

**Complexity, connections and sense-making: Stakeholder
experiences of primary English language curriculum change in
one province in Vietnam**

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Leeds
School of Education**

April 2016

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and the appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

This research would never have happened without funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, for which I am very grateful.

There are many people I would like to thank for their support and guidance during the process of conducting my research. My supervisors, Dr Martin Wedell and Dr Martin Lamb, have been a considerable source of inspiration, expertise and reassurance. Their interest and enthusiasm in my research kept me thinking and on-track during periods of doubt. I am also indebted to my friends and fellow students in the School of Education whose research tales, conversations and advice were a great help to me.

My thanks also go to all the participants in Vietnam who happily gave up considerable time to contribute to this research study. I hope that when I next return to Vietnam, I will be able to thank each of them again. I am also very appreciative of the help and support I received from the British Council in Vietnam in gaining access to research participants and research sites.

Finally, I would like to thank Nick for his constant support and understanding.

Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore the complexity of curriculum reform by examining how different stakeholders, experiencing English language curriculum reform in different 'layers' of the education system in one province in Vietnam, make sense of change in relation to their professional roles, practices and behaviours. While there is a plethora of research on curriculum change in TESOL contexts, much of this is focused on the teacher and the practical constraints they might face in implementing a new curriculum. The multi-level interactions and relationships involved in sense-making, and the complexity that such interconnectedness suggests, seems to be a neglected research area. This qualitative case study begins to fill this research gap.

Using a complexity perspective, the study investigated the perceptions, understandings and responses to primary English language curriculum change of seven primary English language teachers working in three districts in one province in Vietnam. The study also examined the sense-making of three district specialists and four university INSET trainers who are involved in supporting those teachers in implementing the new curriculum. Data were generated through multiple qualitative interviews, classroom observations and document analysis carried out over two research phases.

The research identified a number of control parameters which appeared to be constraining the participants' practices and behaviours towards a *paradigm shuffle* rather than a paradigm shift. The findings show how the interconnectedness of the educational culture, perceptions of risk, feelings of being supported and the flow of communication experienced by the different participants seemed to mediate teachers' emergent classroom practices and behaviours. The research identifies several policy implications for policy makers, curriculum change planners and TESOL practitioners which have emerged from these control parameters, and which are likely to help promote the desired curriculum change outcomes.

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List of abbreviations

| | |
|-----------|---|
| APEC | Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation |
| ASEAN | Association of South East Asian Nations |
| BOET | Bureau of Education and Training |
| CEFR | Common European Framework of Reference |
| CLT | Communicative language teaching |
| DOET | Department of Education and Training |
| DS | District Specialist |
| ELT | English language teaching |
| EPH | Education Publishing House |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| INSET | In-service training |
| L1 | First language/mother tongue (Vietnamese) |
| L2 | Second or foreign language (English) |
| MOET | Ministry of Education and Training |
| NFLP 2020 | National Foreign Languages Project |
| NIES | National Institute for Educational Science |
| PPP | Presentation-Practice-Production |
| TESOL | Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages |
| TEYL | Teaching English to Young Learners |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language |
| TOT | Training of Trainers |
| UT | University INSET trainer |
| WTO | World Trade Organisation |

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Several years ago I was involved in supporting the professional development of primary English language teachers in Vietnam through my role as manager of English language projects with a British organisation. A new primary English language curriculum had been introduced in 2003 and I could see that the teachers I was working with were struggling to make sense of what the new communicative approach to teaching and learning meant for their existing classroom practices and behaviours. The general public discourse at that time was focused on the lack of willingness on the part of primary English language teachers to make the necessary pedagogical changes and their lack of capacity to be able to change at all. Through my own experiences of working with teachers, I sensed that the limited success of the implementation of the 2003 curriculum was related to more than just the teachers. However it was not until towards the end of my time in Vietnam, when another new primary English language curriculum was about to be implemented as part of an ambitious national foreign languages project (NFLP 2020), and the focus once again was put on teachers as an obstacle to change, that I began to consider what educational change means, and for whom. What had been professional musings about educational change became more academically focused during my time as a postgraduate student at the University of Leeds. I was equally surprised and encouraged to find that my experiences of and thoughts on curriculum change were shared by others in educational contexts around the world, and that reports of the failures of curriculum change have been and continue to be a common feature of the educational change literature over the last 30 years (e.g. Bishop, 1986; Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1993; 2007; McLaughlin, 1987; 2006; Schweisfurth, 2013).

In my reading I came across the quotation below taken from Fullan (with Stiegelberger, 1991, p.117).

Educational change depends on what teachers do and think---it's as simple and as complex as that.

This quotation got me thinking more deeply about TESOL curriculum change in Vietnam and what it is that might make the implementation of new pedagogical

practices implicit in the new primary English language curriculum *simple* or *complex*. Much of the curriculum reform around the world has been carried out from a technical perspective (Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009; Tabulawa, 2013; Guthrie, 2013), in which focusing on structural elements, such as textbooks and training provision to build teacher capacity, is regarded as enough to bring about the desired changes – *it's as simple as that*. The literature also points to the teacher being perceived as the main participant in change and many national governments have funnelled significant amounts of finance and resources into tangible and practical curriculum materials, resources and events aimed at the teacher (Tabulawa, 2013; Schweisfurth, 2013). This has certainly been the case in Vietnam and other contexts (e.g. see Hardman and A-Rahman, 2014 in Malaysia; Kirkgöz, 2008 in Turkey; Romero et al, 2014 in Mexico; de Segovia and Hardison, 2009, in Thailand; Song, 2015 in Cambodia; Yan, 2012 in China), where the '*complexity*' of teacher change tends to be seen in terms of these technical factors. In this sense, complexity is reduced to identifiable factors pertaining to the teachers' world, which, if 'perfect', are likely to result in the required outcomes.

However if what is 'complex' about curriculum change are these identifiable, technical elements reiterated in numerous studies on TESOL curriculum change, it raises the question why so many curriculum reform projects have been so unsuccessful. There has been a tendency in the TESOL curriculum reform literature to investigate change in terms of these technical aspects, highlighting the practical constraints that teachers face in trying to implement a new curriculum that focuses on a more communicative pedagogy (e.g. see previous references). The educational change literature has begun to question this emphasis on the technical suggesting that the analysis and understanding of a complex education system undergoing 'complex change' cannot be reduced to discrete fragments of the whole, without consideration of their interconnectedness across other layers of the system (e.g. Mason, 2008; Hoban, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009). What makes educational change complex, according to Fullan (2007, p.84), is that it is 'socially complex' and involves "the planning and coordinating of a multilevel social process involving thousands of people". Added to this is the multidimensionality of any component of change. So, while the technical complexity of, for example, a new textbook or curriculum, might be the focus of change implementation, this limited vision ignores the people involved across different layers of the system and the possible alterations of beliefs and values that such a change might entail.

This seemed to confirm my own experiences of working with teachers in Vietnam struggling with curriculum change. I felt I needed to develop an understanding of change that looked beyond simply the role of the teacher in the change process and the technical support provided for them. While the literature has tended to focus on the teacher in the change process, surely change also affects others involved in implementation? To address the complexity of change that Fullan's quote suggests, I needed to explore the layers of interactions and relationships likely to influence curriculum change implementation. I wanted to investigate the extent to which the sense that teachers make of a new curriculum (i.e. their perceptions, interpretations and responses) might be shaped by their perceptions of the consistency between what they are being urged to do and the implicit messages they receive from other people and parts (or elements) in different layers of the system, who influence how the teachers experience their daily professional lives - *it's as complex as that*.

1.2 Aims of the study

In the light of the impetus for the study outlined in the previous section, this research aimed to explore the nature of complex curriculum change to gain a better understanding of what it is that makes what *teachers do and think* 'complex'. This focus on complexity is important because it answers a call in the literature (Hoban, 2002; Bastardas-Boada, 2013) for a move away from research and curriculum change planning which takes a technical approach to reform and which tends to miss the human factor of the change process; that is the interrelationships and interactions of both different groups of people and parts in different layers of an education system. The study aimed to investigate this 'human complexity' by exploring how the sense that teachers make of a new curriculum is shaped by how others, who have an influence on teachers' professional lives, also make sense of the changes. Drawing on the sense-making literature (e.g. Kelchtermans, 2009; Spillane, 2000; Spillane et al, 2002), the study defines sense-making as the understandings, perceptions and responses of an individual to change.

There seems to be little research which focuses on this complex multi-dimensionality of curriculum change, particularly in TESOL change contexts. Indeed, in the educational change context there is a wealth of research which describes failed change initiatives and provides lists of possible 'causes', yet there seems to be little written about the human interrelationships of change participants and how these relationships and interactions might shape emergent practices and behaviours in the

classroom. This thesis aimed to address both the under-researched area in TESOL of the complexity of English language change, and the gap in the literature on the relational dimension of change.

The research aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How do teachers make sense of primary English language curriculum change?
 - What are their perceptions and interpretations of the new curriculum?
 - What appears to influence the sense they make of the new curriculum?

2. How do other key implementers (district specialists and university INSET trainers) involved in supporting these teachers, make sense of the change?
 - What are their perceptions and interpretations of the new curriculum?
 - What appears to influence the sense they make of the new curriculum?

3. What insights does this multi-layered sense-making reveal about the complexity of curriculum change?

1.3 The research approach

This inquiry focuses on primary English language curriculum change implementation in three districts in a province in Vietnam. I decided to investigate the sense-making of a group of primary English language teachers who were involved in implementing the pilot programme of the new curriculum, which began in 2010 and finished in 2013. To examine the multi-dimensionality of the change process, I also investigated how other key participants (district specialists and university INSET trainers) made sense of the new curriculum. The district specialists and university trainers were key participants because their role was to provide support for the teachers' sense-making of the new curriculum.

Since I wanted to explore the relationships and interactions involved in the curriculum change process across different layers of the system, I needed an approach which allowed me to look for interconnections between people and parts. I found that some of the features of Complexity Theory fitted with my research aims and purpose. Chapter 3 sets out my conceptual framework based on a complexity perspective. This perspective has helped me to generate a description of the struggles and experiences of different groups of change participants in a particular context with an emphasis on the multiple interconnections within and between layers of the system and how these

interconnections relate to the more holistic educational context into which the new curriculum has been introduced.

My research was conducted in the following ways:

I conducted a qualitative embedded case study (Yin, 2009) with the unit of analysis focused on the curriculum change process in the three districts. A case study approach enabled me to explore in-depth the multi-dimensionality of change, looking beyond isolated technical factors to a more holistic, relational analysis.

The data was gathered in two research phases and incorporated one primary data gathering method of a series of qualitative interviews along with secondary methods of multiple classroom observations and analysis of curriculum documents and materials. This multi-method approach allowed for an in-depth picture of each participants' experiences of change and for the generation of a complex picture of the case. It also allowed time for reflection, analysis and follow-up between research phases.

Data analysis began in Phase 1 of the research, where initial categories were identified and which were later refined and developed into broader categories and themes.

The presentation of the findings aims to give the reader a feel for the layers of influence on the teachers' sense-making. The analysis begins with influences at the school level and then takes the reader into the world of the other participants and shows how their struggles and experiences seem to be influencing what is happening in the teachers' world.

Through the research process I took steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the data gathered and, as part of this, to continually reflect on my own role in the data gathering and analysis. The research study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Leeds.

