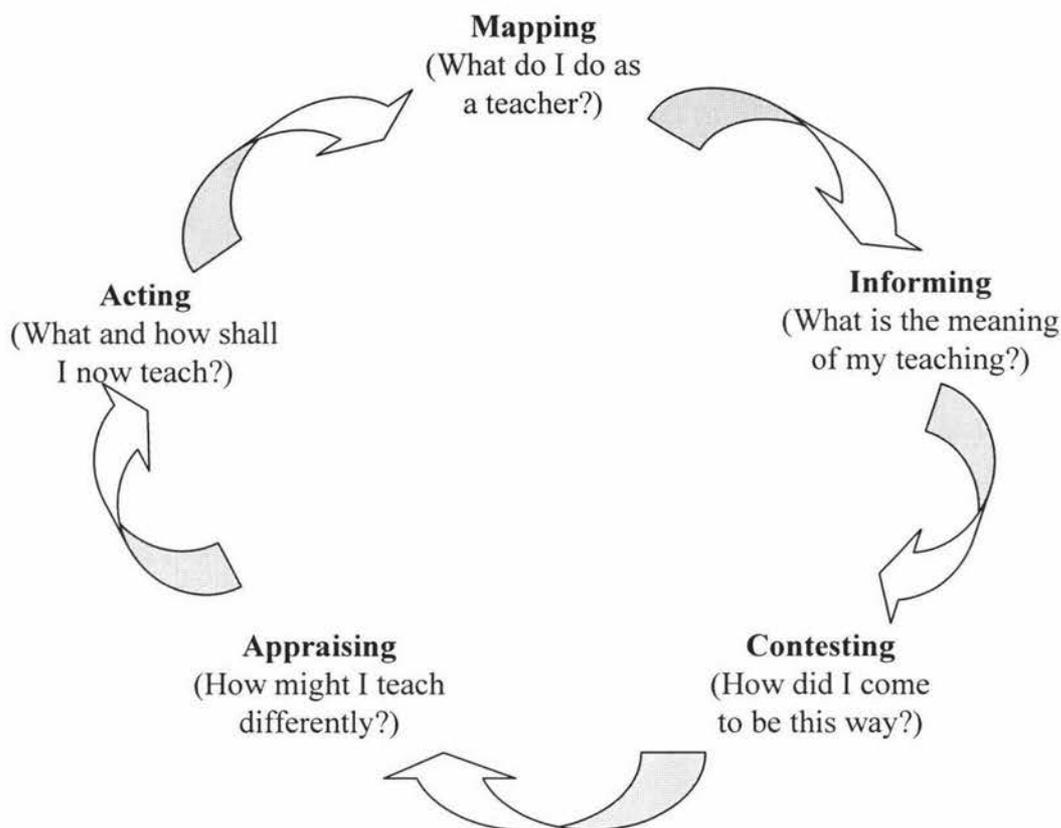
A conflict of ends cannot be resolved by the use of techniques derived from applied research. It is rather through the non-technical process of framing the problematic situation that we may organise and clarify both ends to be achieved and the possible means of achieving them (Schon, 1991, p. 41).

Though written from a sociologist's viewpoint, the parallels with classroom practice are clear. By reflecting on pedagogical practices, teachers not only focus on the end product but on the process by which they get there. More importantly though, a reflective approach recognises a more equitable distribution of knowledge and experience among the participants, thus validating contributions from the classroom teacher.

Why then is a reflective model of teacher development preferable to alternatives such as the apprenticeship model or the scientific model? Bartlett (1990, p. 205) highlights the advantages of the reflective approach by pointing out that teachers are encouraged to examine their own practices and to focus on the "what" and "why" of teaching as "part of a broader educational purpose", rather than staying

within the confines of the “instructional techniques” or the “how to” of teaching. This develops a deeper understanding of classroom interaction and the influence that external factors may have on this interaction which in turn allows teachers to take more control of their own professional development. Moreover, it reduced the likelihood of tissue rejection (see 2.4.1). The reflective model of teacher development as explained by Wallace (1991), also assumes that the person who comes to an education and development programme, brings with her/him not only skills, but a set of constructs, beliefs, attitudes, and ideas on which s/he makes professional decisions. These constructs have developed both in practice as a teacher, and during years of an apprenticeship of observation (see 2.4.4). However, such an extensive background of experience does not imply that teachers have actually developed professionally. It is only by engaging these experiences through critical reflection that teachers can progress.

Although drawing on a very limited number of observations, Jarvis (1992) reported that those teachers who had been able to take these reflective steps seemed to be able to take more responsibility for changing their classroom teaching practice although they had faced several problems in reaching their goal. Teachers had tended to list what they had done in class, had provided general summaries, had attempted to please the teacher educator or had introduced an element of competitiveness into their thoughts. This is consistent with both Calderhead & Gates (1993) who maintain that becoming reflective may indeed be a developmental process where the teachers start by describing classroom events and move on, and Bartlett (1990), who proposes a cycle of reflectivity, as seen in Figure 1. This is made up of elements through which a teacher has to pass. Unlike Calderhead & Gates however, the process is not a sequential one and teachers can pass through the stages of the cycle in any order.



**Figure 1: Bartlett's (1990) Model of the Elements of a Cycle for the Process of Reflective Teaching<sup>1</sup>**

The process of reflection, however, is more than just thinking about what happens in the classroom. It connects thought to action and places the teacher in a relationship with society. Such a relationship is essential if teachers are to develop their critical faculties. Calderhead & Gates (1993) point out that action research studies, which include a reflective component, are often very limiting as teachers fail to extend their own thinking or interact with a public discourse. Several studies (Ho & Richards, 1993; Bartlett, 1990; Jarvis, 1992) have shown initial attempts at diary writing may not be much more than a description of classroom events.

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<sup>1</sup> This is adapted from *Second language teacher education* (p. 209), J. C. Richards & D. Nunan, 1990, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This has led Ho & Richards (1993) to recommend some pre-training before asking teachers to participate in reflective writing. Bartlett (1990) argues that a descriptive stage is an integral part of the reflective cycle in that it serves as a consciousness-raising exercise to the deeper level activity of exploring the principles underlying the teachers' own teaching. This is given empirical support in a study carried out by Jarvis (1992) which showed that once they had moved beyond the stage of describing classroom events, teachers' diary writings often tended to show more depth of processing. Jarvis classifies these writings using categories initially developed by Huberman. The categories are:

- solving problems
- seeing new teaching ideas
- legitimising own practice (re-framing the familiar, while confirming current practice)

Lynch (1990) provides further support for encouraging teachers to reflect on their own teaching as he believes that by doing so, teachers will raise their awareness of why certain courses of action are taken in preference to others. Observers and researchers "cannot know what the motivation is for particular classroom behaviours" (Lynch, 1990, p. 125), so teachers are wise to find out for themselves. However, this has limitations as well, because there is a distance between the time at which an event occurs and the time at which it is recorded. This lapse may cause distortions in the teachers' perceptions of what actually happened.

Generally, a reflective approach to teacher education has been seen as highly beneficial to both teachers and teacher educators in that it stresses the importance of continuing professional growth in a rapidly developing world. However, Valli (1993) warns against getting too concerned with the process of reflection, advocating instead that the move should be towards "what" was reflected on. If this is not done, she argues, then programmes risk becoming too technical, by focussing on "instrumental means". She also draws attention to the lack of emphasis placed on intuition and emotion in programmes promoting reflective

teaching and suggests that this is due to a Western cultural tradition that “stresses objectivity and emotional detachment” (Valli, 1993, p. 19). However, making no attempt to foster reflective attitudes, is of equal concern. Adopting a reflective approach to teaching is generally viewed as making a long term commitment to personal and professional development.

### **2.7.1 DIARIES AS A TOOL FOR REFLECTION**

Having examined the characteristics of reflection, this review now turns to look at how teachers are helped to develop reflection in their teaching. Briefly, the main strategies currently used are journal keeping, action research and ethnographic studies. Because this piece of research has used diaries as the focus of the study, their value as a reflective tool will be discussed below. Action research and ethnographic studies will be mentioned only as they relate to the use of diaries.

Using diaries as a tool for developing reflectivity in teachers is well documented (Murphy-O’Dwyer, 1985; Bailey, 1990; Brock, Yu & Wong, 1992; Ho & Richards, 1993; Knowles, 1993). Although there has been some criticism over the “softness” of the data gathered from this source, according to Murphy-O’Dwyer (1985) diaries are now generally accepted as a legitimate form of data with triangulation achievable once two or more diaries are analysed. Brock, Yu & Wong (1992) see the following benefits accruing from the use of diaries in teacher education:

- an effective means of identifying variables that are important to individual teachers and learners
- they serve as a means of generating questions and hypotheses about teaching and learning processes
- they enhance awareness about the way a teacher teaches and a student learns
- they are an excellent tool for reflection
- they are simple to conduct
- they provide a first-hand account of teaching and learning experiences

- they are the most natural form of classroom research in that no formal correlations are tested and no outside observer enters the classroom dynamic
- they provide an on-going record of classroom events and teacher and learner reflections
- they enable the researcher to relate classroom events and examine trends from the diaries
- they promote the development of reflective teaching

Calderhead & Gates (1993) point out that while diaries are effective at increasing teachers' awareness of their own practice and raising questions about practice at a technical level, they fail to increase awareness of moral, ethical and political contexts. However in some environments, the Vietnamese one being a case in point, raising awareness of ethical and political contexts may not be a desirable goal given that the wish to find a meaning for everything reflects Western values. This contrasting world view is summarised neatly by Clift (cited in Valli, 1993, p. 19) who sees reflection as a particularly Western concept where the emphasis is on "analysis and problem-solving as opposed to negotiation, contemplation or enlightenment". What this Western view does not acknowledge is the subduing effect that a political system built on ideologies which do not encourage free expression may have on a teacher's willingness to express personal opinions.

Another factor that has made an impact on the quality of reflectivity in diaries is, as Kwo (1996) reported, the amount of background experience that a teacher brings to her/his reflection. The degree of comprehension of classroom events varies noticeably between novice and experienced teachers with the latter having a much richer perception of classroom events. That young, inexperienced and less than confident teachers need guidance as they develop their skills base and move towards a new understanding of their teaching would appear to be an obvious requirement for any teacher development programme. However, the way in which this guidance should be provided and maintained is not quite so straightforward hence the number of models that have appeared over the years, each based upon

different theories of learning. The next section looks at one model in particular, as it is felt that this has more relevance to the Vietnamese teacher than other models.

## 2.8 MENTORING

Mentoring at first sight may seem to contradict the notion of teacher development which aims to encourage independent thinking and freedom of action. However, in a modern context the mentor takes on a role as facilitator. Calderhead & Gates (1993) see the mentor as one who has:

... mastery of a public language for describing practice and the learning of teachers, their ability to engage in constructive dialogue with teachers about their work, to help teachers take charge of their own learning and their willingness to withdraw their support at appropriate times so that teachers develop their own independence (Calderhead & Gates, 1993, p. 9).

There are, in fact, a number of models of mentoring, among which are included the apprenticeship model, the competency based model, and those based on the reflective practitioner ideal. Each focusses primarily on the pre-service and novice teacher. However, elements of these models are suitable for later stages of professional development, particularly in the Vietnamese context where student teachers may have only taught one or two classes during a month long teaching practice immediately prior to their graduation and so have almost no practical experience before they begin their careers.

An aspect of mentoring that could be used to remedy this shortfall in practical experience, and one that is particularly appropriate for the Vietnamese context is that of modelling. Modelling has been used to demonstrate “in concrete terms of what it means to achieve ... and also the demonstration of some ways in which these things can be achieved” (MacIntyre, cited in Brooks & Sikes, 1997 p. 19). Moreover, the approach has the potential to provide a less traumatic transition from traditional styles of teaching to teaching in a more communicative way, because it shares some features of the traditional transmission style of teaching so common in Vietnamese classrooms. For example, mentoring not only involves a

facilitating role for the mentor but also, at times, a role as a transmitter of knowledge and skills. This relationship then, tacitly acknowledges a Vietnamese world view in its recognition of Eastern norms of role relationships where “the Vietnamese employee considers his employer as his mentor” (Liem, cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 72). In this study, the employee is the in-service teacher. However, this limited dependency stage is only a transitory one for ultimately “the students [teachers] must take ownership of the new knowledge, skills and concepts, and by relating them to their own experiences and expressing them in their own terms they will make the learning more meaningful” (Ausubel, cited in Brooks & Sikes, 1997).

## 2.9 SUMMARY

This review began by examining the wider South-East Asian education context and the commitment that had been made to language teacher education and development. A brief overview was then provided of the Vietnamese education context with comments on some of the influences, social, cultural and political, that have made an impact on it. The focus moved to a number of pedagogical issues that should be considered when undertaking any language teacher development programme in Vietnam. INSET was the first area to be examined and included brief discussions on teacher training as opposed to teacher development, informal orders within a host institution, the teacher educator, what teachers bring to an in-service programme and the possible effects of in-service education.

The review then briefly looked at what transfers and how transfer is effected, followed by a discussion on change and innovation. The reflective model of teacher education was put forward as an appropriate model for the current study and the use of diaries to facilitate the reflective process was evaluated. The section concluded with a brief look at the role of a mentor in the reflective process.

The ground has now been prepared for a reconsideration of the original research problem with the goal of formulating a specific set of research questions. These will appear in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3            SETTING THE SCENE**

### **3.1    OVERVIEW**

The chapter begins with an outline of the theoretical framework for the study and then presents the research questions. This is followed by an explanation of the research design with a description of the participants and the setting from which they were drawn. The chapter then goes on to detail the data collection techniques and instrumentation that was used and how these were administered. A brief review of data analysis procedures follows. The last section in the chapter deals with threats to reliability and validity and the resulting limitations in the generalisability of the results. A summary of the salient methodological points concludes the chapter.

### **3.2    THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY**

The grounded approach to data analysis to some extent lessens the need to establish an a priori theoretical framework from which to explore the relationships between the concepts and constructs underpinning the study as the emerging categories can not be predicted in advance. However, as Woods (1996, p. 42) notes in his discussion on the validity of a grounded approach, “implicit a priori assumptions on the part of the analyst already exist”. It is therefore, desirable to identify these assumptions and the theoretical constructs that underpin them and from this, to highlight the influence they have had on the design of the research questions.

The first assumption that was made was that both myself and the teachers were in the business of “the learning and teaching of language teaching” (Freeman, 1989, p. 28). Although this may seem a very obvious point to make Freeman argues that there is neither a theoretical basis nor a meta-language that truly belongs to language teaching. He goes on to add that a teacher:

... must have a clear definition of language teaching as the subject matter of language teaching education in order to develop a coherent view of the overall process of language teacher education and to suggest appropriate strategies for carrying out that process (Freeman, 1989, p 28).

The Binh Dinh education environment lacked this coherent view of language teacher education, and as a consequence, a discourse had not evolved specific to the local context which allowed teachers to describe their experiences. Therefore, my first assumption was compromised by the lack of a common professional discourse with my colleagues. Furthermore I was a “stranger” facing a difficult transition from a Western to an Asian context. This can and did lead to words and events being interpreted in different ways. It was this gap in understanding one another and one another’s expectations that this research has attempted to redress.

In addition, the current study subscribes to the assumption that “what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe, and that teacher knowledge and “teacher thinking” provide the underlying framework or schema which guides the teacher’s classroom actions” (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p.29). Lynch (1989) cited in the same article, calls these the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of language teaching. However, the knowledge and beliefs that guide a teacher’s actions may not necessarily be part of a teacher’s conscious decision making process: rather it might be that the action has been guided by years of doing something the same way until the reason it is done is forgotten. Therefore, this research also assumes that for teachers to change and develop, an awareness is needed of knowledge, skills and attitude (Freeman, 1989).

### 3.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do Vietnamese teachers of English examine their teaching practices as revealed through a content analysis and an assessment of critical reflectivity of diary writings?
2. How do Vietnamese teachers of English appraise the content and methods of in-service education?
3. What do Vietnamese teachers of English identify as the outcomes of in-service education?

### 3.4 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A longitudinal approach with ethnographic elements was chosen to conduct this study for the following reasons. Firstly, such an approach was naturalistic which meant that the unique circumstances of the setting and the researcher could be included as variables in the study. Secondly, the approach belonged under the general umbrella of what Nunan (1992) calls the “exploratory-interpretive” paradigm of research tradition where non-experimental methods of data collection, qualitative data and interpretive data analysis were compatible with the political and social environment in which the study took place. However, the paradigm was not pure exploratory-interpretive and could be better termed exploratory-interpretive-statistical as some qualitative data was collected and analysed statistically, then quantified to identify trends. Thirdly, the longitudinal aspect allowed me to collect a greater range and amount of data reducing the possibility of misanalysis that using one type of data obtained at a moment in time might have produced. It also lessened the likelihood of novelty responses from teachers when faced with the task for the first time and furthermore, allowed me to give them feedback on their initial efforts where there may have been some

confusion over what was required. Essentially however, the research followed ethnographic guidelines, matching the characteristics set out by Nunan (1992, p. 55) and listed below:

- ethnography involves the study of the culture/characteristics of a group in real world rather than laboratory conditions
- the researcher makes no attempt to isolate or manipulate the phenomena under investigation
- insights and generalisations emerge from close contact with the data rather than from a theory of language learning and use

This research subscribed to the strong view of ethnography where the data that emerged was seen as the basis to constructing a theoretical model for future in-service teacher education. To avoid the possibility of becoming a purely descriptive study the research followed the principles set out by Watson-Gegeo & Ulichny (cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 57) which included “adopting a grounded approach to the data”, “the use of a thick explanation” and “analysing, interpreting and explaining the data”. A grounded approach adheres to the view that theory is grounded in the data so uses the data as a departure point from which the theory is derived. Because in grounded theory the data is naturalistic, this approach fitted in well with the circumstances of this research. A thick explanation realises “the importance of taking into account all of the factors which may have an effect on the phenomenon under investigation” (Nunan, 1992, p. 58).

The choice of a longitudinal-ethnographic research paradigm was influenced by a number of factors. Although there is a substantial amount of literature documenting Asian learning and teaching preferences, the research on Vietnamese teachers of English, their expectations and classroom practices has been very limited. Nixon (1994) had worked with Vietnamese teachers involved in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) courses in Australia and Ellis (1994) had based his study on interviews with Australian teacher informants



A further factor influencing the decision to keep the study naturalistic was the uncertainty of obtaining control groups at regular times and locations if a more controlled classroom study was undertaken. My previous experience had engendered a certain degree of uncertainty over assurances of small groups, help with teaching material preparation, availability of suitable rooms and other minor logistical details. This, coupled with unforeseen demands on participating teachers' time made scheduling regular sessions with teachers difficult.

### **3.4.1 SETTING AND POPULATION**

Binh Dinh province in central Vietnam, with a population of over two million was the location for this study. As the teacher educator and researcher I was employed by the Binh Dinh Department of Education as an adviser to the Director and was based in Qui Nhon, the principal city of the province. Part of my responsibility was to set up and run in-service teacher education programmes for junior and senior high school teachers throughout the province. The assignment covered a period of two years but this study focussed on:

- an in-service programme which took place from October to December 1997
- the assessment that teachers made of this
- a post-course commentary which was conducted in April 1998

Where necessary, data was drawn from other sources, being observation notes, and interviews conducted during my visits to both city and district high schools throughout the two years.

There are 109 high schools in Binh Dinh province (verbally reported 1996 figures) of which 80 are junior high schools teaching students from years six to nine, and 29 are senior high schools teaching students from years ten to twelve. The senior schools include schools teaching both the three year English programme and schools teaching the seven year English programme. The three year programme is taught in semi-state schools where students, who have failed to gain admission to the government run schools, must pay part of the cost of tuition. The government-

run schools, which teach the more academic seven year English programme, have senior pupils who have passed an entrance examination to be there.

The province comprises ten districts and the city of Qui Nhon. The table below sets out the districts and the number of English language teachers working within these. It also shows the number of teachers from each district who attended the in-service programme. The figures for teachers in high schools are based on 1996 reports. No official school roll numbers were available at the time the data was collected.

**Table 1: Distribution by District of High School Teachers in Binh Dinh Province and of Seminar Participants**

District	Junior high school teachers	Senior high school teachers	Seminar participants
Hoai An	6	5	1
Hoai Nhon	33	10	2
Phu My	30	9	1
Phu Cat	15	8	2
Tay Son	13	7	2
An Nhon	28	14	1
Tuy Phuoc	35	7	2
Vinh Thanh	1	0	0
Van Canh	0	1	0
An Lao	1	1	0
Qui Nhon	54	24	4
Total	216	86	15

### 3.4.2 THE PARTICIPANTS

Seven junior high school teachers and eight senior high school teachers were originally chosen from around Binh Dinh province using the following criteria as a basis for selection:

- a high level of English
- the quality of their compulsory demonstration lessons during earlier summer seminars

- a high level of motivation to develop their classroom teaching

The compulsory demonstration lessons had been a component of a two day workshop, for all high school teachers in the province, organised by the Department of Education during the school holidays and run by myself and another New Zealand teacher working at the Qui Nhon Teachers' College. As part of that programme the teachers had been asked to prepare and demonstrate a lead-in to a grammar lesson. We assessed the teachers on their efforts, gave them a grading as required by the Department, and then wrote reports which were sent to the teachers. Consequently, it was decided that teachers who had demonstrated the above three characteristics in the workshop sessions would make suitable members for a small team of teachers who were, it was envisaged, to become teacher educators themselves after a period of in-service instruction. The final composition of the groups was in fact adjusted by the local Department of Education to ensure a wider geographic spread of participants. This distribution is shown in Table 1. The change in the composition of the group did mean that three or four of the teachers had some trouble in following the seminar presentations. The difficulty was largely overcome when the other teachers translated the work that these few did not understand.

The one-day seminars took place on alternate weeks for each group. Both groups of teachers attended the equivalent of four sessions over a two and a half month period. The senior teachers had one of their seminars extended to two days due to the elimination of their last one day session. This change was made necessary by the proximity of the Tet (lunar new year) season.