1.4 The significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in the enhanced understanding it can provide about the complexity of curriculum change relevant to both TESOL and non-TESOL curriculum change contexts. As already mentioned, there are few studies which have looked at the multi-dimensionality of curriculum change and the insights that the findings reveal may make a small contribution to improved knowledge about what it is that makes change complex and how this complexity can be addressed by policy makers and change planners. Thus, within the macro context of the global rush by

state education systems to enable school-aged learners to learn to communicate in English, the illumination of the micro context of one province of Vietnam where English has recently been introduced at primary level, and the complexity of this change, may help to inform future curriculum change planning in Vietnam and elsewhere.

This study also contributes to the existing educational change literature which tends to focus on the relationships between macro-level elements while rarely investigating those between the human actors on which successful change ultimately depends.

1.5 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters.

Chapter 1 is this introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 describes the context of English language teaching and learning in Vietnam. It outlines the cultural, social and historical aspects that have led to the importance of English language in Vietnam and the move to include English in the curriculum in primary schools. The chapter provides the reader with an overview of the recently introduced National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP 2020) within which the new primary English language curriculum is one policy agenda. It includes a brief account of current primary English language teaching and learning conditions and the challenges that the new curriculum may bring.

Chapter 3 situates the study in the context of existing literature related to educational change and in particular, TESOL curriculum change. It identifies the relevance of the broad base of the literature in terms of the practical constraints that teachers are likely to face during curriculum change implementation. The chapter also highlights gaps in the literature in the field in relation to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of TESOL change. This chapter sets out the conceptual framework for the study drawn from complexity theory.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology. It presents my research stance and the rationale for the qualitative case study approach grounded in an interpretative paradigm. The chapter also provides an account of the data gathering methods used, and the process and procedures for collecting and analysing the data. The chapter describes how I have addressed ethical issues and ensured the trustworthiness of the research design, process and findings.

Chapter 5 is the first of the two data analysis chapters. I present the findings that emerged from the data related to the teacher. The chapter presents my interpretations

of the data related to how teachers make sense of the new curriculum and what appears to shape this sense-making.

Chapter 6 moves the analysis beyond the teacher to focus on the other study participants; the district specialists and university trainers. The chapter presents the findings for how these participants make sense of the new curriculum, what seems to shape their sense-making and how their understandings, perceptions and responses also mediate how teachers 'do and think' in terms of English language teaching.

Chapter 7 brings the findings together to answer the final research question. It discusses the themes that emerged from the data related to the conceptual framework of complexity. The findings include the identification of a number of control parameters centred on the interconnectedness of the change participants which act to move these participants, not in the direction of the desired curriculum policy outcomes, but rather towards the status quo.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter. It presents a summary of the main contributions of the research and identifies some of the limitations of the study. The chapter summarises the main findings and discusses the implications of these and the research for policy makers, change planners and practitioners in both general educational change contexts and in contexts undergoing TESOL curriculum change. The chapter also proposes potential areas for future research.

Chapter 2 Primary English language education in Vietnam

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to help situate the case study in the social, cultural and educational context of English language education in Vietnam. The chapter is divided into six main sections. The first section begins with a brief overview of the emergence of English language education and the historical influences that have led to English being the foreign language of choice in Vietnam. I then provide a short description of relevant elements of the education system in Vietnam and the prevailing education culture. The next section focuses on the introduction of English into the primary school curriculum, highlighting the 2003 curriculum policy and the issues with primary English language teaching in the wake of this reform. Following this, I provide an overview of the new primary English language curriculum in Vietnam introduced in 2010 which is the basis of my case. The final sections identify some of the challenges that the new curriculum brings and indicate how these challenges relate to my research purpose and case study.

2.2 The growth of English as a foreign language

Foreign languages have been a key feature of Vietnam's turbulent history over the past five decades with invasions and influences from the Chinese, French, Russian, American and more recently, the forces of globalization (Do, 2006; Pham and Fry, 2011). In the late 1950s, with the arrival of the American Army, English joined French as a foreign language taught at secondary and tertiary levels in the South of Vietnam (Do, 2006). A different situation prevailed in the North where the French colonial government was overthrown by the Communist Party who had strong relationships with Russia and China, and so Russian and Chinese became the officially taught foreign languages (Nguyen, 2011). Reunification of the North and South in 1975 led to stronger ties with the Soviet Union and Russian overtook English, French and Chinese as the dominant foreign language in the education system (Do, 2006).

After 1986 and the introduction of the Vietnamese government's 'open door' policy, *doi moi*, English started to emerge as the main foreign language taught in secondary schools and higher education institutions (Nguyen, 2012). The period also coincided with the breakup of the former Soviet Union and change within Eastern European

countries which weakened previous political and economic ties with Vietnam. As a result Vietnam no longer sought to foster relationships with nations holding similar ideologies, but looked for cooperation and investment with other countries, many of whom used English as their lingua-franca for trade and commerce (Nguyen, 2011). Consequently, learning Russian became less of a priority and the role of other foreign languages gained importance as overseas tourists and businesses began arriving through Vietnam's newly opened door (Denham, 1992; Do, 2006). However it was not until the mid 1990s that the demand for English outstripped Russian.

Following *doi moi*, "English ... developed with an unprecedented speed in Vietnam" (Do, 2006, p.8) and in 2002, in response to the government Decree 14/2001 on the Renovation of the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum, English became a 'priority' subject from lower secondary through to tertiary levels in the education system (Ngan Nguyen, 2012). French, Russian and Chinese were still offered as a second foreign language, but by 2004, most secondary level students (96%) were opting to learn only English (Loc, 2005; 2007). An "English language fever" (Canh 2007, p.172) was perhaps encouraged further by Vietnam's membership of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997 and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1998, and more recently in 2007, membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The agreed lingua franca of ASEAN and APEC is English and in 2009 a new ASEAN charter was signed which officially sanctioned English as the working language among the participating countries (Kirkpatrick, 2008; 2012). English has increasingly become "the language of educational opportunities and employment prospects" and acts as a gatekeeper to well-paid jobs and universities abroad (Phan et al., 2014, p.238).

Before saying more about the spread of English language education into the primary school curriculum, it is necessary to give the reader some information regarding the prevailing educational culture in Vietnam and a general outline of the education system in relation to the primary school sector.

2.3 The education system and culture

Canh (2015, p.183) describes the education system in Vietnam as that of "top-down inflexible management" and while a process of decentralisation has begun, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) maintains overall responsibility for education and in particular the curriculum, the textbook and the syllabus for all basic subjects in school education. More micro-level administrative duties are carried out at

provincial level within the 64 provinces in Vietnam by the Department of Education and Training (DOET) and at district level in each province by the Bureau of Education and Training (BOET). This is shown below in Figure 2.1.

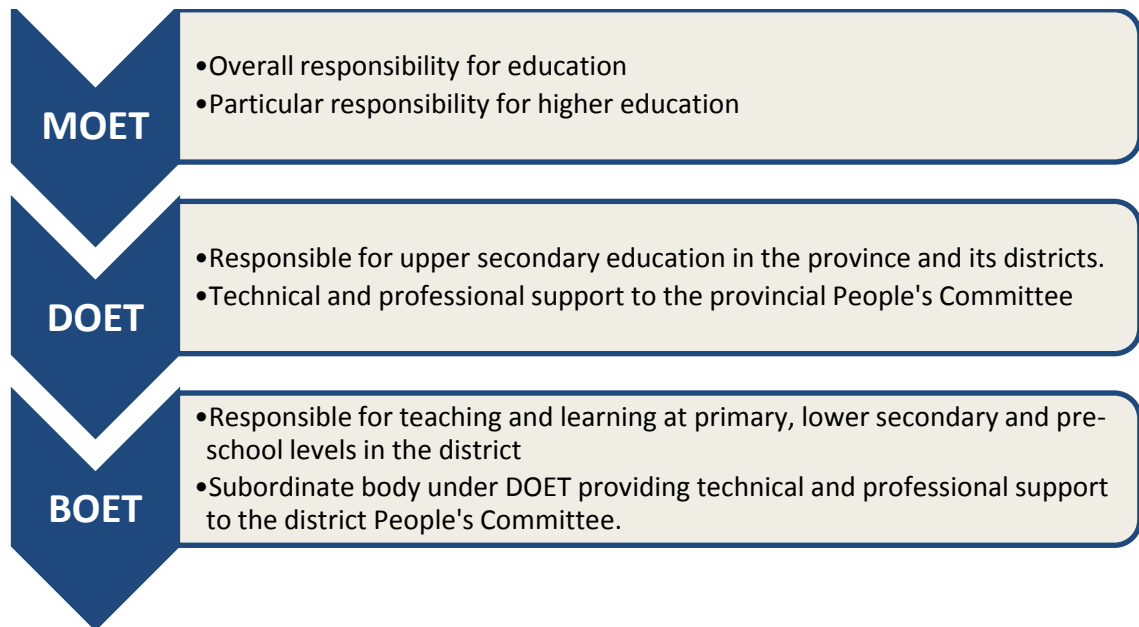


Figure 2.1 The administrative system for education in Vietnam

While MOET is the overarching agency in charge of educational planning and management, it is the People's Committee that is responsible for financial and human resource aspects such as school infrastructure, teacher recruitment and salaries and teaching equipment (UNESCO, 2011). This is also true at DOET and BOET levels, where issues of teacher recruitment and selection are beyond the control of both schools and the local educational departments. The implementation of curricula is carried out by MOET, but curriculum research and development is one of the responsibilities within the National Institute for Educational Science (NIES). Textbooks are written and published by the Education Publishing House (EPH) which comes under the umbrella of MOET. As in many educational contexts, the textbook is what the majority of teachers in Vietnam regard as the curriculum and so what they teach adheres closely to what is in the textbooks (Canh, 2011; Canh and Chi, 2012). Indeed Saito et al (2008, p.98) point out that teachers in Vietnam are under considerable pressure to finish the syllabus within the allocated teaching hours and so "...systematically follow the textbooks in order to avoid any criticism from colleagues and authorities".

Primary school covers Grades 1 to 5 and from 6 – 11 years of age. There are approximately 62,000 English language teachers in schools in Vietnam, with about 12,000 of those working in primary schools (Meeting notes/senior MOET official, 17.10.2013). The teaching and learning of English in primary schools is managed at district level by an English language specialist working in BOET, the district specialist (hereafter DS). The DS is required to supervise, observe and report on (to DOET) English language teaching at not only primary levels, but also lower secondary and pre-school. Their role is also to ensure the quality of English language education in the district through organising INSET training provision. The DS is responsible for disseminating and implementing curriculum policy directives from DOET and MOET. Most DSs are former upper or lower secondary English teachers. In the two key provinces of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, there is also a primary English language specialist working within the DOET who can support the DS in primary matters. However in the other 62 provinces, there is no DOET primary English language specialist and so the one DOET English language specialist has to cover all school levels in the province.

The education culture in Vietnam is, like many other countries in East Asia, based on Confucian principles of honour and respect (Pham and Fry, 2004; Nguyen and McInnis, 2002; Nguyen et al, 2009). This culture has to some extent moulded societal attitudes to knowledge and authority and conceptions about teaching and learning (Houng, 2010). Traditional student-teacher relationships are characterised by “the image of the teacher as a type of omniscient authority figure and a holder of all knowledge” (Canh, 2007, p.174). Students are required to understand both the teacher and the textbook and memorise and repeat this knowledge in a test. The teachers’ role is to ensure students are given the correct information and that they are able to remember it. Group harmony is an important part of the prevailing socio-educational culture and in the classroom setting this means that students are often reluctant to speak out individually or enter into dialogue that is not part of the planned lesson controlled by the teacher and textbook. Tomlinson and Bao’s (2004) research shows how group harmony is built and maintained in the classroom through closed questions initiated by the teacher which require short, predictable, choral responses from the students. They found that any attempt by the teacher to introduce more open questions created a shift in group harmony leaving the students (and the teacher) feeling uncomfortable. This is explained by Nguyen et al (2009, p. 119), who state that

... being seen as modest and self-effacing, rather than 'blowing your own trumpet', is perceived as praiseworthy, while wasting other [people's] time by expressing independent judgements is often perceived as bragging and reflective of an egotistical and selfish personality.

2.4 English language education in primary schools in Vietnam

With the desire for more English emanating from 'social needs' (Do, 2006, p.7) and 'popular demand' (Denham, 1992, p.64), English language teaching began to spread across all levels of the education system. In 1996 English was first introduced as an optional subject in primary education starting from Grade 3, although this occurred mainly in schools in larger urban centres where there were more likely to be suitable teachers and resources.

In 2003 English became an official elective subject in primary schools across the country from Grade 3 as part of the larger 'Renovation of General Education in Vietnam' (Canh and Chi, 2012). At this time the uptake of English by schools was growing rapidly and by 2005, there were estimated to be almost 900,000 learners of English in primary schools across 25 provinces (Thai, 2005), and many schools in key cities were beginning English from Grade 1 (Moon, 2005; Thuy Anh, 2007). However a considerable number of schools in semi-urban and rural areas were unable to offer English as an elective subject because of a lack of suitable teachers (Nguyen, 2012). In schools that had the teacher capacity, English was taught for two 35-minute periods a week. The 2003 policy included, for the first time, an English language curriculum and accompanying series of textbooks, *Let's Learn English 1,2 and 3* (EPH, 2007) which aimed to develop students' communicative skills in English and understanding of other countries and cultures, along with a positive attitude towards English (Moon, 2005; Canh and Chi, 2012). This more communicative approach was in line with the larger reform in general primary education at that time which introduced a curriculum for basic subjects in 2002 promoting a learner-centred approach (Saito, et al, 2008; Hamano, 2008) and "a teaching method that encourages children to engage in thinking, class participation, and problem-solving" (Hamano, 2008, p.401).

Despite the desire for improved English language teaching and language proficiency levels, studies conducted several years after the 2003 Directive point to teachers' implementation practices lagging far behind the curriculum rhetoric (Moon, 2005; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2007). Moon (2005; 2009) describes the primary English

language lessons she observed as following an adult-oriented approach with emphasis on language form and an overuse of choral drills and repetition.

2.5 The National Foreign Languages Project 2020

In the face of growing domestic concerns over the quality of English language education and regional and global trends of placing increasing emphasis on English, the Vietnamese government introduced what Canh (2015, p.186) refers to as “the most ambitious language-learning project in Vietnam’s educational history”. This is “The project of Foreign Language Education in the National Education System for the Period 2008-2020” (2020 Project/ NFLP 2020) which has approximately US\$2 billion in funding from government and non-government sources (Phan et al, 2014).

The 2020 Project’s principle goal is:

To renovate thoroughly the tasks of teaching and learning foreign language within national education system, to implement a new program on teaching and learning foreign language at every school levels and training degrees, which aims to achieve by the year 2015 a vivid progress on professional skills, language competency for human resources, especially at some prioritized sectors; by the year 2020 most Vietnamese youth whoever graduate from vocational schools, colleges and universities gain the capacity to use a foreign language independently. This will enable them to be more confident in communication, further their chance to study and work in an integrated and multi-cultural environment with variety of languages. This goal also makes language as an advantage for Vietnamese people, serving the cause of industrialization and modernization for the country.

(The Government of Vietnam, Article 1.1, Decision 1400, 2008, p.1)

Although the 2020 Project aims to reform foreign language teaching generally, it is widely accepted that English is the key language. Most of the funding and resources allocated for the planning and implementation of Decision 1400 have been siphoned into improving English language education across all school and tertiary levels of the education system. At the primary level, the project heralded a move to the compulsory teaching of English as a foreign language in the primary curriculum from Grade 3, and English is now officially ‘institutionalized’ (Canh and Chi, 2012, p.107) throughout the whole state education system. This policy signalled a significant change for primary schools and a shift from an ad hoc approach to English where students and schools had the choice of opting for English, to a position where English is now deemed essential for all children in every school. By introducing English learning at a younger age, Vietnam is following a regional and global trend highlighted by Nunan (2003) and

Graddol (2006), and more recently in research studies around the world (see Kirkgöz, 2008; Nikolov, 2009a; Kang, 2012; Mathew, 2012; Butler, 2015). However this move to 'more and earlier' English (Hamid, 2010a) is not without its challenges and, as I go on to highlight in section 2.6.1, there are growing concerns amongst both the general public and educational professionals that the 2020 Project is not achieving the desired outcomes of enhanced English language proficiency levels and improved English language teaching quality.

2.5.1 The new primary English language curriculum

In the rush to start implementation, the 2020 Project was announced before a new curriculum for primary English language had been developed, therefore schools continued to follow the 2003 curriculum. It was not until 2010 that a new MOET directive put into place a pilot programme to implement English as a compulsory subject from Grade 3 and a new curriculum and set of textbooks *Tieng Anh ('English')* 3, 4, 5 (Hien et al, EPH, 2011) were introduced.

In contrast to the 2003 curriculum, the new curriculum uses a competency-based framework to identify the language skills students need to develop at each stage of primary schooling so that by Grade 5 students will have reached A1 level of language proficiency on the Common European Framework of References CEFR (MOET, 2011). The curriculum states that:

[t]eaching and learning English at primary education level is aimed at equipping students with a new communicative tool, an initial ability to communicate in simple English with confidence; creating the foundations for them to use English in their learning, establishing a habit for their lifelong learning towards becoming global citizens in the integration epoch.

(MOET, The primary Education English Language Curriculum, Decision 3321, 2010, p.6)

The curriculum focuses on developing learners' communicative competence with a focus on speaking and listening. It states that the desired teaching methodology:

...is that of communicative language teaching (CLT), seeing students as active participants in the learning process and teachers as organizers and facilitators of learning activities for students. Teaching activities should be organized through a diverse and rich communication environment using interactive activities (games, chants, songs, role-playing, story-telling, quiz, picture-drawing) in paired, group and individual contexts. Communication activities need to be practised through themes/topics and communication situations of interest to students... Students should be encouraged to participate in communication activities in a pro-active, active, creative and conscious manner with guidance provided by teachers. Students need to

practice integrating all four of the language skills: i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, with dominant focus on the first two.

(MOET, The primary Education English Language Curriculum, Decision 3321, 2010, p.14-15)

This directive is likely to represent a significant change to many primary English language teachers' practices and behaviours, which I discuss further in section 2.6.1. The notion of teachers as *organisers* and *facilitators* of learning activities, and students as *pro-active* and *creative* and learning in a *rich communicative environment of interactive activities* is quite different to traditional conceptions of teaching and learning which employ "pedagogies [that] focus dominantly on rote memorization [and] passive learning approaches" (Canh, 2015, p. 183), as mentioned previously in section 2.3.

The new *Tieng Anh* (EPH, 2011) series of books follows a theme-based syllabus which places emphasis on listening and speaking skills and aims to "motivate pupils and help them build confidence in communicating in English" (*Tieng Anh 3, Teacher's Book*, 2011, p. 4). This stated focus on oral communication is the main difference with the previous *Let's Learn English* (Ha et al, EPH, 2007) series. The new books include a student's workbook and teacher's book for each level. There is currently no formal national assessment for English at primary level. Testing is normally carried out by each teacher through mid-term and end-of-term and tests usually focus on reading and writing and grammatical competency. MOET have, however, designed a new testing framework which aims to focus on communicative competence and which includes listening and speaking components.

While technology is not at the forefront of the new curriculum, the new syllabus requires teachers to have access to an audio player, computer, projector and screen (MOET, *Guidance on the Implementation of the Primary English Teaching Pilot Programme*, 2011). In addition many schools have been allocated funds to install Smart boards into language teaching classrooms (Meeting with NIES official/ 11.10.2013)

The new curriculum policy requires schools to provide four 35-minute periods per week (a total of 140 periods for each primary grade), rather than the two periods set out in the 2003 curriculum. This mirrors the four periods per week for English currently scheduled in lower secondary schools. MOET's 2010 Directive stipulates schools will need to comply with the conditions necessary to implement the new curriculum. The main conditions are that: teachers must be at least B2 level of English language proficiency based on the CEFR; schools need to accommodate the extra periods for

English by operating whole-day schooling; there should be a maximum of 35 learners in a class; teachers and school management must be provided with professional training opportunities, and that schools should have adequate facilities and resources for language learning (MOET, The primary Education English Language Curriculum, Decision 3321, 2010, p.16).

2.5.2 The pilot programme

The implementation plan for the primary English language curriculum is staggered so that 20% of primary students (located in economically advantaged urban and semi-urban areas) will have access to English in the first wave, increasing to 70% of primary students by 2015 and 100% of the total primary school population by 2018 (The Government of Vietnam, Article 1.1, Decision 1400, 2008), which means approximately 7,043,300 students (General Department of Statistics of Vietnam, 2012).

In the 2010/2011 academic year, 92 primary schools in 20 provinces across the country were chosen by MOET to participate in the pilot implementation project starting with Grade 3 (Meeting with senior MOET official/ 17.10.2013). In each pilot school there was one primary English language teacher assigned to implement the new curriculum and textbooks. The pilot officially ended in May 2013. The 92 schools involved in the pilot implementation are supported, monitored and assessed by MOET. During the pilot, any school meeting MOET's criteria is free to use the new curriculum and textbooks but it is unlikely that they will have the same level of support from MOET, possibly creating a two-tier system. Although the programme being implemented in 92 schools is called a pilot, in many ways this is simply a label as there appears to be no space allocated in the subsequent roll-out plan for rethinking, adaptations or revisions. Indeed, in the recruitment and selection of research participants, I found that many schools seemed to be engaged in the new curriculum implementation process during the three year pilot phase even though they were not classed as 'pilot schools'.

2.5.3 Teacher capacity and support

Teacher capacity is one of the areas that the 2020 Project aims to address and 85% of the project's budget has been allocated to building teacher capacity (Meeting with official in the NFLP 2020/9.10.13). A baseline survey was conducted at the start of the project to investigate current levels of English language proficiency amongst English language teachers and their in-service training needs. It was found that 80,000 practising English language teachers across the country needed retraining to meet the

language requirements (Dudzic and Nguyen, February 2013). Unpacking these figures further, it was reported that 98% of primary English language teachers fell below the desired B2 (CEFR) level, with the majority at A2 level (Nguyen, N.H, March, 2013). While Canh (2015, p. 187) notes that the results of the language proficiency baseline study should be treated with caution because of teachers' unfamiliarity with the test format and the examiners' lack of training in testing and assessment, he also suggests that the focus on English language teachers' deficit capacity through these tests and in the media, has helped to garner public support and drive the 2020 project forward. Concerns have also been raised about teachers' outdated pedagogic practices which are not in tune with the spirit of the new curriculum, as indicated in section 2.3. It has been suggested that 24,000 primary English language teachers will need to be trained or undergo some form of INSET training by 2018 (Vietnamnet, 29/08/2011).