Brief mention should be made here of the participants' writing. The standard varied somewhat among the diary entries, assessments and commentaries that were received. As this is a naturalistic study I have made no attempt to put the teachers' contributions into grammatically correct English. Their intentions are clear and, as I have stated in the introduction, this is their story. Where there is the

possibility of ambiguity or no referent is given, I have inserted a word or two in square brackets.

### 3.4.3 DEMOGRAPHICS

Whether it was planned or not, there was quite a distinct demographic difference between the two groups. Apart from the obvious difference in class levels taught, the two other major contrasts were the ages and the amount of teaching experience among the members of the respective groups. The seven junior high school teachers had an average age of 42 years whereas the eight senior teachers had an average age of 27 years. Teaching experience among junior high school teachers totalled 105 years and among senior high school teachers, 31 years. The ratio of males to females was fairly even at seven men to eight women: four of the men at junior high school level and three at senior high school level.

The other factor that was relevant here was that five of the senior high school teachers had been former students of mine in 1992/93, and successive native speaker teachers up until 1996, while studying at the Qui Nhon Teachers' College. Therefore, they had received all their speaking and listening instruction in English and had been exposed to less traditional models of teaching. Within the group of 15 teachers, all but one had previously attended seminars which I had run during my four years in Qui Nhon. As a consequence, I already knew most of the teachers reasonably well. Table 2 summarises the biographical information of the teachers involved in this study.

**Table 2: Participating Teachers' Biographical Data**

Sex	Age	School Location	School Level	English language teaching Experience	Other Schools	No. of previous in-service courses
F	24	Qui Nhon	senior	2	no	1
F	35	An Nhon	senior	12	no	3
M	26	Phu Cat	senior	3	no	not sure
F	25	Tuy Phuoc	senior	3	no	4
M	26	Tay Son	senior	3	no	not sure
F	30	Qui Nhon	senior	3	no	4
M	25	Hoai Nhon	Senior/junior	2	no	none
F	25	Qui Nhon	Senior/junior	3	no	3
M	43	Phu My	junior	15	no	not sure
F	44	Tay Son	junior	22	no	4
F	48	Qui Nhon	junior	24	no	<8
M	43	Hoai An	junior	>20	no	3
M	33	Phu Cat	junior	9	no	not sure
M	45	Tuy Phuoc	junior	15	no	5
F	40	Hoai Nhon	junior	not indicated	no	2

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.5.1 DATA COLLECTION

The study of teacher beliefs and cognitive processes, or the affective and cognitive dimensions, are what Freeman (1996, p. 366) defines as second order research where the focus is on examining “participants perceptions of phenomena in the world ... the aim is to uncover and to document these understandings, and not the phenomena themselves”.

For this study to be able to document teachers' understandings of, and reactions to the in-service teacher education the data was divided into primary, secondary and peripheral sources to reflect the contribution each group made to the findings of the study. Table 3 illustrates the classification of the data sources.

**Table 3: An Overview of Data Sources**

Type	Source
<b>Primary Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diaries</li> <li>• Appraisal of training input</li> <li>• Post course commentary</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher expectations survey</li> <li>• Teacher beliefs questionnaire</li> <li>• Student questionnaire</li> </ul>
<b>Peripheral Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation/field notes</li> <li>• Audio diary of teacher educator</li> <li>• Teacher interviews</li> <li>• School syllabus</li> <li>• Prescribed textbooks</li> </ul>

Primary data was collected, quantified where appropriate, analysed in depth and used to identify both factors that were important to teachers and the expectations that underlay those factors. The time spent examining this data was considerably more than that spent on secondary sources which reflects its position as the focus of the research. The secondary data was also analysed and, in the case of the teacher beliefs questionnaire and the student questionnaire, results were quantified. However, as it was beyond the scope of this study to examine teachers' underlying beliefs and the opinions of students, the data was used primarily to add depth to the primary data results. The teacher expectations survey provided more in the way of naturalistic data but there was too little written to be able to discern any patterns, so again it was used to enrich the primary data. The peripheral data was also used to add depth to the results but unlike the secondary data it had only

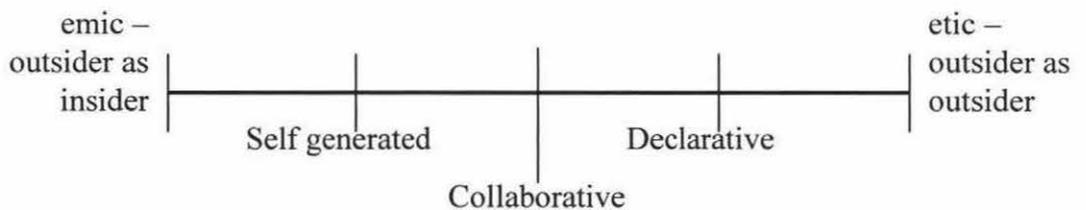
been subjected to limited analysis, particularly in the case of the observation notes and audio diary, being as they were subjective and impressionistic.

Table 4, based on a model developed by Freeman (1996), provides an overview of the methodological process used for the primary data. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the methodological process used for secondary and peripheral data.

**Table 4: Collection and Processing of Primary Data<sup>2</sup>**

Source	Diaries	Assessment	Commentary
No. Of Subjects	14	11	9
Gathering	Ex-post facto data	Etic	Etic
Stance	Declarative	Declarative	Declarative
Process	Iterative	Iterative	Iterative
Category	Grounded	Guided/grounded	Guided
Time Collected	During and after the in-service seminars	Within two weeks of the completion of the in-service programme	Approximately four months after the completion of the programme
Research Questions Addressed	1	2	3

The way the data was gathered in this study is important to stress from the beginning as it defines the relationship between myself and the participants. Freeman uses an *emic* - *etic* distinction to highlight this relationship which is shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Sources of Data and How They are Gathered<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *Teacher learning in language teaching* (p. 368), D. Freeman & J.C. Richards (Eds.), 1996, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Diary studies, as used in this study, fell towards the etic end of the continuum as I took no part in the creation of the data. Surveys and questionnaires also fell at the same end of the continuum. Conversely the audio diaries were emic because they were a record of my personal reactions and thoughts and were used to add depth to the primary sources.

Time is another factor which has an impact on data collection and which, if not made explicit, can affect triangulation. Diaries written some time after the event form what Freeman (1996) calls “ex post facto” data. There are limitations to this form of data collection in that it does not always provide a complete picture of a teacher’s thoughts and actions at the time of the lesson so alternative sources of data are necessary. In this study, questionnaires and surveys made up the other sources of data and were used for triangulation to ensure that the results found in the diaries were not isolated occurrences.

### 3.5.2 DATA ANALYSIS

The stance that was taken for analysing all categories of data was declarative. Here, I was solely responsible for the analysis of the material with no input from the participants. In this study such a stance was appropriate because the relationship between teacher educator and in-service teacher was one of superior to inferior. This was in no way intended or even desired but the perception of the foreign native speaker as an “expert”, not only in speaking the target language but as a fount of up-to-date knowledge on language teaching methodology, was one that was extremely difficult to change.

Processing the data fell into two patterns, linear for analysing most of the surveys and questionnaires, and iterative for the diaries and survey on teacher expectations. The constant re-negotiation of meaning, inherent in the iterative process was found to be more appropriate for the diaries and teacher expectations because of the nature of the data, that is, personal comments. The relative clarity

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

of the data from the closed scale questionnaires meant that a linear process allowed me to arrive at a finding by a far more direct route than with the diaries.

The categories of analyses varied among the various sources of data. Diaries and observations by their very design, unstructured and as far as possible with no pre-existing assumptions, fell into the grounded category where the data categories emerged. The questionnaire on teacher beliefs fell at the other extreme, in the a priori category where the data fitted into a schema already defined by previous research. The other sources appeared to all fall into a guided category where there were some pre-existing expectations about where the results might fall but which were modified where the data differed.

### 3.5.3 CONSTRAINTS

The means of data collection in this study was constrained to a certain extent by circumstances beyond my control. Mechanical recording devices were initially considered as the primary option for gathering data on teaching practice. This was to give a more accurate picture of English language teaching in a Vietnamese high school classroom than recalled lessons could have provided. However this proved unworkable for several reasons: the length of time it took to get approval, the high level of external noise and poor classroom acoustics, and the limited range of recorders available. Recording of interviews was also entertained as a way of obtaining rich data but was later rejected because of:

- difficulties in arranging for teachers to attend an interview when some of them lived a considerable distance from Qui Nhon
- the noise level in my office
- the difficulty of interviewing teachers on their own particularly when visiting the districts
- the reticence of some teachers to talk

This may have been due to fear of being identified on tape or from embarrassment at their lack of facility in English. However, the recordings of interviews that were made with the full permission of teachers have been used to elaborate on

comments made in diaries. Four of the teachers were recorded as they taught a lesson, and segments from these recordings are employed in Chapter Five to illustrate points made in the diaries and questionnaires.

I also considered interviewing teachers while taking only written notes and did so on a few occasions but again the data has limited validity. On most occasions the interviews were conducted with other teachers or school officials present which I felt limited the openness of teachers' responses to some of the questions. It also limited my own questions as I did not wish to risk putting teachers in a difficult situation if they were unable to answer.

### **3.6 INSTRUMENTATION**

#### **3.6.1 DIARIES**

The choice of diaries as an instrument for the collection of data was made for several reasons. Firstly, it was hoped that teachers writing about their own classroom practice and their responses to the introduction of activities incorporating elements of the communicative language teaching approach would develop an increased awareness of their own teaching practice, awareness being an essential factor in the process of change and innovation. Secondly, the comparative simplicity of conducting diary research, in comparison to interviews and classroom recordings, made them a logical choice with which to collect information. One other factor that had a minor influence on the selection of diaries as a research tool was the culture of diary writing that seemed to exist among some of the Vietnamese teachers with whom I had developed friendships. Such an undertaking then, was not completely foreign to the teachers in the study, and had "ecological" validity in the sense of fitting well into the culture.

#### Development

The success which Ho & Richards (1993) had had with teacher diary writing provided a good basis from which to develop the instrument. Using the list

outlining the benefits associated with diary writing composed by Brock, Yu & Wong (1992) and subsequently employed in the Ho & Richards study, the following points were selected as pertinent to the current study's research questions. Diaries were seen as a means of:

- identifying variables that are important to individual teachers
- generating questions and hypotheses about teaching and learning processes
- enhancing awareness about the way a teacher teaches and a student learns
- enabling the researcher to relate classroom events and examine trends from the diaries

### The Subjects

All 15 teachers, seven junior high school teachers and eight senior high school teachers, attending the in-service programme were asked to participate in the diary writing. However, there was no obligation for teachers to do this and those who did not write anything were not penalised in any way. In contrast, attendance at the seminars was obligatory but I had no part in this decision. That was made by the Department of Education.

### Administration

The teachers were asked on the first day of their respective seminars if they would be prepared to keep diaries of their teaching practice.

Aware of the time constraints that most teachers faced with obligations to teach extra classes in the evening, I put no pressure on the teachers to complete diary entries within a set time and nor did I impose a penalty if diaries were handed in late.

To facilitate the diary writing and to ensure that teachers had a good idea of what to do, I explained to teachers what the purpose of the diaries was and gave some guidelines on how to complete them. From my previous experience I had found that verbal instructions were often misinterpreted. So, because teachers were geographically distant from me and telephone communication difficult, I decided

to give out a written guide. This contained the same instructions on how to complete diaries as those which I had given to the teachers in class. The instructions and the guiding questions were based on the model designed by Ho & Richards (1993) (see Appendix 2). This was supplemented with a list of self-evaluative questions to be completed between the time of the seminar and the succeeding one.

Teachers were also given diary pages: ten identical sheets with a space to fill in the time and the class that was taught at that time. The rest of the sheet was blank for the teachers to write their thoughts. These diaries were to be completed as often as possible after a lesson. The suggested minimum number of times was twice a week although there was no obligation to keep to this routine. The diary pages were distributed to junior high school teachers at each of the four seminars and to the senior high school teachers at each of the three seminars.

The diaries were collected at the beginning of the following seminar, read, commented on and returned to the teachers at a later date. As there was no deadline for handing in diaries, some entries turned up quite some considerable time after they had been completed. However, at the end of the course when I was preparing to return to New Zealand nearly all of the teachers delivered their diaries, along with other material they had been asked to complete, in person. For one teacher this meant a three hour bus trip commencing at 5:00 am.

Photocopies were made of all the diaries with the teachers' permission. Belatedly, I discovered that the Department of Education required a copy of all teachers' diary entries together with copies of the instructional material that they had been given. The requirement to submit diary pages posed a real ethical dilemma as I had assured teachers of anonymity. Therefore, before photocopying, teacher names and schools were removed to ensure that confidentiality was maintained.

### Limitations

The main limitation in using diaries as a data collection instrument is that the amount and quality of the writing is very dependent on the teachers' competency in English. The more competent teachers, in my experience, tend to write more and are easier to understand. With less competent teachers, writing can sometimes be difficult to interpret and as a consequence, quite erroneous meanings can sometimes be attributed to their words. Moreover, as better writers generally write more, their views may have a greater prominence in the results. In this study I have used statements from all of the participating teachers in order to keep the results as balanced as possible. However, I acknowledge that the more prolific writers do get more exposure.

### Processing

Completed diaries were returned to me within three weeks of the end of the seminar programme. When I returned to New Zealand the first task was to take out from the diary scripts, all comments that:

- stated lesson objectives
- described the content of the lesson as it appeared in the textbooks
- listed vocabulary

The remaining comments were then reread and colour coded into three very broad areas of concern called the loci. These loci were: *the teacher*, *the student* and *the context*. This approach to data processing and analysis followed the principles laid down in grounded theory Glaser & Strauss (1967) where the categories emerge from the data and are not forced by looking for evidence to support an a priori hypotheses.

The next stage entailed reducing the categories further and highlighting sub-categories within them. This stage took several attempts to complete satisfactorily as there was some confusion as to what the teachers were actually saying. Where this was obvious, a key word analysis was used to categorise the response.

Where it was not so obvious, an assumption of teacher intent in making the comment was used to categorise the response. Figure 4 shows some examples of how the teachers coded statements under the student focus.

key word = active

“the students were active” is classified under the category *affective* and the sub-category *level of activity*

key word = smoothly

“they practised the lesson smoothly” is classified under the category *language* and the sub-category *smoothness/fluency*

key word = words

“they had not enough words to read” is classified under the category *knowledge* and the sub-category *vocabulary*

key word = knew

“the more they knew” is classified under the category *language* and the sub-category *knowledge*

key words = better & answered

“the better they answered” is classified under the category *language*, the sub-category is *use* and the specific focus is *accuracy*

**Figure 4: Student Focus: Keyword Analysis**

Where there is no obvious key word under the student focus I have taken the teacher's intentions into account as shown in Figure 5.

focus of statement = description

“the pupils’ listening and speaking didn’t improve” is classified under the category *language*, the sub-category *use* and the focus *description*

focus of statement = independent production of language

“they mechanically read out the keys from books” is classified under the category *language*, the sub-category *use* and the focus *independent production of language*

focus of statement = affective factors

“most of the students enjoyed/liked/happy” is classified under the category *affective* and the sub-category *emotional response*

**Figure 5: Student Focus: Teacher’s Intention Analysis**

#### Inter-rater reliability

The above process requires a high degree of interpretation. Thus to ensure a more reliable result another teacher educator was asked to categorise the data using the same criteria as I had employed. Statements that had students as the focus had an inter-rater reliability of 77%. For the remaining 23% of these statements, categorising proved problematical. This was mainly due to differing opinions over precise meanings of terms.

Figure 6 shows the teachers' intentions in categorising the statements under the teacher focus.

focus of statement = problem

"I wondered if I controlled the pupils when they read silently..." is classified under the category *language* and the sub-category *problems*

focus of statement = application of new techniques

"I apply the communicative approach..." is classified under the category *methodology*, and the sub-category *application of new techniques*

focus of statement = objectives

"I achieved my objectives/aims..." is classified under the category *planning* and the sub-category *objectives*

focus of statement = execution of lesson

"I cut my lesson plan from 1 period into 2 because..." is classified under the category *planning* and the sub-category *execution*

focus of statement personal development

"I learn much experience from them..." is classified under the category *teacher development*

**Figure 6: Teacher Focus: Teacher's Intention Analysis**

#### Inter-rater reliability

Statements that had teachers as the focus had an inter-rater reliability of 70%. Although 7% lower than for the statements that had students as the focus, this was still within an acceptable margin of error.

### Critical Reflectivity

In addition to collecting information stated explicitly in written diary comments, a more rigorous analysis was applied to the writing in an attempt to assess the degree to which teachers were reflecting on their practice, if indeed they were. If there was evidence of reflection then it would be an indication that teachers were at least partially aware of the consequences of their actions in the classroom. As the goal of reflection is to raise teacher awareness as a precursor to change in the classroom, then such an indication would be a very positive sign. A previous study that had addressed a similar research problem and which was used to guide this analysis was one conducted by Ho & Richards (1993). They had sought to establish the degree of critical reflectivity in the journal entries of a group of Hong Kong teachers. Ho & Richards classified teacher comments based on the model of reflectivity developed by Bartlett (1990), (see Figure 1). They had developed a number of categories which fitted the general parameters of the reflective cycle stages. These categories have been used in this study in preference to the original reflective cycle and its accompanying guide questions, as the original cycle was more difficult to apply. The cycle stages were more abstract than the categories developed by Ho & Richards and were aimed probably at teachers whose exposure to the reflective process and Western language teaching methods may have been greater than those with whom I was working. The following examples of categories are similar and in some cases the same as those that appeared under the *Evaluating Teaching* theme in Ho & Richards' study. These were used to guide my analysis of critical reflectivity. In the first group, *Solutions to Problems*, the first two statements cover topics that were considered reflective. The third statement covered topics that were considered descriptive. In the second group, *Diagnosing Problems*, all the statements covered reflective topics. A complete description of the reflective categories is contained in Appendix 4.

### **Evaluating teaching**

#### Solutions to problems

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| • alternative ways of presenting lessons | reflective  |
| • deciding on a plan of action           | reflective  |
| • seeking solutions from the tutor       | descriptive |

#### Diagnosing Problems

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| • students' problems  | reflective |
| • classroom interaction: for example, a pairwork activity did not work because students were reluctant to talk to one another | reflective |
| • teacher's problems - e.g. Teacher did not have enough time to complete the activity   | reflective |

**Figure 7: Statements Used to Guide Categorise the Degree of Reflectivity<sup>4</sup>**

By focussing on the content and the level of reflectivity of teacher reflections this study avoided diverting attention from what and why observations are made, which, as Valli (1993) notes, can occur when concentrating too much on process.

### **3.6.2 APPRAISAL OF TRAINING INPUT**

At the conclusion of the seminar programme teachers took home a questionnaire asking them to indicate what type of training input had been most useful to them. It was decided that obtaining this information was essential to ensure teacher education and development was relevant to Vietnamese teachers. There had been sessions which had been unsuccessful and it was felt that unless the underlying problems were identified and addressed the same mistakes would continue to be made.

#### Development

In the present study, teachers had been exposed to a variety of materials and methods of presentation over the course of the four seminar sessions, some of which, as mentioned above, teachers had appeared to have responded to well and

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from *Prospect 8*, p. 17-21, 1993, B. Ho & J. C. Richards.

others which had seemed to “fall flat”. The work of Pennington (1996, p. 321) in “seeking to understand the success or lack of success of different forms of input in changing their [the teachers’] awareness and attitudes in relation to the innovative practice of process writing”, offered guidance on how to increase the reflectivity of teachers so it was decided to adapt the questionnaire that she had used in her Hong Kong study. To begin with, all of the activities and materials that were used over the three months were classified into eight groups or types of input. These were:

- demonstration of techniques
- handouts
- sample lesson materials
- additional reading
- reflection sheets
- thinking about application sheets
- diaries
- feedback on diaries

Changes made to the original questionnaire consisted mainly of adapting the questions so that they addressed locally produced material and local circumstances, and ensuring that once completed these adaptations fitted the patterns of the original study. For example, the question about use of a telephone for access to the teacher educator and other teachers was not included as none of the teachers had private phones.

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions about the input and two general questions asking which form of input had the greatest immediate value and which form had the greatest long term value (see Appendix 4). The questions used a closed question scale format with teachers having to indicate on a scale of one to four, one being the *most* useful, how helpful each type of input had been.

Below the scale there was also space for teachers to write what they thought they had learnt and what input they thought they would make use of in the future. Figure 8 is an example of the format used.

*Demonstration of techniques* by teacher educator (Fiona) during seminars

1	2	3	4
very helpful	helpful	not very helpful	not at all helpful

What do you think you learned from this input?

What use did you or will you make of this input?

**Figure 8: Sample Question from Assessment of Training Input Questionnaire<sup>5</sup>**

The original study conducted by Pennington (1996, p. 321) attempted to identify not only the preferred methods of input for teachers but also “to understand the success or lack of success of different forms of input”, and to establish the effect of this input in changing awareness and attitudes. By asking teachers in this study to comment on what they had learnt from the input and whether they would use it or not, it would be possible to assess both whether teachers felt that the material was appropriate to their own context and whether they would be able to apply the concepts in their own classrooms. In Bartlett’s (1990) model, any such evidence would point to a move beyond purely descriptive output to more sophisticated levels of appraising and acting.

#### Administration

On the last day of their respective in-service programmes, both junior and senior teachers were given the questionnaire and asked to take it home to complete. Brief verbal instructions, supplemented with some written instructions, were given on how to complete the questionnaires. Teachers were asked to send these back to me

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from *Teacher learning and language teaching* (p. 344-347), D. Freeman & J.C. Richards (Eds.), 1996, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

by the end of the month, giving them a total of two weeks to complete the task. As was stipulated for the diaries, there was no compulsion to do the work as marks would not be given. The questionnaires were anonymous.

### Limitations

The following factors should be considered when taking into account the validity of the results of the appraisal of training input. The lapse of time between when the material was presented and demonstrated to teachers and when the appraisals were completed varies from item (training input) to item. It is likely that those techniques demonstrated at the first seminar were not remembered as clearly as those that were demonstrated nearly three months later. Moreover, as most of the ideas and techniques were new, there was potential for confusion in working out which was which and establishing what exactly the techniques were supposed to do.

In addition, the degree of writing in the second part of the questionnaire may have been a deterrent to some of the teachers and was, in fact, mentioned by one teacher as a constraint while the complexity of some of the reading material may have influenced other teachers' attitudes.

### **3.6.3 POST COURSE COMMENTARY**

This comprised a booklet consisting of two major parts. The first part was a constraints analysis in the form of a closed scale questionnaire which asked teachers to indicate the degree to which a particular feature constrained them in their efforts to introduce to their classrooms some communicative activities they had learnt about at seminars. Because of my concerns that teachers would not write freely about these constraints due to their level of proficiency in writing English and their reluctance to admit that there were any problems, this method of data collection would ensure they responded. The questionnaire findings might highlight whether the introduction of an approach with communicative elements, whose underlying pedagogical principles contradict those of traditional

Vietnamese methods, would be appropriate for the Vietnamese classroom given the constraints the teachers faced.

The second part of the booklet consisted of a series of questions, couched in the form of a conversation, which aimed at finding out what ideas, from the seminar programme teachers had used in their classrooms and what they thought had been useful or not useful. It also endeavoured to get teachers to make suggestions for future in-service seminars. The open-ended format allowed teachers the freedom to express their opinions on the good and bad points of the in-service programme and how, if at all, the programme had made any impact on their teaching practice.

### Development

Informal constraints analyses, in the form of workshop sessions, written submissions, hypothetical case studies designed to encourage teachers to talk about their own situations, and private conversations had been conducted during the two years of the assignment but differed from the one in the present study in that teachers themselves had been asked to identify the constraints. While providing useful guidelines for the initial stages of the assignment, it was felt that the teachers' responses did not go far enough in highlighting real areas of concern. Typical responses from the informal analyses had included concerns about time and large class size but diary responses did not tend to support this, due to what I thought might be a reluctance to appear negative and critical in a more permanent form on paper.

Four months after the completion of the seminars I distributed a follow-up constraints analysis which I hoped would show whether teachers had any concerns about introducing new activities into the classroom additional to those that they had already mentioned. A questionnaire was designed containing 17 constraint statements which responded to the leading question "when introducing a new activity into the class do you...?" The statements were developed from previous responses teachers had made about constraints and from my own observations. I included statements that teachers probably would not have included themselves.

Teachers were asked to read the statements and to tick on a scale, sliding in five stages from one = *always* to five = *never*, the degree to which each statement concerned them. The statements were collated and a mean score for each statement was calculated. The statements had also been grouped under categories so teachers were then asked to indicate which category concerned them the most. Each category then had its scores totalled and a mean score once again calculated.

Figure 9 illustrates examples of the questions and statements used in the questionnaire. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix 5.

*When you are shown a new teaching technique or new idea do you?*

1. want to make some changes but do not feel confident enough to try new language teaching techniques

always	often	sometimes	seldom	never
--------	-------	-----------	--------	-------

2. not understand how the activity can improve your students' English

always	often	sometimes	seldom	never
--------	-------	-----------	--------	-------

**Figure 9: Examples of Questions from Post Course Commentary Constraints Analysis**

In contrast, the *conversation* took a more qualitative approach to collecting data. The following scenario was used to introduce the questions which were handwritten into the booklet in an attempt to give the conversation a slightly less formal appearance. The teachers were expected to write a reply. Later these were read and categorised into areas of concern; for example, concerns about time and requests for the teacher educator to visit rural areas.

**Situation:** You are at a Teachers' Day (ngay nha giao) party when you meet your old friend Anh Tan. He has heard about the in-service education course given by me, (Fiona) during October, November and December 1997 at the So Giao Duc Dao Tao Tinh Binh Dinh. He asks about your experiences and your opinions.

*Write down what you would tell him*

*e.g.*

*Tan: Have you used any idea from the seminars in your classroom? Which one/ones were the most successful? Can you tell me why?*

*You:*

### **Figure 10: The Conversation Section of the Post-Course Commentary**

#### The Subjects

All 15 teachers from both the senior high school group and the junior high school group of in-service participants were sent this questionnaire. Again there was no obligation for teachers to complete the questionnaire.

#### Administration

This post course commentary booklet was sent to teachers nearly four months after the completion of the in-service programme via a colleague who was working in Qui Nhon for three weeks. As teachers were to receive the booklet through the mail with no advance warning from me, instructions were included on how to fill out the constraints analysis questionnaire and how to answer the conversation. In addition, for the questionnaire, an example was given showing how to mark a preferred choice. The teachers were not asked to record their names in an effort to ensure that their responses were as open as possible.

Teachers sent completed post-course commentaries to a Vietnamese friend in Qui Nhon and from there these were brought back to New Zealand for coding and analysis. Nine teachers of the 15 completed the task.

### Limitations

The opportunity to conduct a post course commentary had arisen unexpectedly and because it was a one-off occurrence, there was no time to conduct a pilot study of the questions used in the questionnaire. This led to limitations in the questionnaire design which became evident when analysing the responses. For example, the lead question “when you are shown new teaching techniques...” should have been printed at the top of each page so teachers could remember what they were answering. In addition, the administration of the commentary was very much in the hands of others once it left New Zealand so any problems that teachers may have with understanding the wording or content of the material could not be addressed.

## **3.7 SECONDARY DATA**

This data was used, where relevant, to add depth to the responses of the Vietnamese teachers and does not constitute a specific focus of the research. For this reason the following descriptions are less detailed than those given for the primary data but still retain the essential information required for constructing a reliable and valid research design.

### **3.7.1 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

Teachers were given a form to fill out on the first day of the seminar (see Appendix 6). The data gathered from this source (see Table 2) provided information on personal details of the teachers, their teaching history, that is, education, length and place of service and previous in-service seminars attended. It was also intended to give an extra dimension to responses that were not anonymous, if these dimensions were relevant to the research questions. Asking teachers their age was considered appropriate in a Vietnamese context as one’s age is a typical first question when two people meet. It establishes the form of address to be used.

### **3.7.2 SURVEY: TEACHER EXPECTATIONS**

The seminar programme was not all planned in advance as there had been only ten days' notice that the series would take place. This gave very little time for preparation so it was decided to find out what the teachers wanted to cover during the three months that the seminars would run. I hoped that this data would highlight elements of classroom practice that were causing concern for the teacher and which could be used as a guide for planning the direction of the seminar programme. I also hoped that an insight would be gained into the less transparent expectations of the teachers through a closer analysis of the responses.

I administered the survey on the first day of the in-service course for both groups of teachers (see Appendix 7). A sheet was given to all the 15 teachers requiring them to complete a paragraph commencing with the phrase "I hope to...". Teachers were given 20 minutes to do this. I collected the teachers' scripts at the end of the allotted time and read through the same day. Categorising was not carried out until I returned to New Zealand.

The categorising followed the same procedure as that for the diaries. The paragraphs were read through several times and the broad areas of teachers' expectations were defined. These became the categories. Then key words within the categories were identified. Where a key word was not obvious, the teachers' intentions were "interpreted", a procedure following one of the key principles of ethnographic research (Watson-Gegeo & Ulichny, cited in Nunan, 1988). These interpretations became the sub-categories and the specific foci.

### **3.7.3 BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING QUESTIONNAIRE**

"Individual teachers bring to teaching very different beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching" (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 36) so it was decided that these beliefs and assumptions should be identified. This was to ascertain whether there were any major trends in teachers' responses and whether these differed markedly from the pedagogical principles underpinning the

communicative approach which the in-service programme would be highlighting. Major points of incongruence could, therefore, be addressed and possible compromises developed.

The questionnaire, (see Appendix 8), was adapted from one designed by K. Johnson (cited in Richards & Lockhart, 1994) and was designed to help identify the teachers' underlying beliefs and assumptions about language teaching and whether the approach they followed was rule-based, skills-based or function-based.

On the first day of the seminar programme, the teachers were given a sheet of paper on which there were 14 statements. Several of these had been rewritten to ensure that all the teachers could understand the questions without difficulty as there were at least three teachers whose English was probably at pre-intermediate level. To complete the questionnaire the teachers had to select, in no order of preference, five statements from a total of 14 which they thought described the way English should be taught and learnt. The teachers completed the questionnaires in the first half hour of the first seminar and returned them to me. The results appear in Appendix 9. However, the teachers discussed the statements among themselves even though they were asked not to, so responses were not necessarily their own. This practice appears to be common with many such tasks, including tests, and being so should probably be seen as acceptable within the Vietnamese context. Ellis (1994, p. 52) comments that "all the above behaviours [what would be called cheating in a Western context] ... are characteristic of collectivist societies. In each instance the needs of the group were placed above Western notions of personal responsibility and professional standards". The situation in this study was not a test but it does highlight the difficulty of getting responses exclusive to an individual. As a consequence the results should be considered only as a guide to teachers' beliefs.

### 3.7.4 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The prominence, thus far, of data collection instruments eliciting the teachers' viewpoint could give a very distorted view of classroom practice and reinforce the stereotype of a teacher centred context. As questions about ways of controlling students had come up in several conversations with teachers, it seemed a good idea to actually survey student opinions about what they looked for in a good teacher and whether these matched teachers' expectations about teaching.

Both junior and senior high school teachers were asked to take 50 of the questionnaires (see Appendix 10), which were written in Vietnamese, and to distribute them to one of their classes. As with the constraints questionnaire, it used scale question types. Students had to choose either *always*, *sometimes*, or *never* as the response that best suited each of the ten statements they had to read. The data collected, however, can be considered neither reliable nor valid as there was no way that either the sample of students or the consistency of instructions given to students could be controlled. There was also the risk that the original questions, which had been prepared in English, had been translated with slightly different interpretations of the intended meanings. However, even with these limitations, the results provide a general insight into the thoughts of Vietnamese high school students in Binh Dinh.

### 3.8 THREATS TO RELIABILITY

As with all work involving a degree of interpretation, there is an element of uncertainty inherent in placing statements, questions, comments from another person into categories developed by one researcher. This possible threat to internal reliability is theoretically reduced in this study by inviting a fellow teacher educator to code the same statements using the same category descriptors as those which I used.

Another threat which is difficult to counter is that this study is a cross cultural one. The researcher, therefore, runs the risk of misinterpreting what the teachers have

said or what they really mean. Educational philosophies also differ and even basic definitions can be quite different so the potential for misanalysis is high. This risk has been minimised to some extent by the fact that I have lived in the community for four years, acquiring a degree of competence in the language and a familiarity with cultural practices. The words of one of the junior high school teachers may serve best as a claim for reliability:

*“A foreign teacher trainer [Fiona] has advantages and disadvantages but the current teacher trainer has been here many times and knows about classroom reality of the Vietnamese teacher and has devoted herself to our language teaching and learning.”*

### 3.9 THREATS TO VALIDITY

Threats to internal validity are evident particularly in the administration of the diary research. None of the teachers had undertaken such a project before so instructions had to be given orally and in written form. However, it became obvious from reading diary entries that some teachers followed the guide questions exactly, answering only these. Others followed the advice to use the questions solely as a guide in writing about their experiences. The first group then, may not have necessarily written about what concerned them.

Teacher competence in English is a variable which also has considerable impact on the validity of the results. The standard ranged from approximately upper-intermediate to pre-intermediate levels of which I was aware before the commencement of the seminar programme. I assumed, therefore, that some teachers were limited in what they were able to say. However, I felt that even a small contribution was better than eliminating them from the programme. The following quote from one of the teachers perhaps best illustrates the frustrations that teachers face having to write all their thoughts and problems in English:

*“These diaries can be kept as experiences but it makes my mind tired of thinking ideas and finding language to express them.”*

### **3.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter has examined, in some detail, the longitudinal-ethnographic approach used in the conduct of this research. The justification for this approach and the choice of grounded theory data analysis and interpretation was outlined. The instrumentation used to obtain this data was primarily, diaries, questionnaires and a post-course commentary each of which had its development, administration and limitations explained. An overview of the secondary and peripheral instruments of data collection was also provided although this gave less detail than that which was given for the primary data.

A description of the setting was also a feature of the chapter, together with an outline of the teachers' selection, age and experience. The effect these variables had on the results was not tested in the study although they may indeed have had a bearing on some of the teacher behaviour. This could be an area for possible future investigation.

By allowing teachers to talk about their classroom world, using the instrumentation described in this chapter and without any attempt to manipulate the context I hope to be able to obtain an insight into an area where there has been almost no prior research: that is, the expectations and concerns of the Vietnamese high school teacher when faced with the introduction of imported current language teaching methodology. The next chapter will indicate whether this objective has been achieved.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the findings from the analysis of the data, the procedures for which were set out in Table 4 and Appendix 1. The primary data provide the basis for this analysis with the secondary data used to support and give a thicker description to the results that emerge. The peripheral data are used only to add incidental information and are not a major contributor per se, to the final results. Findings that have major implications for the research questions will be foregrounded and discussed in the following chapter.

As only primary sources will be addressed directly in this analysis, the findings will appear under these headings: *diaries*, *appraisal of training input* and *post-course commentary*. The aim is to provide insights into the concerns of Vietnamese teachers and the effects of introducing a reflective teaching component into in-service programmes in the provincial Vietnamese context. Valli (1993) warns of the possible risk of over-valuing the *process* of reflection at the expense of content, purpose and quality so I hope that the following analysis of results has avoided this temptation and has highlighted the “what” and “why” of the Vietnamese English language classroom.

### 4.2 DIARIES

The analysis of diaries focussed on two main areas:

- the content, that is, what teachers chose to write about
- the degree of critical reflectivity evident in their writing

This section begins by examining the loci and categories that emerged from the analysis of comments in teacher diaries. The loci, that is, the principal areas of concern, are set out in Table 5 with the total responses for each locus also included.

**Table 5: Principal Areas of Teacher Concern in Teacher Diaries**

<b>Locus</b>	<b>No. of statements</b>	<b>Percentage of total</b>
the student	280	52.8%
the teacher	218	41.1%
the context	32	6.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

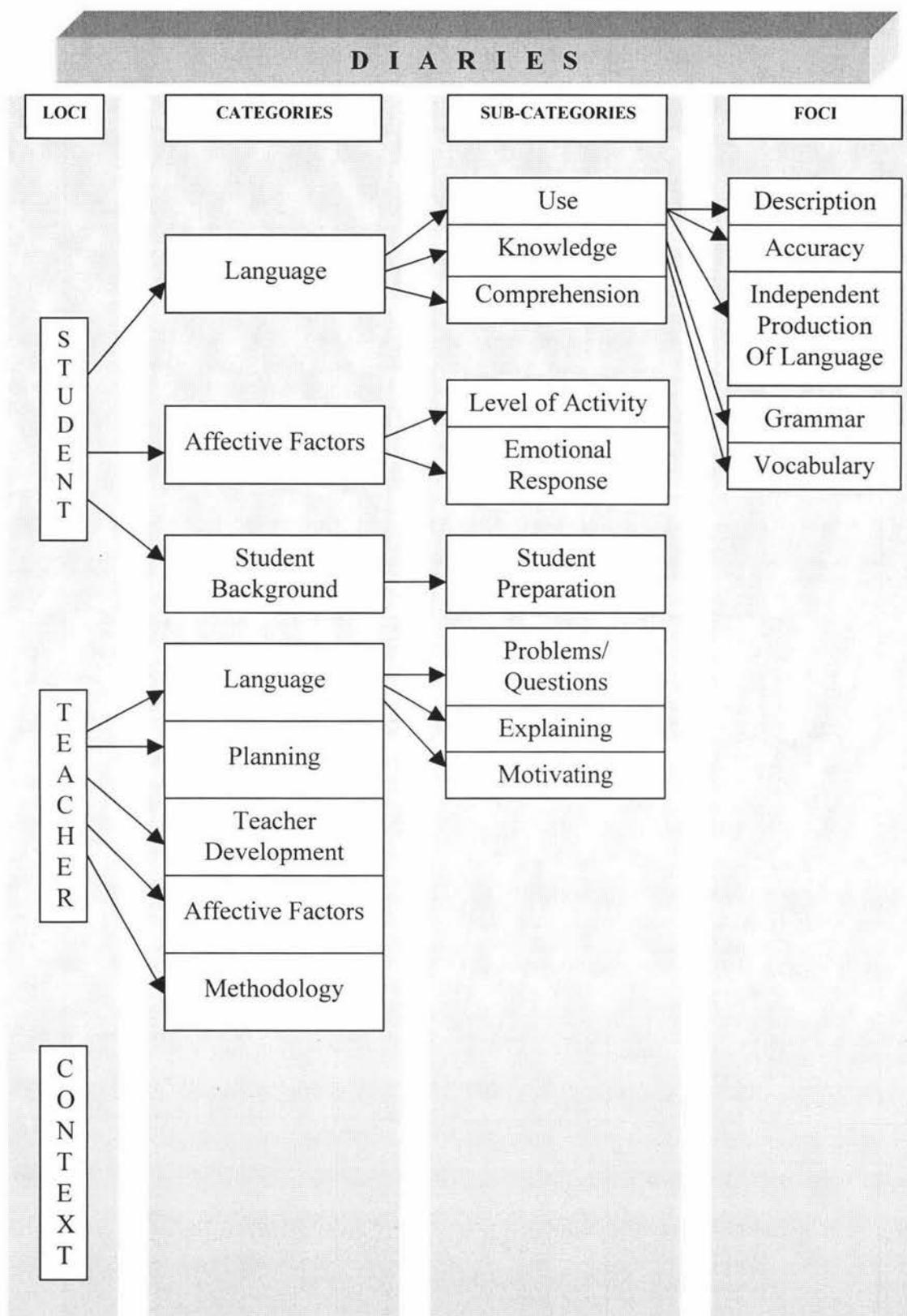
#### 4.2.1 PRINCIPAL AREAS OF CONCERN: AN OVERVIEW

Table 5 shows clearly that the *student* was the main locus of concern for the classroom teacher at 52.8% of the total number of comments. This figure on its own does not reveal what elements of student behaviour teachers chose to focus on, but it does indicate that the relationship with students was considered of paramount importance. Of less concern to teachers with 41.1% of the total comments, was the place of the *teacher* in the classroom. This suggests, at first glance, that perhaps teachers see their principal task as one of getting students to do their work and pass exams and not one of furthering their own personal development. This may explain why, when on a number of occasions I asked teachers about what seemed to be to me, quite unreasonable demands from principals and education authorities, the reply often was “*It’s my duty to do it*”. These two principal categories of diary entries, student and teacher, are analysed in more detail in 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

The percentage of *context* comments, at 6.1%, was lower than expected although the many verbal comments I had heard about the large class sizes, inadequate teaching materials, and lack of resources indicated that these were a big concern for teachers. However, criticism in writing is more permanent than spoken words and teachers may have been worried that their thoughts would be misconstrued as an attack on the authorities. Unfortunately I have no way of substantiating this. The final tally of statements about context would, in fact, have been lower if teacher comments about the use of teaching aids in the classroom had not been

included in this category. As a result, I decided that further analysis of the *context* locus was not needed.

From these three main loci a number of categories and subcategories emerged which give greater depth to the loci by providing more insight into the thoughts and expectations of Vietnamese teachers. Figure 11 sets out the categories and sub-categories that will be discussed in this chapter.



**Figure 11: Content Analysis of Diaries: Main Areas of Concern**

#### 4.2.2 LOCUS: THE STUDENT

As noted already, diary comments focussing on the student made it the largest of the three loci with 52.8% of responses. Once this group had been analysed further a more comprehensive picture emerged. This is shown in Table 6 where the resulting three categories, *language*, *affective factors* and *student background* are presented, together with the sub-categories and the specific foci.

**Table 6: Categories, Sub-categories and Specific Foci**

<b>CATEGORY: LANGUAGE</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Use	Description	41	14.7%
	Accuracy	35	12.5%
	Smoothness/fluency	9	3.2%
	Independent production of language	33	11.8%
	Score	6	2.1%
	Interaction	14	5.0%
Knowledge	General statements	4	1.4%
	Grammar	10	3.6%
	Vocabulary	12	4.3%
Comprehension		23	8.2%
<b>Language Total</b>		<b>187</b>	<b>66.8%</b>

<b>CATEGORY: AFFECTIVE FACTORS</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Motivation		10	3.6%
Level of activity		37	13.2%
Emotional response		30	10.7%
Behaviour/order		6	2.1%
<b>Affective Factors Total</b>		<b>83</b>	<b>29.6%</b>
<b>CATEGORY: STUDENT BACKGROUND</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Student preparation		6	2.1%
Socio-economic circumstances		4	1.5%
<b>Student Background Totals</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>3.6%</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>280</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

There was a very clear trend in the results showing that teachers were interested primarily in student language performance with 66.8% of the total comments. The teachers, generally, did not indicate whether the language was oral or written but I have assumed, given the focus in the textbooks and the absence of any oral examinations at most levels of high school, that the comments were concerned mainly with written performance. What is particularly surprising is the percentage of comments (29.6%) concerned with affective factors as this has not been prominent in other studies carried out in Asian classrooms. Rather, the focus was on the formality of relationships between teacher and student. In this study, the teachers considered the level of activity and emotional response of the student as an important factor in the success of the lesson, which contradicts the picture of an austere learning environment where the teachers consider the student a receptacle to be filled with knowledge. This point will be elaborated on in 5.2.6. The

following sections present the findings that emerge from each of the three categories.

### Language

The language of students was, for most of the teachers, the prime concern in the classroom. The following table sets out the principal components or sub-categories of the language category, *use*, *knowledge* and *comprehension*, and the number of responses which each contained.