In order to deal with primary English language capacity, the 2020 Project introduced a three-month INSET programme aimed at developing teachers' language proficiency and teaching methodology. These courses are planned and delivered by universities across the country. The majority of university lecturers working on teacher education courses became university teachers on graduation and have little knowledge of teaching methodology (Hiep, 2000), or practical knowledge of teaching English in schools, and few are likely to have knowledge or experience of teaching English to young learners (TEYL) (Stainthorp, 2010). However some of the university teachers taking on in-service trainer roles have attended Training of Trainers (TOT) programmes offered by both MOET and international donors (Vu and Pham, 2014). These have ranged from one-week to more intensive 180-hour courses. Although pre-service TEYL programmes are recognised in Directive 2010 as an important part of the implementation process, these are not yet, at the time of this research, part of initial teacher education programmes for primary English language teachers in colleges or universities.

In addition to the university in-service courses, the pilot programme includes one or two-day workshops for teachers to prepare them to use the new textbooks. These workshops are organised by the Education Publishing House and delivered by the authors of the Tieng Anh series of textbooks.

To act as a guide for the in-service support of English language teachers, a 'Competency Framework for English Language Teachers' has been developed by MOET (MOET, 2013). It sets out standards and competencies that English language

teachers will be required to reach and achieve. It is interesting that the document states (p.8) that the

ETCF [will] build the profession of English language teaching beyond the level of technicians or teaching machines [sic] to practising teachers with 'adaptive expertise'...

This suggests that there is some recognition of the pedagogical shift required in the new curriculum. However this framework does not appear, as yet, to have been disseminated beyond a small group of planners within the NFLP 2020.

2.6 Implementation of the new primary English language curriculum

There is considerable interest and concern in government, educational and public arenas related to the 2020 Project, particularly in the move to prioritizing English in primary schools. Studies of the implementation of the elective 2003 curriculum in primary schools reported limited improvement in students' English proficiency (Moon, 2005; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2007). These studies highlighted issues of teacher capacity as the main obstacle in the implementation process. A similar theme is reported in two recent studies (Nguyen, 2012; Canh and Chi, 2012) which suggest that implementation outcomes of the 2010 pilot programme have so far been limited due to issues of teacher capacity alongside structural factors such as resources, materials and training.

2.6.1 Challenges of implementation

While teaching *per se* is regarded as a noble profession and teachers are highly valued in society (Nguyen and McInnis, 2002), primary English language teaching is seen as a low-status job and few teachers have consciously chosen this profession. Many teachers have ended up working in the primary sector after being unable to find employment in secondary schools (Moon, 2005; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2007). Until recently, because English has been an elective subject in the primary curriculum, there has been no official staffing quota agreed by MOET for teachers of English in primary schools. Consequently 90% of English language teachers are on contractual hire and often work in several schools (Nguyen, 2012). Where a primary school does employ an English teacher on a permanent contract, that teacher is very likely to be the only permanent one (Nguyen et al, 2015; Nguyen, 2016) which tends to impact on teachers' opportunities for collaboration and shared learning. Until 2010 there was no official policy stating the qualifications or teaching standards required of primary

English language teachers, and so most teachers are untrained to teach at primary level and have low levels of English language proficiency (Canh and Chi, 2012).

The general perception of teachers' low level of competence can be seen in the numerous headlines in both the English and Vietnamese press, for example, "*English language teaching needs serious improvement*" (Vietnamnet, 28/12/2010), "*Skills of English teachers substandard*" (Vietnamnet, 19/12/2013), "*English teachers fail to make the grade*" (Vietnamnet, 29/08/2011), "*English teachers bad at speaking and listening*" (Vietnamnet, 20/12/13). And so, at the start of implementation, the discourse surrounding the 2020 Project seemed to be that its success rested on teacher capacity and teachers' willingness and ability to change; a perception likely to influence teachers' confidence in their own competence in the classroom. This focus on the teacher is also evident in recent research on English language curriculum change in Vietnam (e.g. Nguyen and Bui, 2016).

Specialised pre-service training in TEYL has only been introduced recently (2012) in a small number of higher education institutions (Nguyen et al, 2015) and so the majority of English language teachers still complete either a four-year university degree in TEFL for the upper secondary school, or a three-year college degree in TEFL for the lower secondary school. Some teachers may also be retrained French or Russian teachers with a college degree in TEFL or have a BA in English and no teacher training. Therefore many English language teachers lack professional knowledge and expertise in teaching TEYL (Nguyen et al, 2015). To add to this situation, any in-service training that English language teachers have been offered has been limited since teachers of optional curricular subjects (as English was until recently) are not required to attend compulsory in-service training at primary level. In-service training has normally been organised in formal learning spaces in the form of ad hoc one-day workshops often provided by international publishers or donors. There are few opportunities for teachers to engage in more informal learning through in-school follow up (Saito et al, 2008; Canh and Minh, 2012).

Many of the 'solutions' posited to the difficulties in the implementation of the 2020 Project seem to centre on the teacher and the need to build their capacity (Nguyen, 2012; Canh and Chi, 2012; Nguyen and Bui, 2016). Nguyen (2012), in her study of two primary teachers, identifies teacher supply, in-service training, teaching methods and materials as the challenges of implementing the new curriculum. Canh and Chi's study (2012) of a group of primary English language teachers in a northern province focuses on teacher capacity and the extent of teachers' ability and competency to

implement the new curriculum. They stress that the 'problem' is teachers' pedagogical skills and English language proficiency and that "...it is critical that these teachers' weaknesses are addressed immediately by intensively retraining the English language teachers currently working in primary schools..." (p. 120). Similarly Nguyen and Bui (2016, p.4) suggest that:

The current reality of teacher quality challenges the effectiveness of the new LP [language policy] because the role of language teachers is undoubtedly critical in implementing a new LP.

However it would seem that the heavy focus in both educational policy and research and in public spheres on the issue of teacher capacity has tended to ignore or downplay the significance of the challenges the new curriculum raises for teachers and others in the education system.

The challenges of the new curriculum go beyond simply learning new technical pedagogical skills or lack of suitable resources. They involve teachers being able to interpret and translate the new curriculum into practice. The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach promulgated in the curriculum requires a change for teachers away from traditional educational values and pedagogy towards a new understanding of teaching and learning, suggesting a challenging cultural change. The tensions and contradictions between CLT and the embedded norms and values of education within Vietnamese society, as described in section 1.3, have been highlighted in a number of studies (Canh, 2000; Canh and Barnard, 2009; Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996; Pham, 2005a; Viet, 2008; Phan, 2008; Viet et al, 2015). Canh (2000) argues that the culturally embedded view of the teacher in Vietnamese society contrasts with the teacher-student relationships implicit in a communicative pedagogy where the teacher has a less hierarchical position and acts as facilitator and is tolerant of student errors. Yet, the tensions for teachers that can arise due to expectations from students, parents, the school management and the wider society about what constitutes good teaching and being a good teacher (Phan, 2008), do not seem to have been explicitly acknowledged in curriculum policy or media reports.

With the importance placed on English as a compulsory subject, the new curriculum also brings new educational expectations from society and therefore new responsibilities for teachers. For example, their jobs are being moved to 'permanent status', there are new language proficiency outcomes for students required at the end of Grade 5 which will be assessed through national exams for the first time, and national standards are now required of all primary English language teachers. In

addition, not only does the new curriculum require a new pedagogical approach, it also necessitates a young learner approach, which, as Moon (2009) remarks, is an emerging concept in Vietnam.

2.7 Rationale for the case study

Despite the significant changes required of teachers and the importance placed on their role in the success or not of the 2020 project, there appears to have been little focus on teachers' own thoughts and feelings about school curriculum reform in studies in Vietnam. Most local research (e.g. Nguyen and Nguyen, 2007; Nguyen, 2012; Canh and Chi, 2012) appears to focus on discreet variables such as policy, training provision, textbooks and assessment and on the linear relationships between those variables. While a more recent study (Canh, 2015) reports on secondary school teachers' beliefs about the 2020 Project, how teachers' thoughts and feelings and responses are likely to be influenced by *other people* who have a role in the implementation process does not seem to have been a focus of curriculum change research in Vietnam. Yet how an individual teacher experiences change is partly an outcome of how others in the system have understood and made sense of the changes to their own roles and responsibilities. Primary English language teachers in Vietnam are supported in their work mainly by two key roles; district level primary English language specialists (DSs) (see section 2.3) and INSET trainers from universities. The DS provides on-going school-level mentoring through observations and workshops and liaises with teachers' school principals regarding textbooks, syllabus and the new exams. Teachers turn to their DS for advice on pedagogical issues and policy changes affecting them. As was mentioned in section 2.5.3, at provincial level, teachers are supported by INSET trainers who are recruited from university departments. During the pilot implementation programme, these trainers delivered 3-month INSET courses to primary English language teachers, as mentioned in section 2.5.3. While there are others operating in different layers of the education system that are likely to influence how teachers' carry out their jobs (e.g. students, parents, head teachers, curriculum designers and textbook writers) it is the DS and university INSET trainers who have so far been key for teachers in the implementation of the new primary English language curriculum. For this reason my study focuses primarily on teachers, UTs and DSs, with other actors as secondary participants. These three groups of actors need to understand and interpret the new primary English language curriculum and there may be a lot at stake for them as their existing ways of working, their norms and values about education are challenged.

The picture of curriculum change in Vietnam has been described as ‘messy’ (Thuy Anh, 2007) and it is this messiness that interests me since it suggests the complexity of curriculum change implementation. I see the implementation of the new curriculum in Vietnam as a complex process and it is likely that the relationships and interactions between the constituent elements and people operating in different layers of the education system probably characterises its messiness. This led me to consider the following initial questions: How do different actors across different layers of the education system think and feel about the new curriculum? What challenges does the new curriculum bring for them and how do they respond? How do these different understandings of the new curriculum influence teachers’ own thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and thereby constrain or support what teachers are able to do? What can this tell us about the complexity of curriculum change?

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a contextual picture of English language education in Vietnam and more specifically, the growth of primary English language education and the current curriculum reform as part of the NFLP 2020. Through this macro-level description, I have attempted to give the reader a sense of where this case study is starting from in terms of both the current implementation context and the embedded socio-culture and history. The chapter highlighted how the focus of public debate and policy planning regarding the 2020 Project has been on the teacher and their ability and willingness to change and that this has also been the focus of many of the recent research studies. However the complexity of the primary English teacher’s role in the change process, the relationships and interactions they are likely to have with others involved in change and how this might influence the desired outcomes, seems to have been overlooked. A study seems to be needed to reveal how teachers *and others* make sense of the new primary English language curriculum, how their relationships and interactions mediate the change process and what understandings all this might tell us about the complexity of curriculum change.

The next chapter attempts to frame the context of the study and the initial questions which were puzzling me, in the curriculum change literature.

Chapter 3 Curriculum change, sense-making and complexity: A review of the literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to examine the main issues related to English language curriculum reform, the dynamics of sense-making and the inherent messiness of curriculum change. I critically analyse the notion of curriculum change as a complex process and set out my conceptual framework for this study. Through the analysis I attempt to position my research in the existing literature and identify where it may add new or additional insights and knowledge. While my study focuses on TESOL curriculum change, many of the issues discussed in this chapter are relevant to general education contexts and so, where appropriate, I also draw on research from the wider educational change literature.