**Table 7: Language Category: Analysis of Totals**

<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Use	138	73.8%
Knowledge	26	13.9%
Comprehension	23	12.3%
<b>Sub-category Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The students' *use* of language was the area that drew the most responses from teachers with 73.8% of the total *language* sub-category. In this study, the term *use* was taken to mean the ability to produce both the oral and written language as it appeared in the prescribed schools textbooks. There was no way of judging whether students' language was both functionally and socially appropriate as the teachers did not comment on those aspects of language production. Though this aspect was missing some patterns emerged which pointed clearly to areas of language teaching that did concern teachers. These are discussed more fully in the following sections.

*Knowledge* and *comprehension*, by comparison, were very small groups as they were difficult behaviours for teachers to assess. As a consequence, teachers' attempts to measure students' performance in this area gave very little idea of whether the students did in fact understand the content of the lesson.

### Use

The number of statements concerned with *use* indicates that there is a preoccupation with the observable surface level features of the language, a trend shown more clearly in the following table.

**Table 8: Use Sub-category: Analysis of Totals**

<b>Specific Foci</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Description	41	29.7%
Accuracy	35	25.4%
Smoothness/fluency	9	6.5%
Independent production of language	33	24.0%
Score	6	4.3%
Interaction	14	10.1%
<b>Foci Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### Description

*Description* was the largest group within this sub-category making up 29.7% of the responses. It was, in fact, possible to further reduce the group but the resulting micro-categories would have made any trends difficult to distinguish. The group was characterised by descriptions of the actions of the students, the problems they faced and task performance:

*“They realised my request quite well.”*

*“Our students cannot read well.”*

*“The pupils’ speaking and listening didn’t improve.”*

Although the statements appeared to reveal little beyond a description of classroom behaviour they did in fact suggest some underlying assumptions about teaching, that is, that learning is quantifiable and lesson outcomes can be placed

on one end of a continuum or the other; either the lesson went well or it did not go well. No attempt was made to identify a possible cause for the success or failure of a lesson. For example:

*“They could give many examples.”*

*“The pupils’ speaking and listening didn’t improve.”*

*“My students can answer my questions.”*

Neither was there any indication that the teacher would conduct the lesson differently the next time if an activity had been unsuccessful. It seemed then, that the lesson required little more than the students to display their facility with known items and further suggested that teachers viewed language learning as a matter of committing a fixed body of knowledge to memory.

#### Accuracy

At 25.4% of language use comments, *accuracy* was the second most commented on feature. In these examples it can be seen just how much emphasis was put on producing the correct form with teachers commenting that students could perform “correctly”, “perfectly” and “exactly”. There was no mention of whether students understood what they were saying or whether any interaction, in fact, took place.

*“The students used appropriate words to fill in the blanks.”*

*“The pupils [could] do exercises 2 & 3 correctly.”*

*“They answered perfectly.”*

*“Most of the pupils could do exercises and make the sentences exactly.”*

This result was consistent with traditional Vietnamese teaching practices where language was considered a ‘correct corpus’ (Kirkpatrick & Prescott, 1995) to be transmitted to students. When this result is compared to the results gathered in the questionnaire about teacher beliefs, (see Appendix 9) it can be seen that it was also consistent with the teachers’ stated preference for mastering language through drill and practice where the emphasis was very much on form and accuracy.

### Independent Production of Language

The other main item under language was the students' *independent production of language*, which had 24.0% of the responses and, like statements in other sub-categories, was concerned primarily with how close students came to meeting some undefined performance criterion. However, unlike the description and accuracy foci which were consistently positive in their descriptions of student performance, this area had a much higher number of negative comments:

*"They couldn't make their own conversations using 'so... that'."*

*"Many pupils couldn't answer the teacher's questions if they didn't look at the map."*

*"When they play roles (didn't look at the books) they didn't it naturally."*

The comment starting "*Many pupils...*" suggests the students were expected to have reproduced the language perfectly without recourse to the textbook, as well as to have remembered the geographical content of the lesson. This teacher then, expected independent production of language in so far as it matched the script of the prescribed text. This highlighted a confusion over what exactly constituted communicative language teaching methods and pointed to a need to first develop what Freeman (1992) calls a "discourse" or a common language with which teachers would be able to describe their classroom experiences.

The comment starting "*When they...*" reveals a great deal about teachers' underlying expectations for a successful lesson. The students were expected to memorise the dialogue in the text and because they had not, the teacher felt that the lesson had not been a success. Inaccuracy or deviant patterns of language use were not acceptable in the language learning process. It had to be right first time. Thus there still appeared to be a large gap between what I envisaged as an appropriate communicative language lesson for the Vietnamese classroom and what the teachers considered appropriate. Where I would have been prepared to accept attempts at producing language which contained errors, it would seem that the Vietnamese teachers would not.

The positive comments on *independent production of language* were more limited in number and, like the negative comments, focussed more on how well students could produce a pre-determined piece of language:

*“They themselves found out the words (adjectives or adverbs) to compare two things or two places.”*

*“Pupils could make sentences using structure subject + has/have + v.p.p. + with great pleasure.”*

*“They tried to think for themselves and expressed their own ideas in English.”*

*“My pupils understood my intention and made up another conversation quickly.”*

The statements beginning *“They themselves...”* and *“Pupils could...”* suggested that teachers saw student independent production of language in a more narrowly defined context, that is, the ability to produce a sentence highlighting the rule or structure being practised. This was consistent with the results of the beliefs about teaching questionnaire (see Appendix 9) where the second most common belief about teaching was that if students could understand some of the basic grammatical rules about the language they would be able to create new sentences of their own.

However, in the statements beginning *“They tried...”* and *“My pupils...”*, the teacher accepted responses that were not in the book thus encouraging a degree of true independence from students. I determined from this response that the teacher was fairly confident in her own English. In my experience a less confident teacher would take a prescriptive approach in her/his teaching methods relying on the textbook to provide the correct models. This growing tension between the pressure to teach communicatively and lack of proficiency in English will be highlighted in the discussion (see 5.2.5).

### Knowledge

This sub-category, which comprised 13.9% of total language responses, was more difficult to analyse. For the purposes of this discussion though, I chose to assume that teachers were referring to the underlying linguistic knowledge of students which Woods (1996) defined as “competence”, rather than performance knowledge, and included the psychological and cognitive aspects of using the language.

The responses in this sub-category indicated that teachers were concerned only with linguistic knowledge as it related to the form of *grammar* and *vocabulary*. There was no mention of whether students were able to use the language at the appropriate time in an appropriate way. Table 9 shows the distribution of responses.

**Table 9: Knowledge Sub-category: Analysis of Totals**

<b>Specific Foci</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
General Statements	4	15.4%
Grammar	10	38.5%
Vocabulary	12	46.1%
<b>Foci Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### Grammar

The importance of imparting a structural knowledge of *grammar* to students was evident in 5.4% of total language responses. Unlike the *use* of language, here the teacher appeared to be more interested in the students’ cognitive processes rather than an actual performance. However, it is probably fair to say that comments were precipitated by the students’ failure to produce a correct form:

*“I think they couldn’t distinguish infinitive from the simple past.”*

*“The pupils have already learnt this tense but they’ve forgotten.”*

*“They don’t know the relationship of tenses in the main clause and the adverbial clause.”*

As with *use*, nothing is said about knowing whether the language is appropriate to the context in which it appears. Noticeable too, is that the relationship between teacher and students is very much unidirectional; the teacher is the “knower” and the student is there to be presented with the intricacies of English grammar. Both groups are filling well defined roles.

The other point to make about the grammar comments is that they are all commenting on negative aspects, that is, deficiencies in students’ language knowledge. As was found with the description area of language, there did not appear to be any allowance made for answers that may not have fitted the model that the teacher wanted. The students either knew the information or they did not.

One teacher did attempt to suggest a possible reason for the lack of knowledge about grammar citing the students’ own circumstances as a cause. However, the statement was too general to provide any indication as to what these circumstances might have been:

*“The students do not have a good background of grammar.”*

### Vocabulary

Statements focussed on students’ vocabulary knowledge were concerned mainly with how little vocabulary students had:

*“They had not enough words to read.”*

*“They didn’t know some words in those questions, for example, support, controlled, incident.”*

The teachers did not mention that the words were, for the most part, presented in contexts that were outside the experiences of their students. This in fact rarely

came up even in conversations with teachers which suggested that teachers were reluctant to criticise the textbook and its content. The vocabulary was seen simply as items to be memorised.

The more positive comments gave little idea of what students did know:

*“The students know a large number of words.”*

However, drawing on my classroom observations of vocabulary lessons this knowledge would likely be word class, phonemic transcription and definition. There was no mention that students were expected to demonstrate that they could use the word in an appropriate context. Again, as was evident in the grammar responses, the teachers focussed on the structural features of language avoiding the more problematic areas of meaning and use. There appeared to be little awareness of how to teach these facets of language.

#### Comprehension

*Comprehension* with 12.3% of total language responses was the smallest of the sub-categories under the language comments which may have indicated its comparative lack of importance to the outcome of the lesson. Teachers, in fact, still appeared to be preoccupied primarily with understanding the form:

*“I thought she understood the new structure.”*

Comments such as:

*“The students did the lesson very well because they understood the reading well.”*

*“The pupils understood the aims of the lesson.”*

while positive about the outcome of the lesson, gave no indication of the criteria that teachers used to judge how they assessed students' understanding.

Correspondingly, comments that indicated students were having comprehension problems made no attempt to isolate the reason:

*“I think they didn’t understand clearly.”*

*“The weak students understand very slowly so I have to spend more time explaining the lesson.”*

In addition, it was quite apparent that both problems and the positive evaluations were stated from the teachers’ point of view and that the teachers never sought information from students on what students found difficult. The diaries then are valid in as much as they reflect only one side of classroom interaction, that is, the teachers’.

These findings again foregrounded the superior-inferior relationship between teacher and student with the teachers’ role as transmitters of knowledge implicit in the use of words such as “explain” and:

*“I had to give them those [vocabulary].”*

Equally, the students’ role as a passive recipient of this knowledge was evident in the teachers’ use of the words “they understood”, “they learnt”, “they comprehended” to evaluate student performance.

Another feature that emerged from the statements and which was apparent in the other categories as well was that the teachers rarely, if ever, identified an individual student who may have performed well or who may have had a problem. This is consistent with the norms of behaviour in societies which are essentially collectivist and where individual excellence is not as celebrated as it is in the Western world.

### Affective Factors

With 29.6% of the total number of student focus responses, *affective factors* was a larger category than I had anticipated. The result throws new light onto teachers' underlying attitudes to teaching and points to an area that has been little addressed in Western analyses of "Asian" teaching. This section will analyse two of the four sub-categories that emerged; *level of activity* and *emotional response*. These are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Affective Responses Category: Analysis of Totals**

<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Motivation	10	12.1%
Level Of Activity	37	44.6%
Emotional Response	30	36.1%
Behaviour/Order	6	7.2%
<b>Sub-category Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### Level of Activity

The high number of comments (44.6% of affective responses) about students' level of activity was difficult to analyse with any degree of certainty because, for the most part, teachers did not elaborate on what they meant by the word, activity. For example:

*"When I presented, the pupils were all active."*

*"They were active and did well."*

These statements gave no real clue as to what the students were doing at the time. It was, in fact, quite difficult to imagine students doing anything much, as the impression I gained from observations carried out around the province was that the teachers did almost all the talking while the students, in most cases, answered display questions when asked.

However, there were a few indications of how some teachers judged the level of activity in their classes. There were those who saw it as the ability of students to provide examples of the required grammatical structure, for example:

*“Most of the pupils were active during the lesson and they could give many examples.”*

There were others who felt that increased levels of activity in the class had been brought about by the introduction of an activity that was not in the prescribed text, for example:

*“Discussing what kind of language is used as, made the class more exciting.”*

Both responses were a positive indication that teachers were attempting to provide some depth to their analyses of classroom interaction beyond such superficial statements as “the lesson went well”. It may be that teachers need more practice in developing these initial efforts at examining classroom interaction (see 5.4.8).

The continuing focus, by most teachers, on superficial aspects of classroom interaction may again be a reflection of traditional roles. Teachers only had to provide knowledge with little responsibility to react to student feedback or to provide any interpretation of it, so long as the classroom was harmonious. The Western tendency to want to analyse and find a reason for a particular behaviour was obviously not a priority of the Vietnamese teachers in this study.

### Emotional Response

The emotional responses of students with 36.1% of affective comments were nearly all positive with comments such as:

*“They enjoyed this period very much.”*

*“The students liked them [realia] very much and enjoyed the lesson.”*

*"The class had a lot of fun when they saw pictures of me."*

*"They were very cheerful because everyone eager to say to get good marks."*

*"My pupils were happy."*

Teachers again, were concerned with the overt features of student response which in this case appeared to be *happiness*.

Not all responses were positive though, with students:

*"Too embarrassed to answer my questions."*

*"Afraid to speak English."*

*"Not liking anything except talking [to their friends in Vietnamese]."*

Without access to student reflections it was difficult to say for certain why such reactions occurred but it is possible to speculate using field notes taken during classroom observations in district schools. Firstly, students were often asked to stand up in front of their peers and reproduce an extract from the textbook or to answer one of the "comprehension" or "further practice" exercises. There were occasions on which this was well beyond the ability of the student, particularly when the models they had of spoken English had been less than adequate. The reluctance was compounded by the knowledge that their efforts would be graded in front of their peers. Secondly, the content was far from stimulating. Going shopping for a book in London (English 8) possibly would have had a limited appeal to 13 year old Vietnamese students living in the countryside. This highlighted for me, the importance of keeping the content relevant to the students or at least providing teachers with the skills to make it relevant.

#### Student Background

The final category to be dealt under the locus of student is that of *background*. In comparison to the categories of language and affective factors the number of responses, at 3.7% of the total, was small but that in itself is significant. The

teacher in Vietnam is employed only to teach, not to provide the range of extra-curricula services that is often expected of teachers in New Zealand. The students are seen as a collective body and when considering the numbers in classes this is understandable. The teacher does not have the time to investigate the background circumstances of each student if they are not doing well at school. One teacher stated:

*“It’s in fact that the pupils have some reasons for their lack of concentration.”*

suggesting that s/he was aware that a problem existed. However, the cause is not made specific nor is there any indication of any allowances made for students who have “reasons” for their lack of performance. This said, there was a concern among some teachers about the differing levels of ability in their classes. This will be discussed under the locus of teacher.

#### Student Preparation

Student preparation appeared as an essential component to a successful lesson:

*“I was successful because the students prepared the lesson at home very well.”*

*“They didn’t prepare the lesson at home.”*

If the students could not reproduce the prescribed material in class they were often labelled “lazy”. Classroom time therefore, would seem to me, little more than testing time. As a Western trained teacher this seemed quite illogical. How could students have prepared a lesson in advance if the material, content and context, were new to them? The majority of students would have had no way of accessing information at home to check up exactly what *toast* was (English 7), or what *lamb chops* were (English 8). Grammar structures, too, would also have posed a problem for students trying to prepare them at home. English grammatical structures did not always have an equivalent in Vietnamese: for example, the

present perfect and past perfect tenses, and definite and indefinite articles. In addition, the explanations in the textbooks were in English. It would have been extremely difficult for a student to work out all this on her/his own. However, it is a factor well worth keeping in mind for planning seminars, as teachers will want material that students can take home and study in advance. The situation is the same for teachers themselves as I was approached several times during in-service summer programmes by teachers who wanted all course material in advance. One can only assume that when I failed to provide material before the seminars, I was taking teachers outside their comfort zones into an area of uncertainty and ambiguity where their lack of knowledge might be exposed.

#### 4.2.3 LOCUS: THE TEACHER

Comments that focussed on the teacher made up 41.1% of diary responses (see Table 5) and were coded into five main categories. These were ranked, as shown in Table 11, from the category with the most comments to that with the least. The sub-categories are also shown.

**Table 11: Categories, Sub-categories and Specific Foci**

<b>CATEGORY: LANGUAGE</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
General Statements		7	3.2%
Problems/Questions		29	13.3%
Explaining		20	9.2%
Guiding		7	3.2%
Motivating		17	7.8%
Teacher Competence		5	2.3%
Modelling and Repetition		10	4.6%
Extending		8	3.7%
<b>Language Total</b>		<b>103</b>	<b>47.3%</b>

<b>CATEGORY: PLANNING</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
General Statements		7	3.2%
Objectives		11	5.0%
Execution		25	11.5%
<b>Planning Total</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>19.7%</b>
<b>CATEGORY: TEACHER DEVELOPMENT</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Learning and Reflection		30	13.8%
<b>Teacher Development Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>13.8%</b>
<b>CATEGORY: AFFECTIVE FACTORS</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Emotional Response		21	9.6%
<b>Affective Factors Total</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
<b>CATEGORY: METHODOLOGY</b>			
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Specific foci</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
General Statements		5	2.3%
Application of New Techniques		16	7.3%
<b>Methodology Total</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>218</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The following section will look at all the above categories and a selection of the subcategories. As was done with the diary entries concerning the student, pertinent findings will be highlighted and discussed further in the next chapter.

### Language

Table 11 shows that when the teachers focussed on their own performance in the classroom, *language* was of major concern with 47.3% of total teacher responses. This prominence was consistent with the diary entries for students where 64.5% of total comments were made about language. The large number of responses enabled the language category to be subdivided into eight subcategories of which *problems and questions* made up the largest group at 28.2%. This supported the findings from the post-course commentary constraints questionnaire where confidence about teaching language was a major concern of teachers.

**Table 12: Language Category: Analysis Of Totals**

<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
General Statements	7	6.8%
Problems/Questions	29	28.2%
Explaining	20	19.4%
Guiding	7	6.8%
Motivating	17	16.5%
Teacher Competence	5	4.9%
Modelling and Repetition	10	9.7%
Extending	8	7.7%
<b>Sub-category Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### Problems and Questions

The statements and questions under this category were principally concerned with pedagogic issues. These mirrored many of the concerns teachers expressed when writing about the students. Again vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension problems were to the forefront. With lexical concerns, teachers reiterated the problems that they raised every time I had conducted an in-service seminar:

*“How can I make students understand the text with only several key words?”*

This feedback highlighted the inappropriateness of techniques such as *guessing words in context* and *elicitation* and caused me to re-evaluate my approach in showing teachers how to teach vocabulary because I had demonstrated and explained these in nearly every seminar over the previous summer.

There was also a tendency among the teachers to expect that a solution would come from outside and that the responsibility for changing the status quo was someone else's:

*“Something should be done to have the presentation of grammar done in a more effective way than dictate the rule.”*

*“How can students improve their pronunciation without reading the text in sound?”*

Nixon (1994) noted that Vietnamese teachers when attending TESOL teacher education courses in Australia had difficulty:

*... in adjusting to Western education, for example, in regard to workload, delivery of content, requirement to synthesise information from different sources and taking personal responsibility for learning rather than being taught [my italics] (Nixon, 1994, p. 278).*

There was a suggestion in the above comments from teachers that some of the same difficulties existed in this study.

### Explaining

In 19.4% of language comments, the teachers still considered themselves as disseminators of knowledge, or as I have labelled it here, an explainer, and again suggests that despite exposure to new ideas and micro-teaching practice there had been little development in the move to a less teacher dominated classroom

practice. The following comments from teachers demonstrated just how one way the relationship was:

*“First I explained the construction.”*

*“I explained and gave them more exercises.”*

*“I taught them how to choose the proper word to fill in the blanks.”*

It is evident that the teacher holds the power in the relationship determining what is taught and how it is taught. There is also the assumption here that language learning is seen as a body of rules to be practised and that there is one correct answer.

### Motivating

Teachers' attempts at student motivation was the only other category that had more than 10% of responses. Many of these comments were simply describing teachers' successful attempts at arousing students' interest in the lesson:

*“I motivated the class by asking questions on the content of the passage.”*

*“I convince the pupils by presenting the lesson interesting.”*

Other teachers had less positive outcomes:

*“I tried my best to make the students speak out but they kept silent.”*

Unfortunately no further information is given on how the teacher attempted to motivate students.

### Planning

Planning, for the most part was carried out in a way that I found uncompromising. Objectives were set and teachers followed them. The success of a lesson was measured by whether the objectives were achieved, but no indication of student performance was given:

*“I achieved my aims and objectives clearly.”*

Moreover, many teachers appeared to tolerate little deviation from the lesson plan with:

*“I followed my lesson plan exactly.”*

However, where teachers had to change their plans the reactions were both positive:

*“I must divide this period into two and I think the change made it better.”*

and negative:

*“I didn’t follow exactly my lesson plan. I translated the passage into Vietnamese ... It was not good but I didn’t know how to make them translate at home.”*

The first comment showed the teacher was prepared to accept a degree of flexibility in the programme and could make a snap decision when faced with the possibility of not completing the prescribed work. The ability to be able to do this is what Schon (1987) called “reflection in action”. The second teacher, however, had no viable alternative plan of action when the lesson failed to go as planned, nor any solution later when completing the diary entry. A similar reliance on “one way” of conducting a lesson was echoed by the teacher who said, in a positive vein:

*“I didn’t change my lesson plan which I prepared a week ago.”*

The examples beginning “*I didn’t follow...*” and “*I didn’t change...*” illustrated the teachers’ reliance on a structured lesson; be it a written lesson plan or a prescribed method. My scrutiny of lesson plans, as required during Best Teacher

Competitions, confirmed the diary findings. Teachers were not only required to note down exactly what they were going to teach, but also the replies that students were to give.

### Teacher Development

Despite what seemed to be fairly traditional routines in a number of the classrooms that I visited, there was evidence, in the diaries, that teachers were aware of the need for change:

*“I had to follow the programme. Now I think I should change something. By using some word cards I think I went through the next exercise more naturally.”*

The teacher has “appraised” the situation, sees that change is necessary and has taken action. It is not clear though, what specific teaching concern precipitates the decision to make a change. Bailey (1992, p.259) suggests that for new ideas to be adopted or the process of innovation to occur, “a dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs must be present”. This teacher is dissatisfied with the current situation but whether these initial attempts at making changes can be sustained without support is difficult to predict.

Teachers were also aware of the gaps that still existed in both their proficiency in English and their knowledge of modern methods of language teaching:

*“I realise that my ability is limited, especially listening and speaking...I don't know much about new modern methods of language teaching.”*

and another teacher:

*“I have been sent to the in-service training workshops and I found that my English, both knowledge of language and methodology isn't good enough.”*

The lack of facility with the language may, therefore, have been a factor in hindering the process of transfer of new skills and ideas to the Vietnamese language classroom. However, the positive side to this was the increased awareness of their teaching practice that both teachers had: they had identified areas of their practice that needed to be developed. These responses allowed me to build into the content of later seminars, teachers' level of language proficiency and background knowledge. In effect this meant redesigning seminar material with less complex grammatical structures and more relevant examples.

At least two of the teachers indicated that improvement and development in their teaching was linked to the increased use of teaching aids:

*"I think I should spend more time on preparing some teaching aids for every lesson."*

*"I should use teaching aids as much as possible."*

The data did not indicate whether teachers had understood the pedagogical reasons for using teaching aids in the classroom, the risk being that teachers may have used the aids for filling in time and entertaining students.

#### Affective Factors

The responses in this category were far fewer, with 9.6% of total responses, than those for the same category under the student locus where 29.6% of responses were affective. The teachers' reticence in putting forward their emotional response is perhaps understandable when it is remembered that the prime responsibility of a teacher is to transmit knowledge and values. Additionally, it may be too, that in Vietnam as in many Asian societies, people are "encouraged to moderate or control their emotional expressions and are often encouraged to conceal, rather than reveal, negative feelings" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 159).

Responses that were made expressed both the teachers' emotional reaction and the event that caused it:

*"I was very happy to see many pupils volunteer."*

*"I felt quite happy. I thought I did achieve the objectives for the lesson."*

*"I still felt unsatisfied. The pupils looked bored and the lesson was disconnected."*

This last comment, in particular, was consistent with earlier comments about the student: the teacher was particularly concerned that the students be active and happy and, in this situation, was unhappy when they were not.

### Methodology

Among the teacher-focussed responses, 9.6% fell into the category of methodology. The majority of these responses, 7.3%, were concerned with the application of new techniques and were varied in the way that they articulated the process of innovation and change. One teacher gave a rather vague description of their introduction of new language teaching techniques being:

*"The process of teaching and the application of some new techniques I have learnt by experience."*

The teacher chose not to elaborate on "some new techniques". Others identified a specific technique that they had used in their classes which gave no detail of how it was used in the lesson or how students reacted:

*"I combined the lecture with the fact in reality."*

*"I used guiding questions to lead students into the lesson."*

Another teacher, in contrast, was much more specific in identifying an activity in the textbook that could be adapted to accommodate a newly learned technique:

*"Glancing at the title and the map and the illustration of the text I immediately think of the new technique of presenting the materials learnt from the workshop recently. It's non-linguistic response to the text."*

Here the teacher had recognised an opportunity to use in class a new technique demonstrated at the seminar. The process did not stop there though. It moved into action. The teacher tried the activity which culminated in a positive reaction from the students. According to Bailey (1992) this would have been attributable to the fact that the activity had met two essential criteria for innovation: it was a close fit to the teacher's existing philosophy, and it was deemed feasible for the classroom context. Whether it measured up to the third criteria of meeting students' needs is questionable as the content centred on a walk in London's Hyde Park.

At this stage, responses such as the one just described are the exception rather than the rule, but they are an indication that transfer of new techniques and ideas is possible provided the teacher her/himself can understand and see the benefit in using them. Whether the behaviour is transferred permanently into the teacher's existing teaching repertoire is not within the scope of this study to determine.

Not all teachers provided evidence that the new techniques and ideas were capable of being transferred. One teacher stated:

*"I apply the communicative approach and new techniques learnt from the seminar such as silent reading, skimming, scanning, guessing words."*

In effect, this meant that everything demonstrated in the seminars was introduced to the class. It is difficult to imagine a teacher implementing so much innovation all at once and one wonders at the effect it must have had on the class. However, a possible explanation for such a reported radical change in teaching is found in Lamb's (1995) term "labelling" where an activity already in use in the classroom which resembles the one demonstrated by the teacher educator is given the term used during the seminars.

Teachers also faced frustrations in their attempts to develop new practices:

*“I tried using the method I’ve just got from the seminar. I had to spend two periods to teach the reading passage, in fact it’s only one.”*

Time was obviously a constraint for this teacher in applying new techniques and without adequate support to suggest ways of managing time this teacher may well decide to forgo any further attempts at introducing change into the classroom. Although not stated, this comment also highlighted the fact that students were being introduced to a new method for the first time, thus lacked any background experience on what was expected of them. The teacher’s comments may then, have been a little unfair on the abilities of the students.

Unusually, one teacher looked back on their own teacher education in what Bartlett (1990, p. 212) calls the “contesting phase”: a phase which involves a search for “inconsistencies and contradictions in what we do and how we think”. The contradiction for this teacher lay in the ease of instruction on the one hand and the passive reactions of the students on the other:

*“The methods and techniques that I have learnt at pedagogy school before, are traditional ones. They are easy to apply for large classes but the students received the knowledge passively.”*

In pointing this out the teacher was articulating the tensions between the old way with its tried and true techniques and the realisation that it does perhaps have limitations in a modern world.

#### **4.2.4 LOCUS: THE CONTEXT**

This was quite clearly the smallest of the three major loci of response which was surprising, but as I have noted in 4.2.1, there might have been sound political reasons for this result.

Despite this, where teaching aids were used, teachers gave positive reports on their effectiveness. Of most use were pictures and blackboard drawings:

*"I'm successful in using simple drawings/drawing simple pictures."*

*"I used pictures and they helped my pupils learning a lot."*

The diaries did not provide any extra details on how the pictures were employed in the lesson. However, based on observations carried out in numerous city and district classrooms, I assumed that many teachers stood at the front of the classroom and told the students about the picture or asked questions, which, on many occasions, had little to do with the content of the lesson. Few attempts were made to engage students in natural discourse.

### **4.3 DEGREE OF REFLECTIVITY**

In contrast to what I had originally predicted, the degree of critical reflectivity embedded in the diary entries was surprisingly high. Table 13 sets out the percentage of reflective responses in the categories developed by Ho & Richards (1993).

**Table 13: The Number of Reflective Responses within Three Loci**

<b>Reflective Responses</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Context</b>
Responses/Total	221/280	114/218	10/32
Reflective Responses as a % of Total	78.9%	52.2%	31.2%
<b>Category</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Context</b>
<i>Theories</i> as a % of reflective responses	1.4%	5.3%	0.0%
<i>Approaches &amp; methods</i> as a % of reflective responses	1.8%	3.5%	0.0%
<i>Evaluating</i> as a % of reflective responses	96.8%	76.3%	100%
<i>Self-awareness</i> as a % of reflective responses	0.0%	14.0%	0.0%
<i>Questions</i> as a % of reflective responses	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The largest number of reflective responses, at 78.9%, was in the locus of the student. Teachers were more concerned about performances and problems of the students than they were about their own. This was perhaps understandable when it is remembered that examinations play such an important part in school life and that teachers' reputations can often be made if their pupils perform well. There was of course, the possibility that teachers were reluctant to look too closely at their own teaching performance, a not altogether uncommon reaction, particularly from inexperienced and, in some cases, insufficiently trained teachers. Vietnamese teachers would not be alone in this regard.

A closer analysis of data reveals that within all three loci, *evaluation* was the topic that attracted the most reflective comments, a finding that was consistent with that in the study of Ho & Richards (1993). In the current study teachers focussed mainly on how well the students performed and problems that arose. Attention was paid to visible features like accuracy of both verbal and written responses and

pronunciation, achievement of lesson objectives, and the affective responses of the students. Such reflections suggest that teachers attended mainly to superficial lesson features which, particularly in the case of student performance, were the end product of the lesson. Unlike the Ho & Richards study, this study did not analyse individual teacher responses so it cannot be ascertained whether there were any marked differences in individual teacher evaluations.

Despite the tendency of most teachers to focus on the most visible features of student behaviour, there were signs that some of the teachers were attempting to construct some meaning from their reflections. Two teachers commented that they had never completed anything like a teacher diary before but it was useful because it helped them to find their “mistakes”. There was, however, no indication from the same teachers that they had attempted to find a solution using their own expertise. Another teacher appeared to realise the value of diary writing as a tool for personal development:

*“I have to keep writing journals because it not only helps the instructor observe the student performance continuously but give the opportunity to question my own teaching.”*

From my point of view as the teacher educator this last response was the ideal outcome of a in-service teacher education: the teacher had taken on the responsibility of examining her/his own practice with a view to identifying the inconsistencies within.

#### **4.4 QUESTIONNAIRE: ASSESSMENT OF TRAINING INPUT**

This questionnaire was completed by teachers at home at the end of the in-service programme. The following section summarises the results in quantitative form and uses written comments from the teacher to add depth to the findings.

**Table 14: Mean Rankings Of Input Helpfulness Of Eleven In-service High School Teachers**

Ranking	Type of Input	Mean
1	Diaries	1.20
2	Feedback on diaries from teacher educator	1.27
3	Handouts given out during the seminar	1.36
4	Demonstration of techniques	1.45
5	Sample lesson materials	1.54
6	Additional reading (articles from ELT sources)	1.82
6=	Thinking about application	1.82
8	Reflection (immediately after demonstration)	1.91

1 = very helpful 2 = helpful 3 = not very helpful 4 = not at all helpful

Eleven of the 14 teachers who finished the in-service programme completed the questionnaire. All the forms of input were rated favourably with nothing receiving a rating of under 2 (helpful). The overall mean rating was 1.55. However, such a clear indication of helpfulness should be regarded with some degree of caution as there may have been an element of trying to please the teacher educator. Despite this, the rankings of each form of input did provide a clear picture of what teachers preferred in the way of content and methodology so the remainder of the section will look at four of the inputs in more detail with a view to isolating the specific features that did hold relevance for the teachers. The inputs are: *writing of diaries, feedback on diaries, handouts, and reflections on demonstrations.*

#### Writing of diaries

The form of input which teachers, as a group, indicated they found the most useful was the writing of diaries with a mean of 1.2, initially an unexpected result, but on reflection not surprising. Unexpected, because of the amount of time required to make the entries especially when written in English. Unsurprising because the

diaries gave teachers an insight into their own practice by allowing them a chance to express their worries, to talk about their successes, and to give their opinions to an “expert” unconnected to the existing education hierarchy. Furthermore, they also received personal feedback offering professional advice. All the teachers acknowledged that it had been useful to look back over what they had done in the classroom:

*“I had a chance to evaluate what I taught.”*

*“this way is very useful because I can look back on what I have taught so I can realise my mistakes or my success from the lesson.”*

*“I easily realised what is good or not good and then found out the appropriate methodology.”*

Three teachers saw diary writing as a potential tool for change by connecting what they had learnt at the seminars to what they were doing in their own classrooms:

*“I learned what I was successful in and what I needed to improve my teaching.”*

*“with these reflections I can see myself clearly and try to find the ways of improving.”*

*“the most important thing is to have a look back at what I taught/happened during class to find out the best way to teach and to make a change of teaching better.”*

The comments were encouraging evidence that teachers were prepared to start examining their own work in an effort to improve themselves. Whether such enthusiasm will continue beyond the security of in-service seminars is questionable, particularly as teachers would be without the professional support that the teacher educator and other teachers provided. The only discord that arose was that the third teacher mentioned s/he wanted the “best way” to teach. This suggested that the teacher had expectations of acquiring one successful way to conduct a lesson, an expectation that was quite widespread judging by the number

of teachers who approached me asking for the “way” to teach grammar, dialogues and reading.

Two teachers indicated that they would continue with their diaries, although one with the proviso that this was dependent on time available:

*“I’ll do it regularly if I have time.”*

*“the reflections I wrote helped a lot. I will do it regularly.”*

From my point of view, further support to teachers, in the form of mentoring, is vital if the impetus behind these initial attempts at writing diaries is to be maintained and if depth is to be added to the reflections.

While the above evidence was encouraging it did not go far enough in addressing specific problems in teachers’ practices. The comments instead, ranged broadly and expressed a general intention with no commitment made to any particular course of action. The next stage would be to get teachers to target specific problem areas within their teaching and, as Freeman (1996) suggests, develop a professional language or discourse with which to talk about them. As one teacher noted:

*“I have thought of my teaching after class but I have never written it down. The reflections I wrote helped a lot.”*

The will is there. It is now a task of focussing that interest and ensuring that someone is there to whom they can address their diaries.

### Feedback on Diaries

Written feedback that I gave to teachers also received a high rating with a mean of 1.27. This usually took the form of comments suggesting alternative ways to present a grammatical item, how to choose key items of vocabulary or simply just offering the teacher encouragement where they had had successes. It was

obviously well received by teachers because when the feedback sheets were handed back, teachers would immediately start to read the comments that had been made and show these to their colleagues. Discussions would then ensue delaying the start of the programme for the day. In commenting on the value of the feedback, one teacher said:

*"I improved my teaching, especially I got many good ideas from you after you read my diaries."*

Although this would tend to suggest a dependence on teacher approval and a need for constant teacher guidance in trying out new work, it does also highlight the importance of a mentor/student relationship in Vietnamese culture, a point that will be considered in the discussion section:

The feedback also appears to have given teachers more confidence to try new techniques and ideas:

*"In fact, they help me [the feedback] more confident when I teach the pupils."*

A similar result emerged from the questionnaire in the post-course commentary carried out three months after the end of the seminars. It showed that teacher confidence was one of the factors in preventing the application of new techniques to classroom practice. The success of this form of input could well be because the feedback was accessible and fulfilled a mentor's role giving each teacher personal advice, suggestions, and encouragement in an area that was unfamiliar. Previously access to advice and assistance had not been available. Pennington (1996) came up with similar findings in her study when she found that the most successful activities were the ones that were more accessible to the teacher.

### Handouts

Handouts given to teachers throughout the seminars, and containing information covered during the lecture as well as additional material, were reported by teachers as the next most helpful form of input with a mean of 1.36. This highlights the lack of professional material available to teachers and the limited opportunities for exposure to new ideas and practices. Most teachers appeared to view the new material as the ideal teaching model for which to aim as well as a measure against which they could gauge their own efforts. The following four comments demonstrate the point:

*"I realised the positive and negative ways and chose a better way for myself."*

*"I would improve the effective skills and try to avoid the problems."*

*"trying to identify the problems facing my teaching and solving them."*

*" 'A Model for Teaching EFL Reading' helps me understand clearly what I should do when I teach my students."*

Only one teacher mentioned the problems that implementing a new approach would present to the established order:

*"Taking these new ideas like taking a challenge, moreover, I have to face the conflicts of old ways and new ways of teaching and how to overcome many other difficulties."*

As Holliday (1994) argues, the effect of in-service teacher education can have implications beyond the classroom.

### Reflections on Demonstrations

In contrast to the high rating for *diary writing* and *feedback*, teachers rated the *reflection on demonstrations given by the teacher* the least helpful form of input with a mean of 1.91. One reason for this response could have been an inability to see how new techniques could have been adapted to their own classrooms when,

in many cases, the techniques may have seemed quite inappropriate in the first place. Trying to encourage teachers to use these techniques, which were well beyond their normal range of experience, and very likely beyond their level of skill to adapt could well have been an exercise in futility on my part. The comments asking teachers to indicate how they thought they would make use of such intake tends to confirm this. Two teachers gave no response, another two teachers stated:

*"I'll use this input in my classes."*

but gave no indication as to how. Another said:

*"I won't use it much."*

and two others answered exactly the same:

*"The teacher can know the pupils' levels."*

This had little to do with the purpose of the activity. All of these comments indicate a clear rejection of reflections on demonstrations.

#### **4.5 POST-COURSE COMMENTARY QUESTIONNAIRE**

This questionnaire was given to teachers three months after the completion of the in-service programme and was intended to provide an indication of the degree to which teachers had implemented new ideas. This was done in two ways: first, by asking teachers to indicate on a scale the single constraint that they found most worrying and second, asking teachers to rank the groups of constraints from the most worrying to the least worrying. Table 15 sets out the rankings and means of constraints among eleven high school teachers.

**Table 15: Rankings and Means of the Constraints among Eleven High School Teachers**

Ranking	Constraints	Mean
1	Think that there is not enough time to try new ideas and activities	2.55
2=	Want to make some changes but do not feel confident enough to try new techniques	2.67
2=	Think that it is too difficult to do because there are too many students	2.67
4=	Not understand how the activity can improve your students' English	3.11
4=	Think that Western language teaching methods will not work in the classroom because they are difficult to use effectively	3.11

1 = always    2 = often    3 = sometimes    4 = seldom    5 = never

The rankings showed that teachers felt they were most constrained by time, with a mean of 2.55, when/if trying new ideas in the classroom. Because the sample was small and the result tended towards a neutral response it appeared that the concern about time was not strong. However, lack of time was a major preoccupation with most teachers at nearly every seminar and interview I conducted so the less than strong response above, was surprising. This hinted at an underlying ambivalence towards incorporating new ideas or techniques into the existing programme. Initially although they may have seemed useful, they came to be seen as an added burden rather than as an alternative way of approaching the prescribed material or the “real” work. The teachers may have provided a neutral response so as not to offend me.

The second ranked statement with a mean of 2.67 was an admission from the teachers that they lacked the *confidence* to make changes to their teaching. This was not surprising as teachers required a higher degree of oral competence to do the activities that were demonstrated than the level they were using to teach

grammar and translation exercises. Ellis (1994) noted that Vietnamese teachers in Ho Chi Minh city were only more likely to teach communicatively if their ability in English was high and, where it was low, to teach using the grammar translation method. In-service education, therefore, would need to consider integrating a language upgrade component into its structure and ensuring that activities and techniques demonstrated were well within the oral competency of the teacher.

Ranked second equal as a constraint alongside *confidence*, was the *size* of the class. For teachers trained only in transmitting knowledge, having to manage groups, pairwork and individual effort in classes of around 50 would take them right out of their comfort zone. In commenting on this one teacher reported that there were too many different levels of English in big classes to try a communicative approach. The implication here was that the teacher preferred to teach at one level.

#### Group of Constraints

The single constraints were grouped and teachers were asked to indicate which group worried them the most when trying new ideas in the classroom. This was *unfamiliarity with the new methods* with a mean of 2.11. The distance between traditional Vietnamese teaching practice and Western communicative language teaching, the latter with the concept of student centred learning underpinning its methods, would seem, as could reasonably be predicted, to be an influential factor in inhibiting change. However, with time and adequate support this would not seem to be a difficult constraint to overcome although it has to be admitted that the results did not take into account either teachers' or students' *attitudes* towards teaching and learning of English in a communicative way.

Of least amount of worry to teachers, with a mean of 3.78, was their *relationship with other people* involved in the education process. This result might not have been particularly reliable though, as there may have been a reluctance to appear to criticise the authorities. The number of teachers attending the seminars was small so it is understandable that they may not have wanted to commit themselves to

saying anything stronger for fear of being identified. In a similar vein, Ellis (1994, p.36) reported that when discussing the appropriacy of local textbooks, among Vietnamese teachers there was a “reluctance to criticise not because of respect for the author, but rather due to a fear and mistrust of the authorities”.

One final comment about the post-course commentary results as a whole is that opinions cluster towards the “sometimes” option with a spread towards “seldom” and “never”. Very few responses committed themselves to the “always” option which, in effect, would have signalled a negative response. While difficult to ascribe a reason for this result, especially with such a small sample, it may be that this tendency towards neutrality is a response influenced by cultural factors. Gudykunst & Kim (1984) note that among Asian cultures expressing a negative emotion or reaction is considered inappropriate, rude and, as causing discomfort to others. For these reasons such behaviour is avoided or concealed.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter has analysed the three sources of primary data. A content analysis and an analysis of the critical level of reflection was carried out on the diaries followed by a content analysis and a quantitative analysis of the appraisal of training input. Lastly the post course commentary was examined. A supplementary commentary was provided by data from the secondary and peripheral sources. This was used to provide more insight into some of the emerging findings. Observation notes were particularly useful in this respect. The next chapter looks at the findings that emerged and discusses them as they relate to the research questions.

## CHAPTER 5 REFLECTIONS

### 5.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses the findings of the previous chapter as they relate to the research questions. The content of the diaries is considered first and the degree of reflectivity contained therein is assessed. This is followed by a commentary on the findings from the training input appraisal. The chapter concludes with an examination of what Vietnamese teachers consider as outcomes of the in-service programme.

### 5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

*How do Vietnamese teachers of English examine their teaching practices as revealed through a content analysis and an assessment of critical reflectivity of diary writings?*

#### 5.2.1 SUITABILITY

The use of diaries as an instrument with which to begin the reflective process had caused some initial misgivings. It was the first time that the teachers had kept a teaching diary and as a consequence, I was uncertain as to whether they would be willing to divulge their classroom “secrets” or teaching practices. I was concerned that teachers might have been reluctant to spend time reflecting and writing when many already had very crowded teaching schedules. However, the results have shown that these misgivings were unfounded because there was a reasonably wide range of classroom experiences and opinions among the teachers despite limitations imposed by a very prescriptive syllabus.

Although many of the comments could not be considered much more than a record of classroom interaction, they provided a preliminary glimpse into factors that Vietnamese teachers considered important in their day-to-day practice. In

addition, it is important to remember that what the teachers omitted from their diaries also provided a great deal of information about the Vietnamese English language classroom. For example, there is little mention of context in which the prescribed structures were introduced and used, nor is there much said about the meaning of the language. Even the efforts of individual students are mentioned only twice in more than 500 recorded diary statements. These omissions suggest that little emphasis is placed on these aspects of language teaching.