Chapter 1 described how this study has been designed around a puzzle emanating from the following notion stated by Fullan (with Stiegelbauer 1991; p.117) that:

Educational change depends on what teachers think and do – it's as simple and as complex as that.

This chapter is organised around four main sections which critically address the issues in the quote above of: *the teacher as the main participant of change; that educational change is simple, and that educational change is complex.*

Curriculum change implementation (3.2) introduces the educational change literature in both TESOL and general education contexts, highlighting the failure of many reforms around the world. The section argues that the continued emphasis on technical approaches to understanding change appears to miss the more complex human factor involved in change.

TESOL curriculum change (3.3) focuses on what curriculum change in many English education contexts around the world means for teacher in terms of pedagogy. The section shows that while the cultural aspects of a move towards communicative language teaching have been acknowledge to some extent, there continues to be an emphasis in the literature on a technical and rational approach to change, with an assumption that change is relatively 'easy'.

Concomitant with this technical perspective is an emphasis on the role of the teacher, often to the exclusion of the role of other implementers.

Making sense of curriculum change (3.4) moves the discussion of the literature towards change being a complex process. The section examines what is at stake for individuals in reform, showing that much of the current change literature ignores the relational and emotional dimensions of change; that is what is complex about curriculum change. The section also sheds light on the role of others in implementing change, suggesting that part of what is complex about curriculum change is that it *does not solely* depend on the teacher.

Curriculum change as a complex process (3.5) examines complexity theory in relation to curriculum change. The section sets out the conceptual framework for this study and argues that positioning sense-making within a complexity perspective will help me to better understand the main issues arising from my research context.

3.2 Curriculum change implementation

Studies of curriculum change are “riddled with stories of failures grand and small” (Schweisfurth, 2011, p.425) and despite many decades of research, this gloomy picture of implementation still appears to be the norm, whether in general education or TESOL contexts.

The importance of the implementation of change came to the fore in the 1970s. In 1977, Fullan and Pomfret (cited in Fullan, 2009) provided one of the first reviews of educational change research, highlighting the failures in implementation. What McLaughlin (2006) terms “misery research” continued for several decades with reports of the continued failure of reforms (Bishop, 1986; Fullan, 1993; Sarason, 1990). Where there were reported successes, these were generally confined to isolated examples and were an exception rather than the norm across schools, teachers and learners. Elmore (1995, p. 11) notes that, in relation to reform in the United States:

We can produce many examples of how educational practice could look different, but we can produce few, if any, examples of large numbers of teachers engaging in these practices in large scale institutions designed to deliver education to most children.

Thus, it became apparent from these research studies that implementation was no easy matter and that public announcements, curriculum policy documents and some ad hoc training workshops were unlikely to be enough to implement or sustain the required change across an education system. As Levin (2009, p.264) puts it

[i]f the goal of improvement is to change daily teaching and learning practices in large numbers of classrooms in a way that makes sense to all those involved, a colossal amount of learning has to happen.

Much of the implementation research after the 1970s analysed the factors determining successful implementation and the literature is full of studies listing technical impediments to change (Towndrow et al, 2010). These factors have tended to focus on policy and delivery systems such as resources, curriculum, materials and training (Smylie and Evans, 2006) with the assumption that the change process can be broken down into isolated, discrete parts independent from each other (Radford, 2006). Indeed Tabulawa (2013, p.xviii), in the context of curriculum reform in sub-Saharan Africa, argues that the lack of any substantial change

is rationalized in terms of insufficient time and resources, high teacher-student ratios and defective teacher education programmes resulting in poorly trained teachers.

This reflects a technicist view of change and failures in curriculum innovation have been partly attributed to a 'mechanistic paradigm' (Hoban, 2002) or technical 'mindset' (Fink, 2001) in which change is viewed as a rational, linear and predictable process which can be planned for to ensure predetermined outcomes (Bishop, 1986; Wise, 1977; Guthrie, 2013; Tabulawa, 2013). It seems to be assumed that change will happen if enough finance and resources are pumped into an education system, since change is perceived to involve visible, tangible factors such as new curriculum materials, resources and training provision (Tabulawa, 2013).

In the next section I provide an overview of English language curriculum change, what it is and the challenges in implementation that have been reported in the literature.

3.3 TESOL curriculum change

With the emergence of English as a global language and national governments' perceived need for more communicative approaches to teaching and learning, English language curricular innovation has been the experience of millions of teachers and

learners around the world. This has not been limited to secondary school level. Indeed, the growing trend seems to be focused on starting English language education earlier in primary schools, as is the case in Vietnam, or even at kindergarten level (Kaplan et al, 2011; Copland et al, 2014); the belief being that issues of language proficiency can be dealt with by increasing the number of years students spend learning English. This move to include English in primary curricula is seen by Johnstone (2009, p.33) as “possibly the world’s biggest policy development in education”.

Wedell and Alshumaimeri (2014) suggest that introducing English language education to young learners in the primary curriculum constitutes a complex change. Not only is English very often a new subject in the curriculum bringing with it all the concomitant logistical issues, but most primary English language curriculum change constitutes not simply a change in textbooks or syllabus, but a pedagogical move away from traditional approaches to language teaching and learning based on grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, towards more communicative and learner-centred models. Such a change tends to be regarded by governments as a panacea to national social and economic failings or future desires, but “with little or no consideration for the complex factors involved in what is a radical change” (Garton, 2014, p.205). As in Vietnam, the expectations of a new curriculum can be high, often leading to dissatisfaction and frustration when there are no visible signs of improvement in the initial stages of implementation.

Asking teachers to change from a traditional pedagogy to a more communicative, learner-centred one constitutes a requirement that teachers change their fundamental view of what knowledge is, the role of the learner and the teacher, and the general organisation of teaching and learning in the classroom (Tabulawa, 1997). This means that teachers need to adjust their professional thinking and classroom practices (Wedell and Al Alshumaimeri, 2014). To begin to understand the ‘quantum leap’ (Chow and Mok-Cheung, 2004, p.158) that this implies for thousands of teachers in various contexts, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of what a ‘communicative’ approach to language education entails and how this differs from more traditional classroom pedagogies.

3.3.1 Learner-centred pedagogy in English language teaching and learning

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) developed in the 1970s from a movement away from viewing language purely as a system of grammatical rules which learners needed to learn in order to be competent language users (Nunan, 1999, Larsen-

Freeman and Anderson, 2011). This shift in focus from linguistic competence to communicative competence (Savignon, 1997; Richards and Rodgers, 2001) has been the key element of English language curricular change across the world (Chowdhury and Ha, 2008), and particularly in Asia, as in the case in Vietnam. For example, two surveys of countries across Asia (Kam, 2002; Nunan, 2003) highlight the emphasis in national curricula on CLT.

However in reality CLT is difficult to define and indeed teachers' understanding of it tends to be 'fuzzy' (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Butler, 2011). The result is often a wide variety of classroom practices. While there are many interpretations of CLT, there are certain identifiable overarching themes which reflect a more general learner-centred approach which are distinct from traditional approaches usually seen as 'teacher-centred' or teacher-fronted. The notion of 'learner-centred' is based on the constructivist view that knowledge is not transmitted, but rather learners create their own meanings and knowledge from the information they receive from the teacher and their own lived experiences (Nunan, 1999; Tudor, 1993). Therefore the teacher's role is to facilitate language learning rather than to teach predetermined, discrete items of linguistic knowledge. The emphasis is on encouraging students to express their ideas and opinions through meaningful and purposeful exchange and so errors are tolerated and seen as part of the unpredictability of the language learning process. This contrasts with a transmission-based conception of education which sees learning as memorizing knowledge provided by the teacher and reproducing that knowledge accurately (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

In a more learner-centred, communicative approach, the student is prominent in the learning process and is expected to have agency in not only what they learn but also how they learn (Tudor, 1993; 2001). The implication for the teacher is an awareness of individual learning styles and preferences as well as different learning paces, and an ability to deal with these in the classroom (Littlewood, 2007). In addition, a learner-centred approach fosters a different type of teacher-student relationship than a more traditional approach. This relationship is more egalitarian and democratic with the teacher's role less about control and authority and more about the negotiation of knowledge and learning (Tudor, 2001; 2003). Both the conception of knowledge and the relationships in the classroom are reflected in the kinds of practices and activities that are likely to be seen in a more learner-centred classroom.

There has been considerable focus on teacher-student interaction in the learner-centred classroom (e.g. Alexander, 2015; Westbrook et al, 2013) and research

suggests that the IRF model (Sinclair and Couthard, 1975; 1992) is an important part of this. Teacher initiation (I) can encourage a range of student responses (R) from choral display to creative production. Likewise, the kind of feedback (F) a teacher provides can encourage student elaboration and communication. Other tasks in the classroom might involve for example role-play and problem-solving activities, with pair work and group work as the most common patterns of classroom organisation. In a primary classroom games and songs are likely to be common communicative activities (Moon, 2001; Copland et al, 2011). These kinds of activities are designed to allow for creative, meaningful language practice where errors are tolerated and students support each other's learning. This differs with more traditional activities which focus on reading and writing and put emphasis on accuracy and right and wrong answers. Where traditional approaches are also entwined with the principles of audio-lingualism and behaviourist concepts of learning, repetition of basic language patterns through rigid dialogues and drills tends to be visible in classroom practice (Larsen-Freeman, 1986), and this is the case in many primary classrooms in Vietnam (Moon, 2009). Moon (2009) describes how the focus in the classroom is on both accuracy of language and pronunciation, with the teacher providing linguistic input and students copying the model with little room for creativity or deviation from the textbook. The implication for the teacher is that unlike the predetermined, highly controlled focus on specific language items and patterns in traditional pedagogical approaches, a communicative approach demands a higher level of English language proficiency of the teacher, since it is difficult to predict or plan for the kinds of impromptu dialogues they are likely to have in their interactions with learners.

An added challenge for primary English language curriculum change is that not only is there (probably) a pedagogical change, but in many contexts where English is a new subject in the primary school curriculum, teachers are also required to know how children learn languages and the kind of teaching approach suitable for young learners (Copland, et al, 2011; Copland et al, 2014; Rixon, 2013; Moon, 2009).

A communicative, learner-centred pedagogy has, as I have already mentioned, been accepted (rightly or wrongly) as the desired model for English language education around the world, and particularly in Asian countries (Butler, 2011; Nunan, 2003; Kam, 2002). The literature on English language curriculum implementation in both primary and secondary state schools provides numerous stories of mismatches between curriculum policy rhetoric and what actually happens in classrooms (e.g. Hardman and A-Rahman, 2014 in Malaysia; Kirkgöz, 2008 in Turkey; Romero et al, 2014 in Mexico; de Segovia and Hardison, 2009, in Thailand; Song, 2015 in Cambodia; Yan, 2012 in

China; Al-Daami and Wallace (2007) in Jordan; Sakui, 2004, in Japan; Nguyen, 2012 in Vietnam). Sakui (2014) reports that despite the new English language curriculum rhetoric calling for communicative pedagogy, what the teachers in her study did in the classroom was much closer to an audio-lingual approach where the main aim of each lesson was to produce correct sentences. Similarly, Hardman and A-Rahman (in Malaysia) (2014) and Lamb and Wedell (in China and Indonesia) (2015) found from their lesson observations of English classes that while on the surface their respondents used communicative activities such as games and songs, when examined further these activities did not really provide learners with meaningful language interaction and practice.