### 5.2.2 THE PRIMACY OF THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

The most obvious feature of the diary entries was that comments focussed almost entirely on two loci: the teacher and the student, with a small number mentioning the context. This finding highlights one of the characteristics of the Vietnamese classroom and that is the primacy and exclusivity (exclusive of other classroom features) of the relationship between teacher and student, a finding that will be elaborated when discussing the idea of *role*. The great majority of these comments, for both groups, was concerned with *language*: student use and knowledge of language in the student category and teacher performance in explaining, guiding, motivating and identifying problems in teaching language in the teacher category. For the teacher, these results highlight her/his role as a mentor and as a transmitter of knowledge. That language assumes such prominence is understandable when the teachers' major task is to prepare students for written language examinations. This result is consistent with research carried out in other Asian classrooms (Graf, 1991; Burnaby & Sun, 1989) where the emphasis was on teaching students to pass an exam based on a prescribed text, and where teachers are primarily focussed on "putting across" the patterns of English.

This must, and does have, an impact on the degree of innovation that can be tolerated in the classroom. Graf (1991) in her study of Chinese teachers found that while examinations still held their primacy within the education system, new techniques or ideas would have little chance of being taken up by teachers. In the same study it was the Western trained teachers who made the changes to their own

teaching, a consequence that is recognised in this study with its inclusion in the model of the reflective teacher educator that appears in the conclusion.

### 5.2.3 ROLE

Turning now to the concept of *role* which was touched on in 5.2.2, implicit in the comments was evidence that both groups, teacher and student, filled fairly clearly defined roles in classroom interaction. *Role* as defined by Gudykunst & Kim (1984, p. 67) is “a set of behavioural expectations associated with a particular position in a group”. The findings from this study indicate that the teachers do indeed adhere to these expectations which are linked to cultural norms although the study did not set out to establish any conclusive link. The role of the Vietnamese teacher is influenced by what Gudykunst & Kim point out is “the degree of hierarchy present in the relationship”; a notion that stems from the influence of Confucianism. This often manifests itself in employer – employee relationships, Liem (1980). Although the context is different in the current study, the degree of distance in the hierarchy is the same and the teacher becomes the “employer” or “mentor” whose job it is to plan, motivate, guide and correct the student in much the same way as Liem’s employer guides, advises and encourages the employee. In her/his planning role the teacher sets the lesson objectives which are, by and large, dictated by the grammar points contained in the current lesson rather than by any actual expressed need of the students. Once in the class s/he motivates the students so that they focus on the text and then explains and models the language so that students are able to understand and reproduce both the rules and the target structures. In conjunction with this role, the teacher acts as adjudicator in measuring the students’ performance: a performance based on accuracy and the ability to independently reproduce the language.

It is interesting to note that students often had expectations of the teachers’ roles similar to the expectations that the teachers had her/himself. In fact, the findings from the questionnaire given to students almost parallel the findings in the preceding paragraph. Students expected the teachers to provide good models of spoken English (and of written English as well), to explain everything including

all grammar rules and, particularly among senior high school students, to point out all mistakes. This tends to confirm the primacy and the very hierarchical character of traditional roles to which both teachers and students adhere.

The role of the student is, in contrast and overtly at least, much more limited and falls within clearly defined parameters. As the teachers' and the teacher educator's perspectives of student roles are the only perspectives that this study can call on in reporting student teacher interaction then these findings only take into account these points of view. The student is expected to listen, understand, answer correctly according to what is set down in the textbook and show enthusiasm. Even prior to the lesson the students will have been expected to memorise the content. This is consistent with previous research among Asian learners (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Ellis, 1996). In a hierarchical system like the one that operates in Vietnam, this is probably appropriate as the students would not be expected to voice their opinions. Likewise, the teachers themselves, when filling the role of a student at an in-service seminar defer to the "superior status" of the teacher educator, rarely questioning, challenging or giving an opinion. The importance of the context in determining roles was demonstrated at one of the in-service seminars held during the summer months. A teacher, who was also a participant in the in-service programme on which this study is based, was asked if they would prefer to work at a group activity or on their own. The reply was to the effect that it was not their decision and that they would do as they were told. It seems probable that this teacher felt that because, at the time, they were filling the role of the student they had no right to influence the direction of the seminar. If the teachers hold such opinions then it is easy to see this attitude influencing classroom interactions with high school students. The classroom brings with it certain expectations in terms of role and these boundaries are not transgressed.

A caveat is important here: this strong adherence to roles pertains very much to the situation in Qui Nhon where outside influence has been limited and the teachers' exposure to native speakers of English and current English language teaching methods has been much less than in the larger cities of Ho Chi Minh city,

Hanoi, Hue and Da Nang. It is risky, therefore, to attribute such a reluctance to challenge an “expert” to traditional notions of role alone. It may be that superior language skills or more confidence in communicating with native speakers give teachers from the larger centres more confidence to question their educators.

A minor feature of the Vietnamese high school classroom relevant to the discussion as it is very much linked with the concept of role, is that the relationship between teacher and students is very much unidirectional with little or no indication that there is anything more than a formal question answer discourse between them. Students did not respond or interact spontaneously which was hardly surprising when teachers commented that:

*“I tried to give as many as possible examples.”*

*“I always checked their understanding by asking many questions.”*

*“I often repeated new structures for students to remember.”*

There appears to be little opportunity for any participation from the students.

#### **5.2.4 LIMITED PROBING**

As discussed above, the role of the teacher encompasses a number of responsibilities but these do not extend to probing or trying to find reasons for the lack of student success. Instead, teachers attribute inferior performances by students to superficial causes:

*“The rest were so lazy to work. I think they didn’t prepare the lesson at home.”*

They make no comment beyond noting the failure:

*“My pupils couldn’t answer.”*

This formulaic response to lesson outcomes is perhaps not surprising when it is considered that teachers are operating under considerable time pressure, a constraint that is mentioned on more than a few occasions in teacher diaries. It may again also be linked to cultural influences and the way in which Vietnamese view the world. Eastern cultures place emphasis on “synthesis through spiral logic” and contemplation of the self and the universe whereas the West emphasises analysis through “linear logic”, such as “cause to effect or effect to cause” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 41). Thus Vietnamese teachers may attribute lack of success to a “pot-pourri” of factors which may or may not have pedagogical underpinnings. In contrast, in this study, I have attempted to isolate the underlying causes of classroom problems which may not be a culturally appropriate course of action in the Vietnamese context. Of course there is always a much simpler interpretation: the teacher does not want the cause of the problem identified as that may reveal weaknesses in her/his teaching.

#### **5.2.5 TRADITIONAL ROLES UNDER PRESSURE**

It would appear that traditional classroom roles are under some pressure, particularly in the rural areas where the teacher’s own command of English is fairly limited. Evidence that the introduction of communicative language teaching methods may be instrumental in putting this pressure on traditional teacher-student relationship in the classroom is evidenced in the reply of two teachers, one of whom commented on how difficult it was to control communicative activities and the other who stressed the difficulty she had in getting students to continue with the lesson in the book after they had been doing some unstructured pairwork. Several teachers also commented on the fact that students appeared bored, which if Western experience is anything to go by, can be a signal for future problems in the classroom. A breakdown in traditional roles would indeed threaten the whole harmony of the classroom. Ellis (1996) adds weight to the evidence by noting that in Vietnam:

The picture emerging is one of older teachers clinging even more desperately to the traditional teacher-centred approach to maintain discipline, and younger teachers caught in a state of limbo, sometimes lacking the necessary education to gain the respect of their students and yet reluctant or afraid to exercise their traditional authority (Ellis, 1996, p. 45).

### 5.2.6 AFFECTIVE FACTORS

The most interesting finding of the diary writings was the large number of comments made by teachers about the affective responses of students. The teachers' idea of a successful lesson was often gauged by how active or enthusiastic the students were, which in the Vietnamese context, would appear to mean how many students raised their hands when the teacher asked a question or how quickly they were able to respond to a request from the teacher. There was also a high proportion of statements describing the students' emotional responses. That most of these indicated students were happy would suggest that again, harmony was an important factor in the conduct of the lesson. This should be viewed as a very positive feature of the Vietnamese classroom because, as Valli (1993) explains, the lack of emphasis on the role of intuition and emotions in reflectivity was a noticeable omission in teacher education programmes in the United States. Instead, the focus there was frequently on the rational.

The teachers, on the whole, said little about their own feelings. Most comments that were made were formulaic "I felt happy". As with the comments about the students, few of the affective responses were negative indicating a reluctance to reveal such emotions: a characteristic of many Asian cultures (see 4.2.3). Some teachers did show more depth in their affective responses. One teacher, who was very pleased with the class response, went to the extent of identifying three elements that were crucial to the success of the lesson:

*"Self-confidence and enthusiastic quality together with good knowledge are important elements which I showed in my teaching."*

Conceivably the teacher, and the others, would derive greater benefit from their reflections as they used “both intellectual and emotional responses in reflecting on the meaning and effect of their teaching” (Valli, 1993, p. 19).

These are positive indications that some teachers are beginning to develop a discourse with which to talk about and construct meaning from their own experiences. If becoming reflective is a developmental process as Pennington (1992) argues, then this articulation provides a good basis for change and innovation in the classroom.

### **5.2.7 DEGREE OF CRITICAL REFLECTIVITY**

Giving teachers a set of guiding questions based on those used in the study by Ho & Richards (1993), might encourage teachers to look at their teaching practice in more than just technical terms. This recognised Lamb’s call to begin INSET courses with “awareness-raising activities, where participants confront their own routine practice and the values it is intended to serve” (Lamb, 1995, p. 79).

This study did reveal a higher degree of reflectivity in teachers’ responses than had originally been anticipated, the anticipation being based on informal assessments made after listening to teachers’ thoughts on classroom interaction throughout not only the three months of the seminars but also in the 18 months preceding the in-service seminars. Whether teachers were all able to recognise the “values which these practices were intended to serve” was not answered in the study as it had not been a focus of the research but, nevertheless, there were signs that some teachers had tried. For example, one teacher realised that dictating grammar rules had little value but could offer no alternative:

*“Something should be done to have the presentation of grammar done in a more effective way rather than dictate the rule.”*

### **5.2.8 OBSERVABLE AND SUPERFICIAL OR INTUITIVE AND HARMONIOUS?**

Notwithstanding this shortcoming, the majority of reflective comments focussed on evaluations of student performance in terms of what was achieved, what was not achieved and stating problems. Such reflections suggest that teachers attended only to observable surface features of student performance which in this case appeared to be restricted to fairly narrowly defined parameters like accuracy and reproduction. In addition, and as previously noted, there were few attempts to identify causes of problems and suggest ways of solving them. It may be that these teachers are, according to Gudykunst & Kim (1984) “not concerned as much with logic and analysis” of the student behaviour as “with intuitive knowing”; that is, knowing that the student cannot perform the task. If this then is the case, my intuition is to accept the finding as it stands, because it reflects a Vietnamese view of the world. However, if we take Bartlett’s (1990) cycle of reflective teaching as a guide then many of the reflective responses show that teachers are at the appraisal stage and are indicating doubt about their students’ performances which may or may not reflect a desire to change their own techniques. Without the added depth of the other elements in the reflective cycle, their attempts to construct meaning will still be limited. Until they move through these other elements, the teachers will not have become fully reflective teachers. The argument I have with this is that it reflects a Western trained practitioner’s view of the world: that is, one of self-determinism through confronting the issues. I am not sure that this is compatible with the world view of the Vietnamese teacher.

### **5.2.9 EXTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL OR A COLLECTIVE ORIENTATION?**

There is too, a suggestion that teachers do not see the solution to classroom problems as something over which they can have much influence. Their locus of control appears to be an external one where performances are believed to be under the control of other people or forces (Ashkanasy & Gallois, 1987). However, if looked at from the perspective of “pattern variables” (Parsons, cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 1984) or the choices that an individual will make before choosing a

particular course of action an alternative explanation presents itself in the form of a “collective orientation”. The teacher chooses not to focus on an individual’s problem but considers the progress of the group as a whole. By stopping and attending to one or two problems, the teacher in effect slows down the progress of the class. This reflects a particularly Eastern view of the world as “a harmoniously functioning organism consisting of an orderly hierarchy of inter-related parts and forces” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 41).

The results also show that teachers reflect on their own classroom behaviour far less than they do on that of the students. This suggests that perhaps they view their role in fairly static terms and that what is important is the product, in this case the students’ performance as a group. The teacher was happy because the students had done something well and there was no further elaboration. The concept of reflection, in terms of their own practice, is alien to teachers and challenges their own confidence as well as their status as “the knowers” if they admit to lack of success in a lesson. However, it may also indicate that the process is a developmental one and that the teachers are only just beginning to develop a discourse to talk about classroom interaction. More meaningful discourse may come later.

### **5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION TWO**

*How do Vietnamese teachers of English appraise the content and methods of in-service education?*

#### **5.3.1 MENTORING: CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE?**

The findings from the appraisal of training input questionnaire, as noted already in the previous chapter, revealed that the preferred forms of input and support for teachers were the keeping of teaching diaries, followed very closely by written teacher educator feedback on entries that teachers had made in those diaries. Writing about their successes and problems in the language classroom, and then receiving personal advice and support on these from a person whom they considered an expert, appears to appeal to teachers because of its accessibility and

because such an approach is culturally appropriate. In other words, it reflects the traditional role of a mentor/student relationship so prevalent in Asian societies. The finding concurs with Pennington's (1996, p. 321) assertion that "the forms of training and support which have the greatest impact on the individual teachers' awareness and attitudes are those which represent the most accessible part of the input". A mentoring model of teacher education holds particular relevance in the Vietnamese context as teachers do their apprenticeship of observation and their teaching in a system where much of the instruction, in junior textbooks particularly, uses stories from the life of, and sayings from Ho Chi Minh who is held up as mentor and teacher to the Vietnamese people.

However, mentoring in its traditional form did not allow the learner access to the knowledge, understanding and judgement that underpin teaching practice (Brooks & Sikes, 1997), nor did it encourage any innovation or forward momentum. As a result a modern form evolved with many strategies from which to choose and use in the classroom. Those which would appear to be most applicable to the context of this study are firstly, modelling, where teachers can be given "the beginnings of a repertoire" (McIntyre cited in Brooks & Sikes, 1997), to assist them in perhaps making their classrooms more communicative and secondly, "the reflective coach" where, to summarise Brooks & Sikes (1997) the mentor can help the teacher:

- to extend thinking about teaching
- to focus attention on problematic areas
- to probe ideas in order to deepen insights
- to broaden perspectives by looking at alternative courses of action
- to articulate thoughts both verbally and on paper

Results, like the ones in this study, which indicate that the students preferred input and support which involved close personal contact with the teacher, are to be expected in a culture which emphasises "content of materials, individual achievement, and learning from authority" (Pennington, 1996, p 327). While the first two preferences were not supported by the current study, the third was. In the written comments one teacher said of the diary feedback :

*“It looks like a face to face talk with valuable advice.”*

Others noted that:

*“I read your comments many times.”*

*“You helped me to solve some problems I couldn’t think out.”*

In the absence of any institutional support there would appear to be a real demand for advice on how to actually teach in a more communicative way especially when teachers were faced with having to carry out this task for which many have had no preparation. It is reasonable to assume that teachers who try an activity and receive constructive feedback and support would be more likely to try again even if they were unsuccessful the first time hence the desirability of a establishing “professional” mentoring or a feedback system based on the principles set out by Brooks & Sikes (1997). However, set against this is the pressure to get the techniques and thus the lesson “right” the first time. There is a set syllabus to get through and the harmony of the lesson is important. In addition, the Vietnamese culture is not one of trial and adaptation so a less than adequate performance may be seen as a loss of face rather than as a learning experience. Faced with these constraints the teachers often have little choice but to continue with their tried and true ways of teaching, a point that will be brought out with the next research question.

### **5.3.2 AMBIGUITY: CULTURALLY INAPPROPRIATE?**

Interestingly, the teachers indicated that their least preferred reflective activities involved saying how an activity first demonstrated in an in-service seminar, might be used in their own classroom, and how they thought students might cope with it. This reluctance may indicate that teachers saw the demonstrated activity as unrealistic because they could not see how it could be applied in a “real” class of 50 students. In addition, the demonstrated activity was probably viewed as remote from their own teaching experience because its pedagogical underpinnings were

incompatible with Vietnamese teaching philosophy. By implication then, the activities would be unlikely to transfer into Vietnamese classroom practice. This assumption was given credence with the negative evaluation made by nearly all the participants in the study of the guessing words in context activity. The outcome of this particular technique carried an element of ambiguity as there was the possibility of more than one correct answer. Three teachers voice their concern clearly:

*“They [the students] had no chance to know them clearly [the words] if the teacher doesn’t have them know by heart at home.”*

*“Learners don’t have the exact definition of the new word in their own language.”*

*“Not clearly enough to understand the whole text.”*

Thus the element of doubt inherent in such an activity was enough to make the teachers believe that students would be unable to construct the meaning of the text.

### **5.3.3 CONFIDENCE**

For teachers who are normally required to teach long lists of vocabulary by providing dictionary definitions and phonemic transcriptions, such an activity also poses a threat to their confidence, particularly if they rely solely on the textbook to guide them. Their role is to provide a correct answer. What might happen if the student gave an answer that the teacher did not know her/himself? The risk of losing face is palatable. These speculations are no idle musing. In my capacity as an adviser to the Department of Education I was asked to assess a demonstration lesson by a young teacher. On at least two occasions, students gave answers which, in my opinion, were correct and superior to the ones in the book. The teacher ignored both responses and proceeded to give out the answer as per the text. This caused some confusion to the students concerned. Furthermore, as the person who introduced and demonstrated the guessing words in context activity to teachers I can report that there was an indefinable air of “this will never work for

me” made particularly evident by teachers’ unwillingness to contribute spontaneously to the session. Both reactions are quite understandable and do not denote arrogance on the part of the teachers. The teachers do not have the skills to cope with the element of ambiguity inherent in a less structured approach to language teaching.

### 5.3.4 CHANGING THE WORLD VIEW

What then needs to change is the way in which we view the teaching of language in a context which holds views on the teaching and learning of language that differ from those of the teacher educator. In my case, the techniques that were demonstrated obviously did not fit into the teachers’ existing teaching schema and were not close enough for teachers to be able to make links or to be able to adopt. Asking teachers to adapt the ideas is probably not appropriate either, at this stage. Rather we need to:

... recognise the interpretivist frame; we must see teaching as a social practice...we must abandon the prevailing view of teaching as a set of behaviours and knowledge which lodges in an individual; instead we must see teaching as a way of being in a particular context of time, place and people (Freeman, 1994, p. 115).

In other words, “we must account for their versions of the world” (Freeman, 1994, p.116). While concurring with this suggestion it does raise some concerns over cultural appropriateness. This study has shown that Vietnamese teaching practice follows an essentially transmission model of education which incorporates elements of behaviourism, like substitution and transformation drills, into the teaching repertoire. To abandon these elements and the pedagogical principles from which they are derived, is to run the risk of tissue rejection outcomes.

## 5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

*What do Vietnamese teachers of English identify as the outcomes of in-service education?*

### 5.4.1 INTRODUCTION

It was expected that the post-course commentary booklet sent out to teachers would show that there would be some changes in teachers' opinions about the value of the course, teachers having had the opportunity to try some of the ideas in their classrooms in the intervening four months since the end of the programme. This was the case and was demonstrated mainly in the comments that were made in the written conversation.

### 5.4.2 THE "LAZY TRACKS"

Comments, written approximately four months after the seminars, appeared to be less positive or perhaps more realistic about the problems that still confronted teachers in their efforts to be more communicative than they had been in the diaries. While only conjecture, it is quite likely that the realities of large classes, a syllabus that must be taught lockstep with the rest of the country, the lack of an exact model of how to teach communicative activities, student indifference and the absence of support from a mentor or guide with whom to discuss concerns and problems force teachers to resort to traditional methods. One teacher illustrates quite graphically what will happen without support:

*"The new ideas and techniques will be frozen some day and we will continue to follow the lazy tracks."*

Another cites pupil indifference, which is underpinned by a suggestion that there is no support when things go wrong:

*"We will easily get disappointed when pupils don't want to get used to new methodology."*

The post-course commentary questionnaire, which was also part of the booklet, simply asked the teachers to identify, on a scale, the constraints that they still felt they faced in trying to introduce new ideas and techniques into the classroom. Lack of confidence and unfamiliarity with new methods of teaching rated highly and provided confirmation that lack of support for teachers was a major contributor to constraints that teachers faced in introducing new techniques into their teaching practice.

### **5.4.3 TRANSFERRING NEW IDEAS**

Many of the teachers considered *time* as the major constraint in introducing new ideas as they felt that there was no time available in 45 minutes to allow students to practise language that had been explained in class. Although lack of time is a legitimate concern this does point to a possible misconception about what exactly a communicative approach to teaching is. It would appear that teachers did not change their teaching practices to accommodate new ideas or to adapt the principles that underlay these ideas and techniques. Instead, they attempted to place the new methodology on top of the existing practice where almost inevitably it failed to transfer because there was little time to apply it in the way in which it was intended. Lamb (1995, p. 80), in commenting on the lack of uptake on INSET programmes, describes this process as assimilation where "new knowledge is added to old without any significant reordering of underlying knowledge structures or beliefs". Three teachers in this study noted that when introducing new ideas, students did not react as anticipated. In their opinion, this had thrown the lesson into disarray and they were unable to finish in the required time. It would seem therefore, that the problem is not a matter of lack of time but one of bad time management and one of a limited understanding of what the new techniques were aiming to achieve pedagogically.

#### 5.4.4 UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

There would also appear to be a slightly unrealistic expectation placed on the results that communicative language teaching can achieve in the classroom in a short time. One teacher, after trying a new technique in class was disappointed because:

*“... the students’ listening and speaking didn’t improve.”*

Another teacher lamented that when students tried a new activity for the first time only one student could do it. As a consequence the students learned nothing that day. With pressure on teachers to “get students through the textbook” there is a good chance that these teachers will not attempt the activities again.

#### 5.4.5 VISIT THE REAL WORLD

That some teachers wanted educators to come out and look at what one teacher said was “*the real situation*” and another called “*the situation in Qui Nhon*” suggests that not enough was done prior to the in-service seminar to investigate the real world of the Vietnamese teachers. Holliday (1994, p. 113) argues that a failure to learn about the “real world of a new culture” has been a major cause of failure in English language projects. This outcome has major implications for the future direction of the current project as these requests need to be responded to if development is to be a two-way process. This type of data should in fact form the basis of any future decisions “which the project needs to inform its own action” (Holliday, 1994, p. 114). While I agree with Holliday’s conclusion, and visited at least 20 city and district schools, in reality there are limits to what a foreign teacher educator can achieve. For example, many of the schools visited needed police permission which was often slow in being granted. Furthermore, the physical effort of getting to approximately 125 schools would have made it impossible to run regular seminars.

#### 5.4.6 MAKING LINKS BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW

There was still a feeling among teachers that the ideas and techniques being demonstrated and discussed in the in-service seminars had little place in their own classrooms. While the content on which new techniques and ideas were based was taken directly from prescribed English language texts, the underlying teaching principles were too remote from teachers' own teaching philosophies, or those that are inherent in Vietnamese education, to be valid. This interpretation is echoed by other researchers (Jarvis, 1986; Damen, 1987) who note that many foreign language students do not see much value in activities whose "orientation" is communicative and thus too far removed from the traditional backgrounds from which they have gained their own previous experience.

Where there was a positive reaction to activities, for example, skimming and scanning, the activities could be linked to what Vietnamese teachers were already doing in their classrooms. However, once again, there were changes. Scanning was interpreted to mean finding the answers to comprehension questions, the latter of which were already laid out in the textbook and which students would have been expected to prepare at home (the answers were, in fact, on sale in Vietnamese translations). Similarly, in my experience, skimming meant getting students to read the text in no more than two or three minutes and then asking them what the main idea was. In Vietnam texts would have been prepared and memorised at home first. Lamb (1995, p. 75) calls this teacher behaviour *labelling* where teachers "had clearly just applied a term they had picked up on the course to an activity they were already doing".

#### 5.4.7 MAKING THE METHODOLOGY METHODICAL

There were calls by four of the nine teachers, who completed this post-course summary, to provide what one of them describes as:

*"... a methodological presentation so Vietnamese teachers know how to solve problems."*

This foregrounds a theme that the third research question addresses indirectly, that is, the attempts to identify a culturally appropriate methodology. All of the concerns that teachers raised in the post-course commentary appeared to relate to the inappropriateness of the approach which I was taking, the quote at the beginning of this paragraph being one such example. The lack of a clear structure to some of my presentations seemed to have made teachers uncomfortable and the content less accessible as they did not know where they were “up to”. This was brought home quite forcefully near the beginning of the series of in-service seminars. A Vietnamese friend of mine, who had asked to attend the seminars as an observer, came up at lunchtime and suggested that I not only tell teachers what the objectives were for the day (which I had done), but write them on the board as well. Then after lunch I should tick off on the board the objectives that had already been covered in the morning session.

Requests for outside help with methodology and more demonstrations also point to a possibility that teachers see themselves as passive participants in the teacher development process. Such an attitude is heavily influenced by what is called an “individualised, non-participatory, no risk learning cultural context” (Pennington, 1996, p. 342). However, the reluctance to actively engage in classroom innovation is also quite understandable given the teachers’ lack of voice in determining the curriculum or any other aspect of the educational process. Such decisions are made by those in higher positions of authority.

#### **5.4.8 DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE**

The outcome which I believe is most evident in the post-course commentary, though it is not stated directly, is the need for a mentor or guide who would take the teachers through the presentations helping them to interpret their experiences, whether positive or negative, and to advise and support when and where needed. After a period of time when teachers were ready, the mentor’s role would become that of a facilitator who would allow teachers to control their own learning. Ultimately the mentor would withdraw from the process to allow the teachers to develop their own independence.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

The final part of this journey begins with a recapitulation of a caveat I wrote in the methodology chapter and that is, that the conclusion applies only to the context in which this study was conducted, Binh Dinh province. However, there are general principles that do apply to the INSET culture at large and it is these which form part of this conclusion. The remainder of the conclusion is used to set out and explain my tentative model of the reflective teacher educator process.

### 6.1 AN ANALOGY

Perhaps the best way to begin is to give an analogy, as in the introduction to the literature review. It is a device which Vietnamese themselves use often, to express their ideas and if indeed this thesis is to reflect some of my Vietnamese experience as a teacher educator, then this analogy, best illustrates one of the major outcomes of this research: that is, the importance of understanding and acknowledging the validity of another world view by incorporating it into the teacher education and development process.

When I had not long been in Vietnam, in 1992, my counterpart commented on the amount of work I was doing and how energetic and enthusiastic I was when I taught. She added that this was the problem with foreigners. They were like big oak trees, strong and enduring but when they fell, they fell very heavily. She went on to advise me that I must learn to be like a Vietnamese woman and become like bamboo; to bend but to never break.

### 6.2 LEARNING TO BEND

This study has elements of both the oak tree and the bamboo. The first seminars were, in retrospect, inappropriate for the Vietnamese with too much discussion, too many open-ended activities and my rather naïve expectations that teachers would always be willing to give their point of view. Not only was the work exhausting and frustrating for me, it also appeared to make little impact on teachers' practices. To avoid breaking I would have to learn to bend. Holliday's

(1992) recommendation to “ascertain the information we need” was good initial advice but it assumed that the teacher educator would know the information that was needed. Certainly this was true some of the time but on many occasions what I assumed was wanted was one thing and what was really needed was another. So with feedback from the teachers after each seminar session, revisions were made for the next seminar, and the next, as I slowly gained an insight into the teachers’ world view and how it affected their classroom practice. The process was very much one of a step forward, assess the reaction from teachers, step back, revise and then try again – a continuous loop. Demonstration of techniques such as guessing words in context, *role play* and *information gap* were discarded as it soon became obvious that teachers would have limited, if any, use for them. These may have a place in the future, but for now the teachers had enough to contend with as they attempted to update their knowledge and skills to meet the increasing demand for skilled communicators in English.

### 6.3 EXPLORING THE ENVIRONMENT

Gathering information to inform successive seminars was not confined to the seminar classroom. Diaries completed by teachers after their classes also provided invaluable data on the factors Vietnamese teachers considered important. For example, the unarticulated conflict between the communicative approach to teaching and the transmission approach to teaching was highlighted by a strong emphasis on roles in the classroom and the desire for an unambiguous method which could be followed lockstep. Such fundamental differences in educational philosophies presented me, the teacher educator, and the teachers themselves with a highly complex challenge in attempting to design a culturally appropriate methodology.

What the original research questions did not address directly but which are touched on in the literature review and which became increasingly important in my efforts to understand the Vietnamese teaching culture is the importance of understanding the world view of the teachers. This gave me the basis on which I could make informed interpretations of diary writings and of behaviours that I had

observed in the classroom. Within the culture of the classroom this information can be difficult to obtain, interaction often being formulaic and with little real meaning. In this study I overcame the difficulty partially, by living amongst and socialising with the Vietnamese which added an extra dimension to much of what I observed. Although I would never claim that I understand fully the deep action that underlies much of the interaction in the Vietnamese classroom, I do have a much better appreciation of why certain things happen and what I can do to minimise the risk of tissue rejection.

As part of this process in becoming informed about the world of the Vietnamese teacher, it is essential to pilot whatever method of data collection is chosen. This allows the teacher educator an opportunity to not only identify design flaws but to pinpoint cultural assumptions and bias and to ensure that any ambiguity resulting from contrasting teaching philosophies is minimised.

#### **6.4 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Reflective teacher education does have implications for the Vietnamese classroom although there are limitations. Teachers show an interest in evaluating their lessons and trying to improve their teaching practice by incorporating new activities into their existing repertoire, but much of this focusses on surface features and changes and does not address the underlying issues that face Vietnamese teacher education. Beyond describing classroom interaction, reflective teaching assumes a wish to discover the reason for an occurrence, and beyond that the luxury of being able to make individual choices. Neither of these concepts is an integral part of Vietnamese culture which, as has been shown in the literature review, views the world not through an analysis of linear logic but rather through “a synthesis of spiral logic” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984).

#### **6.5 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

None of the teachers in this study had ever had to complete diaries as part of their teacher education. This had an obvious impact on their writing, as without a

“discourse” in which to couch their experiences, their descriptions of classroom interaction were limited. Although guide questions were used, these may have directed some of the teacher thoughts too much. There is a place for some education in diary writing and getting teachers to recognise that their own opinions and reactions are valid. This, of course assumes that teachers have a sufficient command of English to be able to express themselves confidently. However, at the same time it should be noted that expecting Vietnamese teachers to carry out in-depth analyses appears to be inappropriate in this teaching culture. At this level, developing a discourse to describe classroom interaction and its possible pedagogical implications would be a reasonable goal.

For Western-trained teacher educators to be able to interpret the diary responses in an informed way it is essential to be “in tune” with the teachers, their beliefs and their expectations. Ideally, to achieve this it is preferable to spend time in the teaching culture in order to gain an insight into patterns of classroom interaction. By doing this, in this study, I was able to establish that affective factors are very important to the Vietnamese teacher: that harmony and stability in the class are paramount and any activities carrying an element of ambiguity or which are ad hoc and not prepared well in advance, beautifully, are likely to be rejected. These preferences can be linked to pressure on the teachers to perform well and to teach the lesson as per the book. Admitting that they do not know an answer is not an option. Therefore the introduction of ideas and activities which are not structured and transparent and that may violate these unwritten codes of conduct is a risky undertaking.

However, the process of becoming more culturally attuned to the Vietnamese view of the world should extend beyond the education context and into the local community. By getting to know Vietnamese people, their beliefs, their customs, their language, their history and their aspirations, the teacher educator reduces the chances of tissue rejection and at the same time acquires an appreciation of the deep action that informs teacher behaviour.

All these courses of action for informing a culturally appropriate approach to teacher education in Vietnam suggest that the current models of teacher education need to take into account more of the Vietnamese view of the world and less of the Western view of the world. For example, the traditional roles that teachers and students play in the classroom are still a very prominent feature of classroom interaction but are under increasing pressure from the educational changes that are taking place. To ensure that teachers are not “roller-coastered” into situations that threaten these roles and their status as teachers, a measured approach to the introduction of new ideas is needed. I feel that this is best done by taking features of traditional classroom patterns and “synthesising” them with the features of a more current approach.

One suggestion which has the ability to successfully meld the old and the new is to extend the role of the teacher educator to one of a mentor. Mentoring is an integral part of not only Vietnamese education but many other facets of Vietnamese life, particularly skilled trades where an extensive system of apprenticeship/mentoring operates. This relationship should be a component of any in-service education because teachers want professional advice and models to follow and need regular feedback and support if their attempts at introducing these into the language teaching classroom are to succeed. It is naïve to assume that teachers will go back to their classes and adopt or adapt the majority of what they have learned at in-service seminars without any support. Lamb’s (1995) study showed this quite clearly. For many teachers there had been no uptake from in-service teacher education whatsoever.

### **6.5.1 THE REFLECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATOR**

While the primary focus of this research has been the responses of teachers to in-service teacher education there has also been a subtext operating which is as equally important to the outcome of the programme. This subtext is the development of the reflective teacher educator, in other words, the deep processing that occurs as the teacher educator receives feedback from the teachers and translates it into output for the next seminar. The content for successive

seminars is, therefore, the fruition of this internal process. However, the process is far more complex and seemingly less logical than a straightforward input-output paradigm with many sources of input not getting beyond entry level while others are totally reshaped in the process.

Moving from being a “stranger” to being more culturally aware meant that I did have to use a variety of sources of input. Diary notes, questionnaires and observation notes constituted a large part of these and informed many of the subsequent decisions I made during the seminar programme. This process has been underpinned by my conscious decision to employ the principles of reflective teaching to my own teaching in the hope that some of this would transfer to the teachers with whom I was working. Probably as equally as important in my education have been my experiences in the community, that is, learning Vietnamese, participating in festivals and special occasions, forming friendships with Vietnamese and undertaking to teach English to classes of adult beginners, where some were willing students and where others were obliged to participate by Government directive. These experiences have enabled me to add an extra dimension to my teacher education programme, drawing on examples from these other classes, tales from Vietnamese folklore and events in Vietnamese history to ensure that the messages were more accessible to the teachers.

Figure 12 through to Figure 15 constitute a tentative model of the reflective teacher educator process as it applied to my situation in Qui Nhon but there are elements which are relevant to other contexts. There are four views of the model. The first is an overview of the entire process and the remaining three, integral parts of the whole which have been developed and expanded to reveal key elements. The small box-tailed arrow that appears above each diagram contains a scaled-down version of the complete model. The shaded areas within these mini models indicate their relationship to the whole. An explanation of each view follows the diagrams.

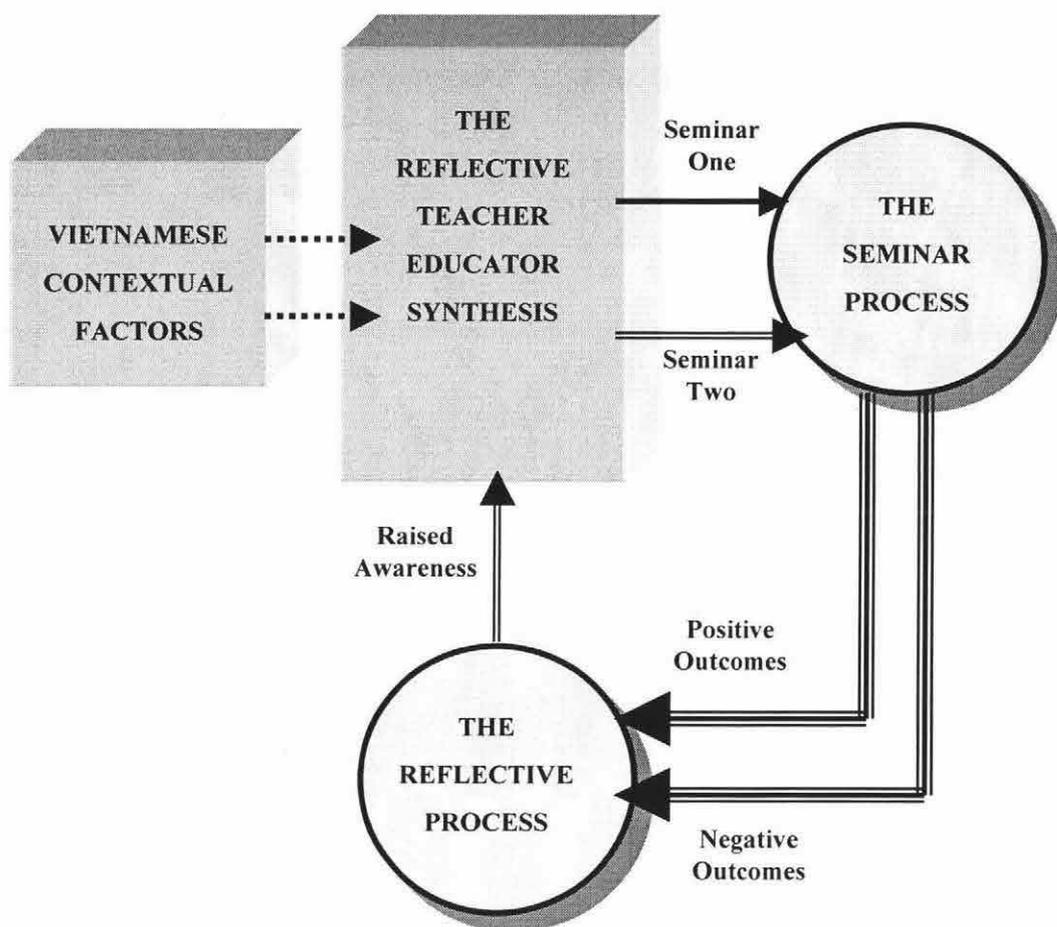


Figure 12: Tentative Model of the Reflective Teacher Educator Process

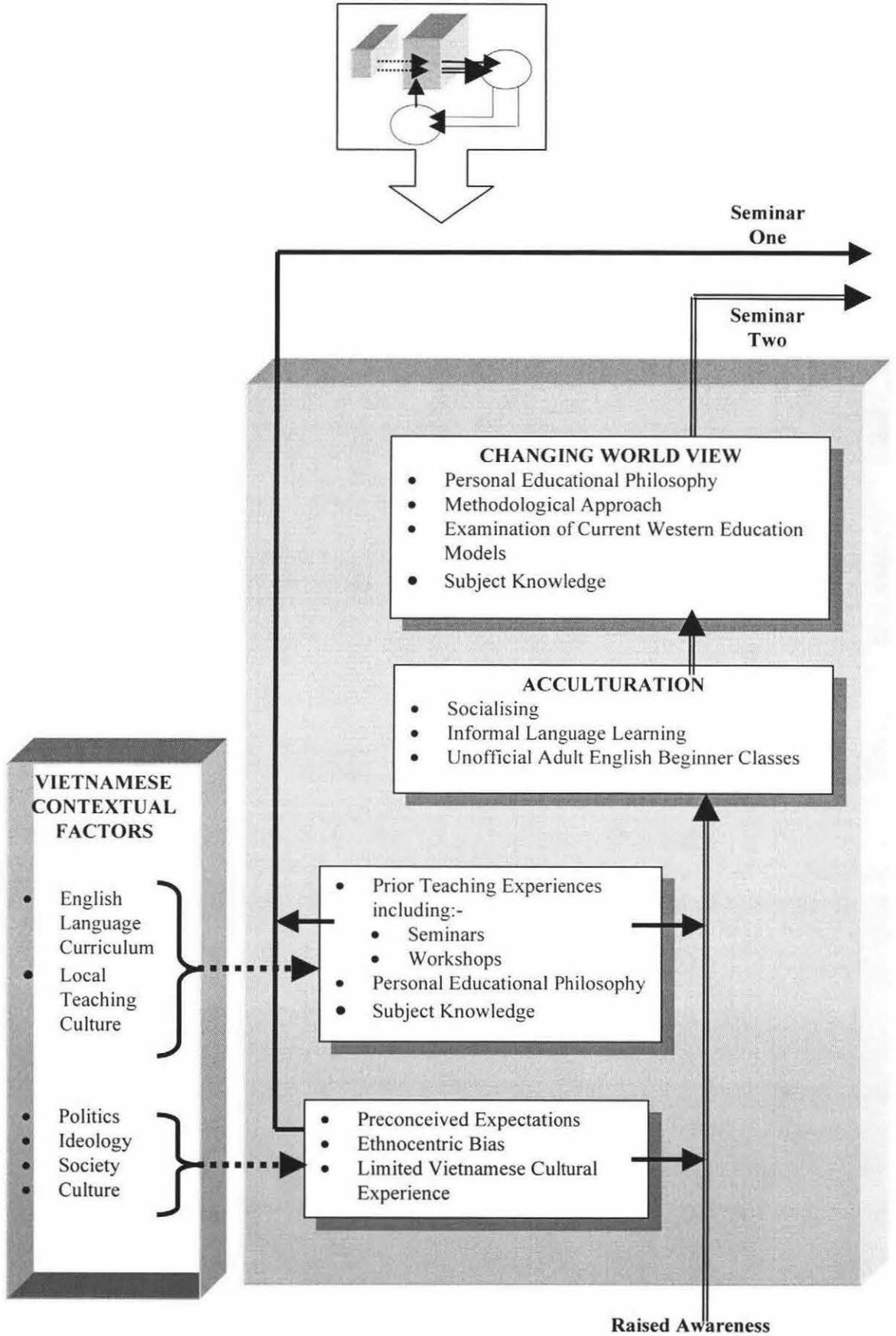
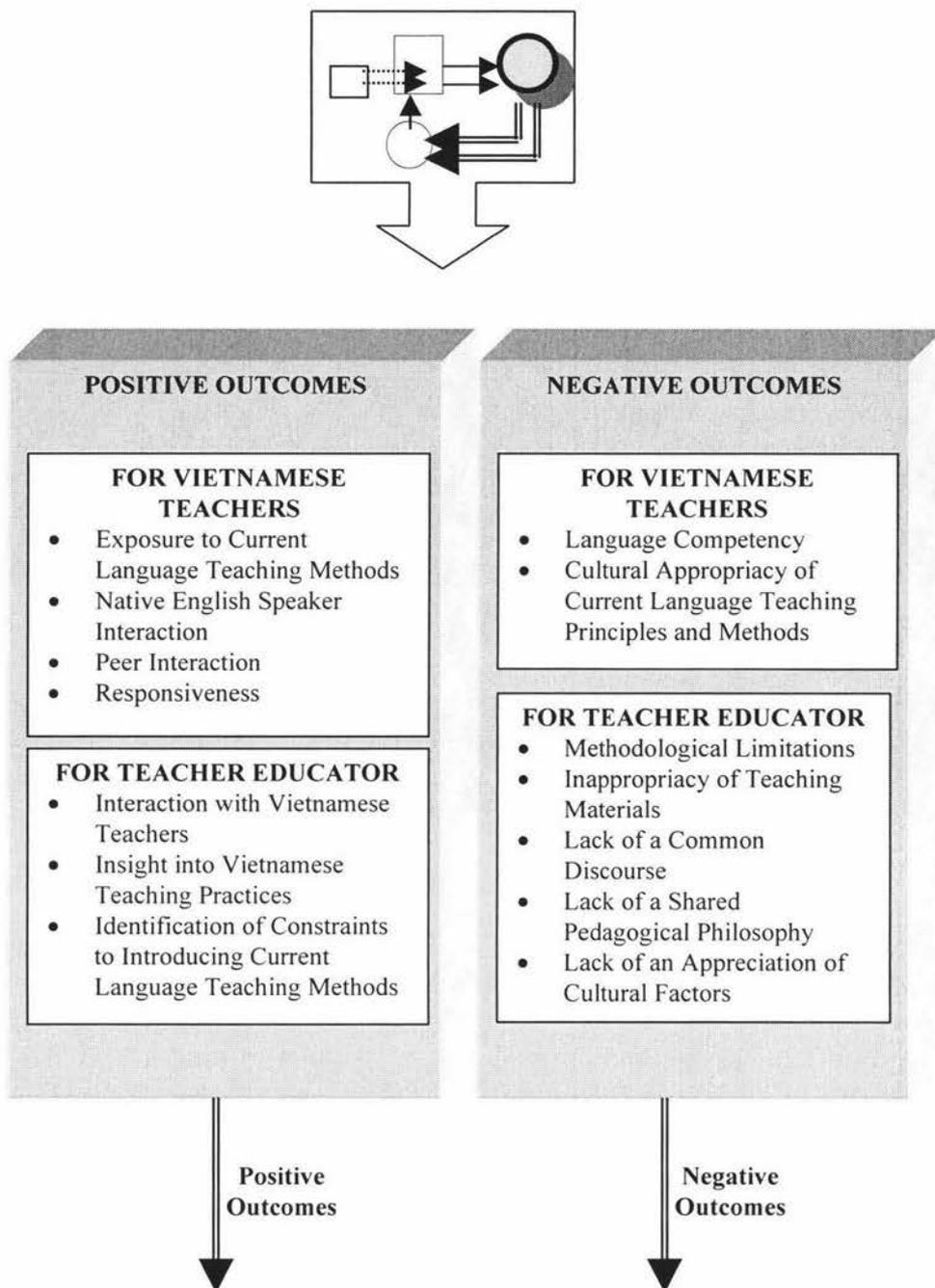
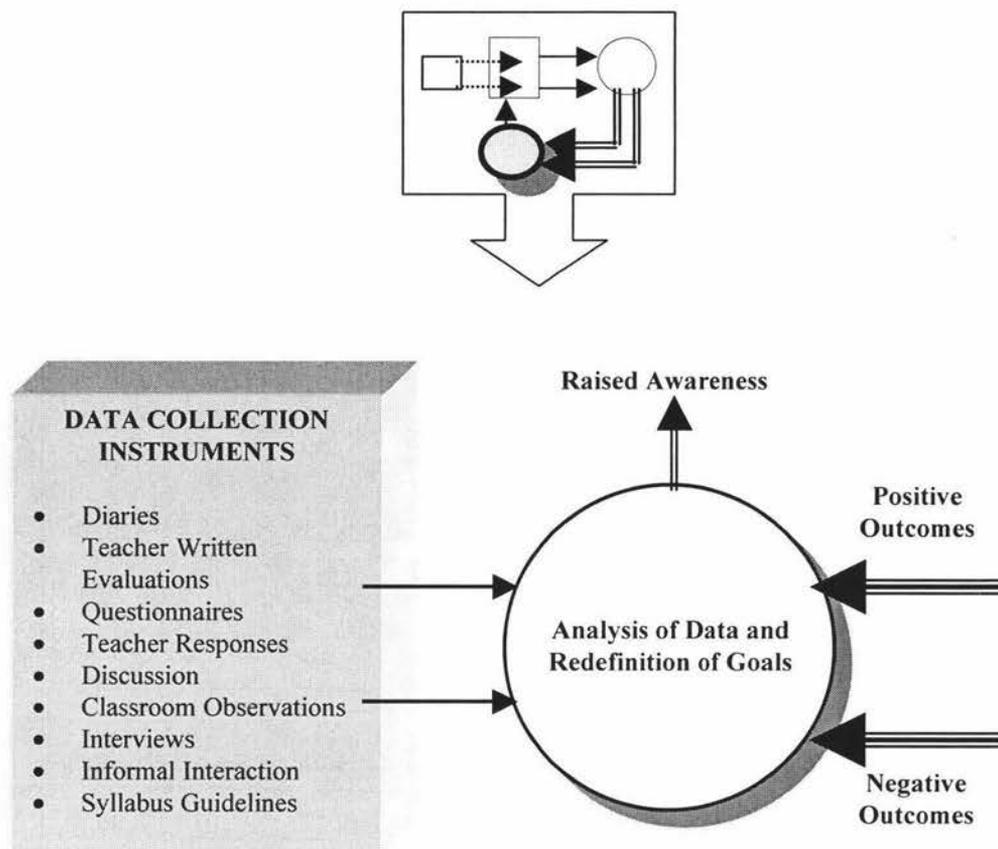