The message from the literature seems to be that despite the huge financial and manpower investments in innovations in the teaching and learning of English, there are few unqualified examples of successful implementation (Wedell, 2009; Nunan, 2003; Graddol, 2006; Butler, 2011). This seems to be particularly the case with the introduction of English language education at primary level. Romero et al (2015) lament that after 15 years of reforms in primary English language teaching in Mexico, teachers are still not using a communicative approach and this seems to be a dilemma experienced by teachers and schools in many countries.

Alongside the many reported failures in curriculum change, the curriculum change literature in TESOL and general education is full of accounts of why this lack of success is so prevalent. Drawing on this literature, it would seem that there are two main challenges to the successful implementation of curriculum change and more specifically, innovations in English language teaching and learning: cultural issues and practical constraints.

3.3.2 Cultural issues in curriculum change

As has already been mentioned, the move towards introducing a predominantly communicative and learner-centred pedagogy into the English language curriculum in countries such as Vietnam is a particularly demanding change since traditional teacher-fronted approaches and more learner-centred education constitute 'pedagogical paradigms' (Tabulawa, 2013). Tabulawa (2013) draws on Kuhn's (1962) notion of a 'paradigm' which, although originally referring to the natural sciences, has been applied to education to mean a 'worldview' or value system related to teaching and learning and so a 'paradigm shift' implies a complete change in outlook and educational culture of a particular community.

Implementing a new English language curriculum is often seen by policy makers as unproblematic involving an easy shift from one form of teaching practices and behaviours to another (Tabulawa, 2013; Guthrie, 2013; Schweisfurth, 2011; 2013). The fact that learner-centred pedagogy is a 'Western' import and implies a different 'culture of learning' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996) is often overlooked. Indeed, Nguyen's (2012) research into the implementation of the new primary curriculum in two schools in Hanoi makes almost no mention of the challenges of the cultural shift implicit in the new curriculum and what this might mean not just for teachers but for others across the education system. Similarly other educational change literature paints a rather gloomy picture of the continued cultural myopia on the part of change planners in many countries around the world and the prevalence of a mechanistic approach to change. Schweisfurth's 2011 survey of 72 studies of educational change in developing countries identified the cultural dimension as one of the key factors in the failure of imported learner-centred education initiatives.

O' Sullivan's (2004) research in Namibia showed how teachers struggled with a constructivist perception of knowledge since they believed knowledge to be fixed, objective and detached from the learner. The teachers in her study felt that their role was to transmit knowledge to their students through forms of rote learning. In China, Hu (2002, p.93) identifies the existing educational culture as the most significant constraint on the implementation of the new communicative pedagogy. Tensions between traditional and more learner-centred approaches were apparent in teachers' assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning, their perceptions of the different roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners, the kinds of learning strategies that were encouraged and the qualities that society valued in teachers and learners.

Many authors have argued that 'Asian values', such as hierarchical relationships, collectivism and respect for authority are a characteristic of Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) evident in countries such as, for example, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong and Korea (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Curdt-Christiansen and Silver, 2012, Nguyen et al ,2009; Nguyen et al, 2006). These values are believed to be in direct conflict with imported 'Western' values inherent in learner-centred pedagogy and can make it difficult for teachers to implement a CLT-based English language curriculum. Curdt-Christiansen and Silver (2012, p.156) in their study of the influence of 'Asian values' on primary English language reform in Singapore found that societal values had a significant effect on what teachers did and were able to do in the classroom. They report that

...there is a tension between educational reforms which emphasise self-regulation and societal values which emphasise obedience to authority; there is a cultural clash between a syllabus which espouses learner-centredness and social norms which emphasise hierarchy.

Many have also questioned the ethnocentric tendencies of CLT and highlighted that implementation needs to be sensitive to the existing educational culture (Holliday, 1994, 2001; Bax, 2003; Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996). This view is expressed in notions of 'contingent pedagogy' (Sriprakash, 2010), 'appropriate pedagogy' (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996) and a 'context approach' to language teaching and learning (Bax, 2003). Indeed, as mentioned in section 3.3.1, much of what teachers actually do in the classroom is usually based on what they have always done intermingled with a few new ideas and practices.

The focus on culture as an influencing factor in successful implementation has been criticised for promoting a stereotypical view of Asian teachers and learners in particular in the sense that many research studies suggest that all Asian learners are passive in the classroom and that all teachers are didactic and authoritative. For example, in Vietnam, Phan (2004) points out that the teachers in her study readily used a communicative approach in their teaching and did not fit the commonly reported stereotype. In this respect, Butler (2011, p.40) argues that it is

potentially misleading to overemphasise the role of traditional cultural values (such as Confucian values) in shaping Asian classroom practices at all grade levels across Asia.

Similarly Markee (2007) and Gong and Holliday (2013) argue that overemphasising cultural challenges can be problematic since they can be value-laden. However, with the exception of a few studies (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen and Silver, 2012; Ouyang, 2000; Hu, 2002), the majority of research on English language curriculum reform has tended to pay only lip-service to the role culture plays in mediating the implementation process and seems to have downplayed what Kennedy (1988, p.332) calls "the pervasive nature of culture – how it influences daily tasks and the way people behave". As Kennedy and others (e.g. Tabulawa, 2013; Guthrie, 2013) point out, problems in implementation are likely to arise if policy makers and planners ignore cultural influences or choose not to deal with them and focus predominantly on technical 'solutions' to practical constraints as I will discuss in the following sub-sections. Noticeably, in a recent survey of TESOL change literature, Waters (2014) makes a call for more research into the kind of cultural contextual factors Kennedy highlighted

almost 30 years earlier. To understand the influence of culture on the implementation of a new curriculum, we need to focus on people; on the human side of change. Yet, as I will go on to discuss in sections 3.4 and 3.5, it is this human dimension that makes curriculum reform complex and therefore what tends to be brushed aside by both policy makers and researchers for 'easier' and 'more measurable' elements of the change process. This research attempts to answer Waters call by focusing on the human dimension of change and in so doing, makes a start in filling the gap in the literature.

3.3.3 Practical constraints

The bulk of the research on curriculum change in both general education and TESOL contexts focuses on the classroom level and the practical constraints experienced by teachers. These include four main areas: issues related to structural conditions of large classes and limited time allocated in the school timetable for English; concerns around teacher capacity both in terms of the numbers of available, suitably qualified teachers and the level of linguistic and methodological skills of existing teachers; the nature of support provided for teachers, and issues with the fit of available materials with new pedagogy and indeed the general availability of teaching resources.

3.3.3.1 Structural conditions

Large classes and the lack of time are commonly cited in the literature as obstacles to the successful implementation of communicative teaching and learning (e.g. Li, 2001; Carless, 2001; Canh and Barnard, 2009; Kirgöz, 2008; Sakui, 2004; Dello-Iacovo, 2009, Song, 2015). Many teachers have reportedly found it difficult to use communicative activities in large classes due to problems of noise, classroom management issues and not being able to attend to individual student needs. In contexts where the curriculum and syllabus are carried out in lock-step fashion, as in Vietnam, with rigid demands placed on teachers to finish the content of the syllabus in a set time, a pedagogical change that requires more time for classroom interaction and preparation can be fraught with dilemmas for teachers (Wang, 2011). Baldauf et al, (2011) and Hayes (2012) also suggest that in the case of primary English language education the amount of time dedicated to language learning is often not sufficient and so the desired outcomes of a new communicative curriculum are rarely achieved. A communicative approach to teaching and learning also implies less control and predictability in the structure of the lesson which can result in a more fluid approach to teaching where the teacher reacts to on-the-spot incidents and interactions. Such situations may make it difficult for the teacher to keep control and to maintain the kind

of teaching and learning pace that is regarded as desirable within many educational cultures (Alexander, 2000; Butler, 2011).

3.3.3.2 Teacher capacity

Teacher capacity or teacher preparedness has been identified in much research as a crucial problem in the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy, particularly with regard to primary English language teaching (e.g. Nunan, 2003; Kirkgöz, 2008; Hardman and Al-Rahman, 2014; Canh and Chi, 2012; Enever and Moon, 2009; Garton, 2014; Copland et al, 2014). In many contexts, teaching English to young learners (TEYL) is a relatively new phenomenon, as in Vietnam, and so English teachers need to develop knowledge, skills and confidence in how children learn languages, new communicative pedagogy suitable for young pupils and English language proficiency (Copland et al, 2014). Kirkgöz (2008) highlights in his study in Turkey that most primary English language teachers were trained to teach at secondary level and have been left to muddle through in primary classrooms. A similar situation exists in Vietnam and around the world (Moon, 2009; Nguyen, 2012; Copland et al, 2011). Yet at the same time the literature reports of limited expertise in higher education institutions in TEYL, and so training for both new and existing teachers has been minimal and ad hoc (Rixon, 2013; Hayes, 2014; Copland et al, 2014; Hamid, 2010a). In his study of primary English language teaching in seven countries in Asia in 2003, Nunan (p.609) notes that

...there is little evidence that differentiated teacher education curricula to meet different chronological ages and stages have been developed or are being developed...

Indeed the recent literature suggests that little seems to have changed since then (e.g. see Rixon, 2013). Zein (2014), writing about the situation in Indonesia, contends that in Asia, it is only Taiwan that has provided a specific programme at tertiary level to prepare English teachers for primary schools. It hardly seems surprising therefore, that many countries implementing curriculum change report of a significant shortage of suitable teachers.

3.3.3.3 Support for teachers

In the case of English language curriculum change, support for teachers becomes all the more important in those contexts, like Vietnam, where reforms in English language pedagogy are not part of a wider reform agenda in other subjects in the curriculum (Wedell, 2003), and so English language teachers are working in the midst of an

unchanged wider educational system and culture. Yet Chen and Day (2015) highlight the all too common paradox that while stakeholders have high expectations of teachers during educational change, they do not always provide the necessary support to help teachers meet those expectations. In such situations teachers are left to muddle along as best they can. Where teachers do have opportunities for support, very often teacher development programmes are reported as providing training that is irrelevant to the realities of teachers' professional contexts and inadequate in terms of the kind of skills and knowledge that are dealt with (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Wedell, 2009; Hayes, 2000; Al-Daami and Wallace, 2007; Hallinger and Lee, 2011). For example, in Jordan Al-Daami and Wallace (2007) found that the teacher training provision was overly theoretical with little opportunity for teachers to practise and INSET programmes did not address teachers' concerns with the new curriculum. Similar findings are reported by Hardman and A-Rahman (2014) where Malaysian teachers felt that too much time in INSET workshops was spent on the *content* of the curriculum rather than on how to build the principle of the communicative approach into their teaching.

While there is considerable research focusing on support for teachers, there seems to be little acknowledgement of support for *other* implementers and the role that they may have in helping teachers to make desired changes in their classroom practices and behaviours (see section 3.4.3). Therefore there seems to be a need for further inquiry into this area of teacher support.

3.3.3.4 Materials and resources

In many countries implementing English language curriculum change, such as Vietnam, textbooks are regarded as the curriculum (Nguyen, 2012; Hayes, 2014; Canh and Chi, 2012; Moon, 2009). The assumption often made by change planners is that armed with a new textbook, teachers should be able to implement the desired new teaching practices and behaviours. Hutchinson and Torres (1996) point out that in times of educational change a textbook *can* be an agent of change through building confidence and providing support for teachers. However, Hayes (2014, p.26) warns that

[t]extbooks are not a panacea for other failures in the system – i.e. they cannot replace qualified, skilled teachers – and, in some instances, may themselves be a source of problems if they are not founded on a basic understanding of how children learn languages.