Figure 13: The Reflective Teacher Educator Synthesis



**Figure 14: The Seminar Process Outcomes**



**Figure 15: The Reflective Process**

Figure 12 provides a view of the complete process. The teacher educator, represented by the central box, synthesises information from two directions; the Vietnamese context and the more consciously controlled (by the teacher educator) data collection and analysis phase. These inform the planning for the next seminar which in turn has both positive and negative outcomes. The process is iterative with incremental improvements as the teacher educator gains an increasing awareness of the deep actions that underlie teacher responses and interaction.

Figure 13 shows in detail the synthesis between the Vietnamese contextual factors and the teacher educator. The process is a lengthy one and is driven by output from successive seminars, collection and analysis of data and less consciously acquired information gained by living and working in the host culture. Initiated by a process of critical reflectivity the synthesis begins as the teacher educator discards some of her/his beliefs, ideas and expectations, modifies others and retains those s/he believes are fundamental to her/his personal teaching

philosophy. By doing so s/he is able, little by little, to develop and accommodate a different world view.

Figure 14 details both the positive and negative outcomes from the seminars for both the Vietnamese teacher and the teacher educator. Although this model does not show it, over time the negative outcomes would diminish. This would depend on the teacher educator being committed to an on-going process of evaluation and reflection and being prepared to accept Vietnamese pedagogical practices, expectations, and beliefs as valid contributors to an informed methodology.

Figure 15 shows the point at which the outcomes of the seminars and data collected from other sources are analysed and existing goals re-appraised and redefined. This has the added benefit of raising the cultural sensitivity of the teacher educator with the flow-on effect evident in seminars, with the use of a more culturally appropriate approach.

## **6.6 FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study set out to answer three questions and it has done so unequivocally. Vietnamese teachers still view their teaching practices in traditional terms with both teachers and students filling well defined roles in classroom interaction. Maintaining harmonious relationships is of paramount importance but some teachers feel their traditional role is under pressure. Teachers do not consider in-depth analyses of students' performance and self evaluations as essential parts of their teaching repertoire because assessment of the students is conducted on a collective basis with little emphasis on individual performance.

Facing increasing pressure to improve their skills, Vietnamese teachers show a preference for content that is relevant to their own classrooms, is structured with little or no ambiguity, and keeps the classroom harmonious. Presentation of new techniques is more successful if it is accompanied by support and feedback from a mentor/teacher educator. Any Western methodologies that do not take into

account Vietnamese pedagogical philosophies are unlikely to transfer into the Vietnamese English language classroom.

In summing up their reactions to in-service education, Vietnamese teachers feel that some activities are too remote from their own language teaching experience to be of use and suggest that future teacher educators should spend more time in the Vietnamese English language classroom learning about what actually goes on. Although many new activities are considered useful, teachers feel that the constraints of time and lack of professional support will mean they have to resort to tried and true methods. Most teachers find that attendance at in-service programmes has increased their confidence in trying new techniques and has given them a forum to express their ideas.

## **6.7 FUTURE AREAS FOR RESEARCH**

As this study was the first of its type carried out in Binh Dinh province there are clearly still many avenues of teacher education that have yet to be addressed. For the immediate future though, I suggest that the following areas are deserving of investigation.

Firstly it would be beneficial to evaluate teachers' responses to each part of the course and to then carry out a further analysis to isolate the features of activities that "work" and the features of those that do not. Linked to this is the need to investigate other sources of data which could provide a more complete picture of the teachers' environment: for example, to survey student opinion on the introduction of new activities into the classroom.

Secondly, further exploration of the reflective teacher educator process and development of the model that precedes this section would be a natural extension of this project. The tentative model that I have proposed is a representation of the path that I took towards developing a methodology appropriate for Vietnamese classrooms but was not the original focus of the research. However, the model may be of use as a departure point for further investigation. This has particular

importance in the world of aid and development projects as the fundamental tenets driving much of today's efforts are those of sustainability and capacity building. If language teaching projects are to be sustained, then teacher educators and teacher trainers need to be well informed about the local context and conversely, so must local counterparts be informed of the objectives of the project. Ideally, a model should be developed to take account of the experiences of Vietnamese teachers as they participate in in-service education.

Thirdly, a comparative study should be undertaken, comparing those teachers who attended the in-service education and those who did not. The purpose would be to identify whether the in-service education had precipitated any changes in the classroom teaching practices, or attitudes of seminar participants, and whether the education was perceived as beneficial or otherwise, and in what ways. This would also allow the teacher educator, teachers, education authorities and project sponsors to evaluate the effect of the programme and either to set new goals and objectives for future in-service education or, to target new areas for development.

It only remains now to conclude and I leave that to the Vietnamese themselves. This phrase was quoted to me what seemed like a million times during my assignment and it epitomises the whole approach to in-service teacher education.

**“Dan Dan” /ZAN ZAN/  
(Step by Step)**

**APPENDIX 1: COLLECTION AND PROCESSING OF SECONDARY AND  
PERIPHERAL DATA**

**Table 16: Collection And Processing Of Secondary And Peripheral Data**

<b>Source</b>	<b>No. Of Subjects</b>	<b>Gathering</b>	<b>Stance</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Time Collected</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
Biodata	15	Etic	Declarative	Linear	Linear	Beginning of the in-service seminar programme	All
Survey: Teacher Expectations	14	Etic	Declarative	Iterative	Guided	First day of the in-service seminar programme	All
Questionnaire on Teacher Beliefs About Teaching	15	Etic	Declarative	Linear	A priori	First day of the in-service seminar	All
Student Questionnaire	339	Etic	Declarative	Linear	Guided	During in-service seminars: teachers administered	All
Classroom observations	Researcher	Etic	Declarative	Iterative	Grounded	Before and during the in-service seminars	All
Teacher educator audio diary	Researcher	Self generated	Declarative	Iterative	Grounded	After each seminar	All

**APPENDIX 2: DIARY GUIDELINES**

The following Diary Guidelines for teachers have been adapted from Reflective thinking through teacher journal writing: Myths and realities, B. Ho & J.C. Richards, 1993, *Prospect* 8, 21-23.

### **Thinking About Your Teaching**

#### **Teaching Journals/Diaries**

The primary objective of this in-service education is to help **you** develop a language teaching methodology that is suitable for **your** classroom. Once you have achieved this we hope that you can pass on your experiences to other Vietnamese teachers of English. However, before you can do that you need to think about what actually happens in the classroom.

I would like to encourage you to begin reflecting on your own teaching and the beliefs about teaching that influence the things you do in your classroom practice.

A useful way of developing a deeper understanding of points raised at the workshops and in your own teaching is by writing about them. Writing can help you learn about your teaching, and often helps to answer questions or to identify solutions.

This semester I would like you to keep a journal or diary, in which you regularly write down your thoughts about your teaching. This information can also help me to make this course more relevant for you

**Journal/Diary Guidelines**

- You will be given a ring-binder and writing paper.
- Write on one side of the paper only. Please write neatly in English.
- You are writing for
  - yourself
  - for me, your teacher educator
  - if you wish you may also share your thoughts and comments with another course member. This is up to you.

**How to reflect**

- Reflect about a lesson at least twice a week. If possible, immediately after you have taught a lesson, write down your ideas about that lesson. It is easier to do this while the lesson is still fresh in your memory.
- Use the questions that I have included in the ring-binder to guide you but do not try to answer them all. You may also write about other things in the lesson if you wish.

## **Reflection Questions: A Guide**

*Try to do this twice a week as soon after the lesson as possible. Remember you do not have to answer all these questions. They are only to guide you.*

### **Questions about what happened during a lesson**

- **Questions about your teaching**

- What were your objectives for the lesson?
- Did you achieve your objectives?
- What teaching materials/aids did you use?
- How effective were they?
- What language techniques did you use?
- Did you have any problems with the lesson?
- Did you do anything different from usual?
- Did you follow your lesson plan exactly? If not, why did you decide to change?
- Did the change make things better or worse?
- Which part or parts of the lesson were the most successful?
- Which part was the least successful?
- What changes do you think you should make in your teaching?

- **Questions about the students**

- Were students active during the lesson?
- Was the lesson at the right level for them to understand?
- What do you think students really learned from the lesson? Why do you think this?
- What did they like most about it?
- What didn't they like about the lesson?

**Thoughts about being a teacher**

*Once a fortnight (every 2 weeks) reflect on yourself as a language teacher. Use these questions to guide you.*

**Questions about yourself as a language teacher**

- Where do I get my ideas about teaching from?
- How am I developing as a language teacher?
- What do I do well in my teaching ?
- What do I not do well in my teaching?
- How can I improve in my language teaching?
- How am I helping my students?
- What satisfaction does language teaching give me?

**APPENDIX 3: CATEGORIES CONSIDERED AS REFLECTIVE**

The following reflective categories have been adapted from Reflective thinking through teacher journal writing: Myths and realities, B. Ho & J.C. Richards, 1993, *Prospect* 8, 16-17.

### **1. Theories of teaching**

*Theories and beliefs about teaching and learning*

- A justification for something
- A personal opinion

*Applying theories to classroom practice*

- Contradictions between theory and practice
- How theories changed

### **2. Approaches and methods**

*The teacher's knowledge*

- Pedagogical knowledge
- Knowledge and experience

*The learner's background information*

*The school context*

- The relation between teaching and the school context

### **3. Evaluating teaching**

*Evaluating lessons*

- Positive evaluations of lessons
- Negative evaluations of lessons

*Diagnosing problems*

- Student's problems
- Classroom interaction
- Teacher's problems

*Solutions to problems*

- Alternative ways of presenting a lesson
- Deciding on a plan of action

### **4. Self-awareness**

*Perceptions of themselves as teachers*

- Their teaching style
- Comments on their language proficiency

*Recognition of personal growth*

- How confidence has developed

*Setting personal goals*

- Self-development

### **5. Questions about teaching**

*Asking for reasons*

**APPENDIX 4: ASSESSMENT OF TRAINING INPUT QUESTIONNAIRE**

The following questionnaire has been adapted from Pennington in *Teacher learning in language teaching* (p. 344-347), D. Freeman & J.C. Richards (Eds.), 1996, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The different types of training input that you have received during these seminars are listed below. Please indicate how helpful you found them by circling one number.

1=very helpful    2=helpful    3=not very helpful    4=not at all helpful

Then comment on what you think you learned from each type of input and what use you made or will make of each of these inputs.

1. Demonstration of techniques by teacher educator (Fiona) during seminars

1                    2                    3                    4

What do you think you learned from this input?

.....  
 .....

What use did you or will you make of this input?

.....  
 .....

2. Handouts given by educator during seminars (e.g. lesson transcripts, reading involves a variety of skills, problems faced by Vietnamese teachers in teaching reading, a model for teaching EFL reading, finding an appropriate methodology etc.)

1                      2                      3                      4

What do you think you learned from this input?

.....  
 .....

What use did you or will you make of this input?

.....  
 .....

3. Sample lesson materials given out by educator during seminar, e.g. On A Farm, Rubber Trees, Waste Paper.

1                      2                      3                      4

What do you think you learned from this input?

.....  
 .....

What use did you or will you make of this input?

.....  
 .....

4. Additional reading (done at home) on the techniques demonstrated during the seminar (Guessing Words in Context, Context Clues, Skimming and Scanning, How do you teach reading? etc.)

1                      2                      3                      4

What do you think you learned from this input?

.....  
 .....

What use did you or will you make of this input?

.....  
 .....

5. Reflection sheets asking you to comment on the techniques demonstrated.

(e.g. I was involved in what I was doing, I was thinking the activity , I thought the activity would be useful for .....etc.)

1                    2                    3                    4

What do you think you learned from this input?

.....  
.....

What use did you or will you make of this input?

.....  
.....

6. Reflection sheets "Thinking About Application" asking you how you would apply the techniques demonstrated.

1                    2                    3                    4

What do you think you learned from this input?

.....  
.....

What use did you or will you make of this input?

.....  
.....

7. Writing teacher diaries

1                    2                    3                    4

What do you think you learned from writing down your thoughts about lessons you taught?

.....  
.....

What use did you or will you make of these reflections?

.....  
.....

8. Feedback on teacher diaries ( comments that I made)

1                    2                    3                    4

What do you think you learned from this input?

.....  
 .....

What use did you or will you make of this input?

.....  
 .....

9. Of all the inputs, which one had the greatest immediate value for you as a teacher and why?

.....  
 .....

10. Of all the inputs, which one do you think will have the greatest long-term value for you as a teacher?

.....  
 .....

**APPENDIX 5: CONSTRAINTS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE**

*Level:* \_\_\_\_\_

*When you are shown a new teaching technique or a new idea do you...*



*Physical constraints*

worry that students will be noisy and naughty

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

think that there is not enough time to try new ideas and activities

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

think that it is difficult to do because there are too many students.

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never



*Relationships with other people*

worry that the principal will not understand what you are trying to do and will tell you to stop

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

worry that parents will complain if their child is getting less grammar exercises to do at home

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

worry that students won't like the new techniques

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

worry that other teachers will complain about your class

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never



*Unfamiliarity with new methodology*

not understand how the new activity should be used

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

not understand how the activity can improve your students' English

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never



### *Change*

think that the traditional way of teaching is easier and so you do not want to change

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

think that you learnt English by traditional methods so you do not want to try anything different

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

think that because the new activity is not written in the textbook it is not worth trying

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

want to make some changes but do not feel confident enough to try new language teaching techniques

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never



*Appropriateness for the Vietnamese classroom*

think that the ideas for ways to teach communicatively could not be used for the exercises (e.g. practice, further practice) in the textbooks

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

think that Western language teaching methods will not work in your classroom because they are difficult to use effectively

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

think that the activity will not help students pass their exams

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

think that learning about new ideas and techniques is a good way to improve your own knowledge but you would never use them

always                      often                      sometimes                      seldom                      never

**APPENDIX 6: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

**Please tell me about yourself**

<b>Name</b>	
<b>How old are you?</b>	
<b>Where do you teach?</b>	
<b>Where did you do your teacher training?</b>	
<b>Do you teach junior high school or senior high school?</b>	
<b>If you are a senior high school teacher, do you teach the three year English programme or the seven year English programme?</b>	
<b>How long have you been teaching English?</b>	
<b>Have you taught at other schools?</b>	
<b>Have you been to any other in-service education courses?</b>	

**APPENDIX 7: TEACHER EXPECTATIONS**



**APPENDIX 8: BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING QUESTIONNAIRE**

The following questionnaire has been adapted from Johnson in *Journal of reading behaviour* cited in *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*, J.C. Richards & C Lockhart (Eds.), 1994, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Read all 14 statements. Then choose 5 statements which describe the way you think English is learnt and how you think it should be taught.

1. Language is a set of grammatical structures which are learned by heart.
2. If students understand what they are saying they are learning the language.
3. When students make speaking errors the teacher corrects them and then later teaches a short lesson explaining why they made that mistake.
4. If the students listen to, practise and remember the language which native speakers use, they are learning the language.
5. Students need to understand the grammatical rules of English to become fluent in the language.
6. When students make oral errors the teacher gives them more practice with difficult language patterns.
7. Language can be learned outside the classroom without a textbook.
8. If students understand some of the basic grammatical rules of the language they can make their own new sentences.
9. It is more important for students to pay attention to what they are trying to say than to how to say it.
10. If students practise speaking exactly the same way as native speakers they can make up their own new sentences. These new sentences use the same language patterns that students have already practised.
11. It is important to give clear, frequent, exact examples of grammatical structures during English language lessons.
12. Language can be learned with lots of drill and practice.
13. When students make oral errors it is best to ignore them, as long as you can understand what they are trying to say.
14. Students need to master some of the basic listening and speaking skills before they can begin to read and write.

**APPENDIX 9: BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING RESULTS**

The following table shows results gathered from the beliefs about teaching questionnaire in Appendix 8.

**Table 17: Beliefs About Teaching Results**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Teaching Assumption</b>
1	Language can be learned with lots of drill and practice.	Skills based
2=	Students need to understand the grammatical rules of English to become fluent in the language.	Rule based
2=	If students understand some of the basic grammatical rules of the language they can make their own new sentences.	Rule based
4	Language can be learned outside the classroom without a textbook.	Function based
5	It is important to give clear, frequent, exact examples of grammatical structures during English language lessons.	Rule based
6=	If students understand what they are saying they are learning the language.	Skills based
6=	If the students listen to, practise and remember the language which native speakers use, they are learning the language.	Function based
8=	When students make oral errors it is best to ignore them, as long as you can understand what they are trying to say.	Skills based
8=	Students need to master some of the basic listening and speaking skills before they can begin to read and write.	Function based
10	It is more important for students to pay attention to <u>what</u> they are trying to say than to <u>how</u> to say it.	Function based
11=	When students make speaking errors the teacher corrects them and then later teaches a short lesson explaining why they made that mistake.	Rule based
11=	If students practise speaking exactly the same way as native speakers they can make up their own new sentences. These new sentences use the same language patterns that students have already practised.	Skills based
13=	Language is a set of grammatical structures which are learned by heart.	Rule based
13=	When students make oral errors the teacher gives them more practice with difficult language patterns.	Skills based

**APPENDIX 10: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Read the following statements.

*Then decide whether you always, sometimes or never do them*

*Circle your answer*

- |  |               |                  |              |
|--|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1. I like to learn English by working with the whole class | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 2. I like to learn English by working in pairs             | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 3. I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes       | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 4. I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes           | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 5. I like to learn English by practising with friends      | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 6. I like to write everything in my notebook               | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 7. I like to learn many new words                          | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 8. I like to memorise all my lessons                       | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 9. I like to do many grammar exercises                     | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 10. In class, I like to learn by conversations             | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 11. I like to practise sounds and pronunciation            | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 12. I like to have everything explained to me              | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |
| 13. I like to listen to English                            | <i>always</i> | <i>sometimes</i> | <i>never</i> |

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