Tensions surrounding textbooks are reported in Japan (Humphries and Burns, 2015) where the national textbooks for English emphasise reading and focus on learning isolated target structures, in contrast to the aims and desired outcomes of the English language education policy. The role of textbooks becomes all the more important in contexts where teachers do not have access to other resources or the time to develop extra materials themselves (Butler, 2011; Song, 2015). For example in Vietnam, Chin et al (2014) report how teachers in rural areas were concerned by the lack of Internet access, computers and CD players to be able to fully implement a communicative English language curriculum.

A common constraint for teachers implementing a new curriculum is the mismatch between the requirements of a communicative curriculum and national high-stakes exams, often sat at the end of a school level or for entry to college or university (Yan, 2012; Yan and He, 2012; Orafi and Borg, 2009; Ouyang, 2000). Yan (2012) found that teachers in China were 'obsessed with tests' and that much of the classroom time was spent on repetitive exercises focusing on decontextualised language items in preparation for the exams students had to take. She argues that teachers did not necessarily choose to teach in this way, but rather that they were under immense pressure from students, parents and the school authorities with regard to exam success and the embeddedness of an examination-oriented culture.

3.3.4 It's as simple as that

The review of the curriculum change literature so far has shown how the research focus has been on creating a picture of the reality of implementation and the issues and challenges involved. However as I hinted at the start of this section, the emphasis appears to have been on curriculum change as a technical process. While the tensions in teachers' existing beliefs about teaching and learning and the values and norms implicit in a learner-centred pedagogy have been examined, and criticism has been raised about the appropriateness of an imported communicative pedagogy in non-Western educational settings, there still appears to be a general disposition in the literature towards providing 'simple' technical solutions to a complex phenomenon. For example, Song's (2015) recent study of Cambodian teachers' responses to child-centred pedagogy examines teachers' beliefs and practices and the mismatch between policy and reality. Like many similar studies, the findings indicate that there was little change in what teachers did in the classroom, despite teachers' own proclamations that their practices had moved away from traditional methods. Song points to tangible and rectifiable factors such as large classes, lack of resources and

an overloaded curriculum as obstacles to change, implying that if these obstacles were removed, the desired change would happen. There are a myriad of similar 'lists' within the literature which inform policy makers and planners that if these are adhered to, curriculum change implementation will be successful, or at least 'less unsuccessful' (e.g. see Li, 2001; Hayes, 2012, 2014; Baldauf et al, 2011; Enever, 2011).

While the investigation of technical factors is useful, it does not provide a complete picture of the implementation landscape. Basica and Hargreaves (2000) call for research that "probes beneath technical aspects of reform"; research that focuses away from issues of mismanagement and breakdown to a more holistic view of the nature of education and its context. This is something that this case study of primary English language curriculum change in Vietnam aims to do. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2009, p.2) point out

...too much emphasis [has been] placed on the material being used [textbooks, curriculum, tests etc], rather than on the characteristics and understandings of those using the material.

Focusing on technical 'solutions' alone is unlikely to help to bring about the desired changes in classrooms since it ignores the complexity of *people* who experience change; how they think, feel and respond to a curricular innovation. From the previous analysis of the literature in this section, it would seem that understanding how teachers and others think and feel and respond to change becomes more significant in a context where a new curriculum requires significant pedagogical change and where there is often a huge underestimation of what is involved for successful implementation (O'Sullivan, 2002; Schweisfurth, 2011, 2013; Guthrie, 2013; Tabulawa, 2013; Altinyelken, 2013). This appears to be the case in the majority of examples of English language curriculum reform (Wedell, 2009).

In many ways it seems understandable why a technical view of change prevails since, as Levin and Fullan (2008) argue, ensuring coherence across different tangible elements of change implementation is perhaps easier than addressing the human behaviours and feelings involved, and governments everywhere are under pressure to show results of reform quickly and so may opt for apparently easy solutions. However Zembylas and Bulmahan Barker (2007, p. 239) remind us that technicist approaches to educational change

...overemphasize the rational and consequently do not take into account the complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty acknowledged to be part of the change in school.

This implies that ignoring the human factor of change means not acknowledging the messiness involved in implementing a new curriculum into a system full of people who are likely to respond to the changes in different ways. This becomes significant if we consider the implications for policy planning. Mohammad and Harlech-Jones (2008, p. 48) express this well when they say

[p]lanners have imperfect understandings of realities or lives and professional environments of implementers. The result is that their planning has the hallmarks of utopianism, in that it fixes on a desired state while ignoring the practical realities [and people's experiences of change] that might inconveniently wreck the whole process.

It is this investigation of the struggles and dilemmas faced by those who are tasked with implementing a new curriculum that this study contributes towards.

A focus on the human factor is very often translated into a focus on *the teacher*. Many of the research studies provided as examples earlier in this section have focused on teachers and their role in implementing curriculum change. However, despite this apparent move towards investigating the human aspect of change, there still seems to be an underlying technicist mindset where teachers are seen in deficit terms (Smylie and Evans, 2006; Bascia and Hargreaves, 2000; Datnow, 2006) and are the 'problem' in curriculum change, viewed in terms of their capacity and resistance. As Bascia and Hargreaves (2000, p. 5) put it

...reformers assume that educators have the capacity and ability to teach in different and more efficient ways but are either lazy, unknowledgeable, unfocused or resistant to change.

Priestly et al (2015, p.4) rightly warn that seeing teachers as 'a factor' in the curriculum change process suggests a conception of education in general as a "quasi-causal process" where the teacher is an 'input' and is devoid of thoughts, independent actions and feelings. They go on to argue that seeing teachers as 'a factor' in achieving particular educational outcomes can lead to a situation where teachers are blamed (and punished) if their classroom teaching does not appear to have a positive effect on student learning outcomes. Such a view was evident in the findings of a study of general education reform in Thailand (Hallinger and Lee, 2011). Hallinger and Lee highlight how policymakers' rational and 'deficit' approach to teacher support is

unlikely to foster the kind of new learning required of a more learner-centred curriculum:

“...learning by rote will next year be eliminated from all primary and secondary schools and be replaced with student-centred learning...Any teachers found failing to change their teaching style would be listed and provided with video-tapes showing new teaching techniques. If they still failed to improve, they would be sent for intensive training”.

(Dr Rung Kaewdang, quoted in Bunnang, 2000, p.5, cited by Hallinger and Lee, 2011, p.140).

So while the teacher is a crucial partner in the success of curriculum reform, much of the literature seems to ignore or miss the ‘complexity’ part of Fullan’s quote and what it is that makes teachers’ role in reform complex. There have been relatively few studies in the research literature which have explored teachers as complex parts of a complex system; as people whose behaviour, attitudes and feelings during implementation of an educational change do not form or occur in a vacuum, but are dependent on and influenced by the different elements and people in the implementation world around them. Therefore further inquiry is needed in this area.

The next section focuses on the human aspect of change by examining the notion of sense-making and how implementers make sense of a curriculum change process in the literature.

3.4 Making sense of curriculum change

3.4.1 Sense-making

As mentioned previously, a mechanistic paradigm of educational change continues to be a common experience in most educational systems (Fink, 2001; Turner, 2013; Tabulawa, 2013). Such a view tends to ignore how actors interpret, understand and respond to change; how they make sense of change. Spillane et al (2002) highlight how sense-making is rarely considered in the implementation process or in the educational change literature, despite it being a key dimension of successful change. This also seems to be the case in the TESOL literature where while there are many studies focusing on the gap between curriculum policy and practice, there is limited research looking at how teachers *and others* come to make sense of the policy they are required to follow, and how this sense-making might relate to the reality of implementation. My research aims to help fill this gap.

Cognitive approaches to policy implementation have drawn on sociological theories of sense-making (e.g. Weick, 1995) to highlight that how individuals or groups interpret, understand and ultimately enact change is influenced by their prior knowledge, the context in which they work and the relationships within the change process (Coburn, 2001; 2005; Spillane et al 2002; Kelchtermans, 2009). Essentially, then, sense-making is an interactive, dynamic and emotional process and as Coburn (2005, p.478) puts it,

is based on how people notice or select information from the environment, make meaning from that information, and then act on those interpretations.

In order to construct understandings and interpretations, individuals or groups need to put the new information into 'pre-existing cognitive frameworks' (Coburn, 2005), 'worldviews' (Weick, 1995), existing 'key meanings' (Blackler and Shinmin (1984), 'frames of reference' (Luttenberg et al, 2013) or 'personal interpretative frameworks' (Kelchtermans, 2009; März and Kelchtermans, 2013). All these concepts have much in common and can be summed up by März and Kelchtermans (2013, p.15) who state that:

... based on their experiences in the profession, teachers develop a personal system of knowledge and beliefs that acts as a cognitive and affective lens through which they look at their job, give meaning to it and act in it. This concept takes into account teachers' feelings, motivation and perceptions of their work, as well as general educational perspectives related to teaching and learning.

März and Kelchtermans (2013) argue that how individuals interpret and make sense of curriculum change, and ultimately respond to it, will depend on their perceptions of the curriculum, their beliefs, values and norms related to teaching and learning, the interconnections between these and others' interpretations and the structural context of the system as a whole. Such a view takes into account the 'human' perspective of change, attempting to capture the complexity of sense-making within the educational change process.

To understand actors' sense-making, we need to understand what constitutes their professional self. Kelchtermans (2009) suggests that a teacher's professional self, or what he terms 'personal interpretative framework', consists of two main concepts; 'professional self-understanding' and 'subjective educational theory'. The latter refers to the existing knowledge and beliefs a teacher has about education and which explains how teachers deal with particular situations in particular ways. Professional

self-understanding, according to Kelchtermans (2009: pp. 261-262), consists of several interrelated parts. Most relevant for this study are the notions of:

- self-image: how teachers describe themselves and their job performance
- self-esteem: how teacher perceive themselves and how others may perceive them, their relationships with others, and the related issues of normativity and what constitutes good teaching
- future perspectives: teachers' expectations of the development of their job and profession in the future

These three aspects of a teacher's professional self are interwoven with previous educational experiences and knowledge, beliefs and values. Examining sense-making enables a view of how teachers actually experience curriculum change (Luttenberg et al, 2013). This relates to my study in that, as mentioned in the previous section, the curriculum change literature has largely focused on technical steps and behaviours rather than examining curriculum implementation as a process in which teachers and others must make sense of the change. In addition, the common perception of teacher resistance to change misses the complexity of how teachers search for meaning and coherence in an innovation (Luttenberg et al, 2013). Therefore to understand a curriculum reform, it is necessary to understand the dynamic nature of teachers' existing personal frameworks. This means not just looking at what teachers and other agents can do, but how they come to understand the new curriculum.

In the TESOL change literature sense-making has been examined through the concept of *teacher cognitions* (Borg, 2003; Phipps and Borg, 2009); that is the beliefs, norms and values teachers have about their professional work. However I have chosen to use the concept *sense-making* because it has a more dynamic sense of searching for meaning and coherence in curriculum policy and the thinking, feeling and doing that that involves.

What the literature in both general education and TESOL change has highlighted is the emphasis on teacher capacity and willingness to change. Viewing the limited uptake of a new curriculum as demonstrating a lack of individual capacity or a deliberate attempt to resist new policy changes ignores both the complexity of sense-making (Spillane et al, 2002; Spillane, 2000; Spillane et al, 2001; Luttenburg et al, 2013) and the influence that an individual's personal interpretative framework has on this process. Spillane et al (2002) found that actors such as teachers tend to make unfamiliar practices found in new curricula more familiar by interpreting them based on

what they already know; their current frame of reference. Their existing knowledge is based on past learning and teaching experiences and current values and norms of education which are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural context. This might mean that they perceive new ideas and pedagogy to be more familiar than they actually are, and so for example, as Spillane et al (2002, p.398) put it

...ideas may be overinterpreted as essentially the same as the belief or practices the teacher already holds.

This often results in teachers making only superficial changes to their classroom practices without reflection on the kind of fundamental changes that an innovation may require; what Fullan (2003) calls a 'false clarity'.

A focus on sense-making and how it mediates the change process does not mean that other more technical explanations of the gap between policy and implementation which have been discussed in section are not relevant. Indeed, factors within a teacher's working context such as resources, textbooks and training, constitute part of their personal interpretative framework. However analysing sense-making affords a view of curriculum change that acknowledges the relationships with others involved in sense-making that influence not only what teachers think and do, but also how they feel and the responses that ensue. The following sub-sections discuss this in relation to what the literature says about the emotional and relational dimensions of change.

3.4.2 Sense-making as an emotional experience

Sense-making can be an intensely emotional experience. Citing the work of Spillane et al (2002) and van Veen and Lasky (2005), Ketelaar et al (2012) suggest that sense-making is not simply a rational, cognitive process, but also an emotional one, where the elements of a professional self are closely linked to the normative issues surrounding what constitutes good education and a person's moral duties and responsibilities in their job. Similarly, Guo (2010), in her study of curriculum change in China, reports that changes to teachers' roles (what they are supposed to do) can be at odds with what they believe and think, which can create ambiguity and feelings of insecurity.

The majority of research into emotions and educational change has been carried out in general education contexts (e.g. see Uitto, Jokikokko and Estola's (2015) review of 70 research articles on teachers and emotions). Much of this literature (e.g. Cross and Hong, 2011; Day and Lee, 2011a; Marshak, 1996; Saunders, 2013; Schutz and Zembylas, 2011; van Veen and Slegers, 2006; Zembylas, 2003; 2010; 2011;

Hargreaves 1998a/b; 2000; 2005; Lasky, 2005, Yin and Lee, 2011; Chen, 2016) has attempted to look beyond a technical perspective of educational change to one where emotions are an integral part of the process and linked to key meanings and sense-making.

For example, Marshak (1996) reports on the emotions of resistance, loss and grief in an educational change and the impact this has on implementation. Similarly, van Veen and Slegers (2006) highlight the professional vulnerability that change can bring to teachers in the Netherlands as they grapple with interpreting change through their existing professional self. Teachers' vulnerability has also been examined by Kelchtermans (2005; 2009; and with Ballet and Piot, 2011) as an emotional response to the threats and loss to teachers' self-esteem and perception of their role as a teacher that educational change can bring. In the context of China, Gao (2008) found that with the introduction of a more learner-centred pedagogy, teachers felt threatened by the changes. They felt their professional identity was being questioned by different stakeholders such as parents and school principals in terms of what good teaching should be. This led to feelings of vulnerability in the teachers' professional relationships with those around them as they struggled to deal with the contradictions between the expectations of the new curriculum and the realities of their working environment. Feelings of vulnerability appear to stem from perceptions of risk, which Le Fevre (2015) suggests explains why although teachers may have a desire to change their pedagogical practices, they often do not enact such change. Le Fevre found that perceptions of risk involve a fear of possible future losses and repercussions and that these perceptions are mediated by levels of relational trust in the relationships and interactions between different stakeholders, in much the same way as Gao's study indicated.

These studies show that understanding the emotional aspect in reform contexts is an important part of understanding the implementation process of educational change. Yet, despite this, Spillane et al (2002: p 411) highlight that the emotional dimension of change is still an area of research that is "overlooked and understudied". Similarly, Hargreaves (2005, p.13) argues that

the emotional dimension of educational change is not a frill but a fundamental improvement, and deserves increased attention in the educational change literature.

He goes on to point out that in so much literature on educational change, "it is as if teachers think and act; but never really feel" (p.279). This call for more focus on

people and emotions is shared by others (e.g. Day and Lee, 2011b, Day et al, 2007; Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2011; Lee and Yin, 2011; Smit, 2003). The lack of attention to emotion can be attributed to the fact that emotions are difficult to measure, usually requiring a more interpretative research design. In addition, with the prevalence of technicist approaches to educational change, emotion is often viewed as an unnecessary element in the implementation process (Zembylas, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005). Of significance to my study is that this seems to be particularly so in Asian settings (Lee and Yin, 2011).

While most of the research on sense-making and emotions appears to be based in Western contexts and in general education, the cognitive and emotional dimensions of sense-making are relevant in a TESOL curriculum change context too. As already mentioned in section 3.3, new behaviours and classroom practices expected of teachers may stem from new, imported pedagogies, creating tension between a teacher's professional sense of self and the mandated policy change. For the teacher, the risk of loss of face with these new practices is great. Hu (2002: p99) reports that in China, with the introduction of a CLT-based curriculum, a 'good teacher' can no longer

make class events fully predictable, guarantee the smooth delivery of carefully planned content, and give a sense of security to both teacher and student.

This transition away from traditional educational norms, values and behaviours may, as Wedell (2011) suggests, remove teachers' feelings of stability and security, threatening their 'key meanings'. Like the studies conducted in general educational contexts, Yan (2015) and Cowie (2011) found that emotions are bound up in the professional relationships teachers have with others. Cowie (2011) reports that the English language teachers in his study in Japan expressed feelings of isolation and frustration in relation to collegial relationships. In the context of English language curriculum reform in China, Yan (2015) points out that blaming teachers for the limited uptake of the curriculum practices misses the emotional tensions teachers are under, particularly due to the lack of school support in implementation. She found that this lack of support "shattered the teachers' courage to make a transformation" (p.14), exacerbating their feelings of vulnerability.

However, despite the importance of emotions in the process of English language curriculum reform, it continues to be an under-researched area. Indeed, in a recent study of English language teacher emotions in China, Xu (2013, p.375) comments that "it is a pity that teacher emotion remains an unrecognised area in TESOL".

Educational change contains a myriad of human elements inherent in the relationships and interactions of the people involved. Although the concept of emotion is not the central focus of my study, it is inextricably linked to the professional relationships and interactions experienced by change implementers, and constitutes part of the messiness and unpredictability of change which is the basis of this research. My study takes up this call for more research into the emotional dimension of change.

3.4.3 Sense-making as a social experience

As I have mentioned already in this chapter, teachers are acknowledged to be crucial to the success of educational reform. How they make sense of a new curriculum can mediate what happens in the classroom and the extent to which new policy is implemented as intended. However sense-making is not an individual process. It is dependent, to a large extent, on the interrelationships and connections with others in the education system and how they make sense of change (März and Kelchtermans, 2013; Spillane et al, 2002). This raises the following question for me in relation to my study in Vietnam. To what extent is the sense that teachers make of a new curriculum influenced by the sense that others within the wider system also make of it?

In the previous sub-section I examined the emotional element involved in the sense-making process and indeed, as I will go on to discuss, the literature points to both social and emotional experiences as being closely linked. For teachers, who very often work in isolation and behind closed doors, opportunities for interaction with colleagues can often be limited to formal INSET programmes (Cowie, 2011; Canh and Minh, 2012). Section 1.3.2 outlined the numerous accounts in the educational change literature of the lack of effective training provision and the failings of one-off, short INSET courses (see also Lamb, 1995; Hayes, 2000, Hayes, 2012, Waters and Vilches, 2008, 2013; Power et al , 2012; Ingvarson et al 2005; Yan and He, 2015; Zein, 2015). Yan and He (2015) found in their study of INSET provision for English language teachers in China, that the main concern for teachers surrounded the lack of opportunity in the workshops for interaction, in terms of communication with both peers and the trainers. It is this interaction that provides teachers with opportunities to make sense of and grapple with the meaning of a new curriculum and to reflect on and deliberate current teaching practices and behaviours in relation to what new pedagogy might entail (Spillane et al, 2002).

From the literature reviewed, few teachers appear to have access to such spaces or 'enactment zones' (Spillane and Zeuli, 1999). Instead, their experience is of isolated working or formal workshops focused on theory and delivered in traditional-

transmission-style limiting opportunities for reflection and critical discussion (Scheiwsfurth, 2013; Yan and He, 2015; Hayes, 2012). To facilitate sense-making, these 'enactment zones' also need to be spaces of dissonance where teachers and others can bring insights and perspectives to the surface that act as a catalyst for change. The presence of others in group interactions is crucial if teachers are to be able to question their values and beliefs about teaching and learning inherent in their personal professional frames of reference. Indeed, without this kind of dissonance, such professional learning spaces can have limited impact. Harris (2013) found that in educational reform initiatives in Wales, teachers' collaborative learning was ineffective because it was only based on sharing ideas and existing practice and did not allow for the creation or the generation of new practice or new knowledge.

From the literature, it would seem then that the role of others in the sense-making process is important if teachers are to be helped to make the required changes in their pedagogical practice; sense-making is not an individual matter but is influenced by interactions with others (Coburn, 2005; Spillane et al, 2002). Yet the role of others in supporting teachers has not been a major feature of research and as Coburn (2005) points out, we still know little about both the extent to which and how others might influence teachers' sense-making. This study aims to address this gap by investigating what sense district specialists and university INSET trainers make of the new primary English language curriculum in Vietnam and how their sense-making influences what teachers think, feel and do in the light of curriculum reform. The following sub-sections provide a discussion of the existing literature on the roles of educational managers, such as district specialists, and INSET trainers in supporting curriculum change.

3.4.3.1 The role of the district specialist

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, DSs in the context of Vietnam represent middle level educational management, with responsibilities of English language education supervision, training and curriculum implementation. Wedell and Al Sumaimer (2014, p.128) point out that

[a]s the link between policy makers and schools/classrooms, supervisors will continue to play a central role in providing appropriate support to key change implementation partners [such as teachers]...

Similarly, Wang (2010), in a study of the perceptions of middle level administrators in a Chinese university during English language teaching reform, found that these middle managers act as a bridge between policy makers and implementers and have an

active role in interpreting and shaping curriculum innovations. Zheng and Davidson (2008, p.60) report that, in the case of English language curriculum change in China, “the difficulties in relationships between groups [e.g. teachers, supervisors, school principals, policy makers] are central to the problem and process of change”. They comment that limited interaction between these different groups is likely to create feelings of being misunderstood. This has implications for how teachers are supported in their sense-making, since, as Zheng and Davidson (2008, p. 61) put it:

[i]f the principal [or district specialist] does not gain some understanding of the dimensions of change, that is, beliefs, teaching behaviour and curriculum materials, he or she will not be able to understand teacher’s concerns – that is, will not be able to provide support for implementation.

The role of middle managers such as district specialists or school principals is very often intertwined with teachers’ emotional experience of change. As previously discussed, perceptions of risk associated with different ways of thinking about and enacting pedagogy can lead to feelings of vulnerability. Teachers need to be able to feel there are safe learning spaces in which they have a sense of trust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). The importance of this can be seen in Ouyang’s (2000) account of how one teacher found herself with little support from authorities after returning from an intensive INSET programme in China. The school and local education leaders regarded the new communicative pedagogy introduced as part of an English language curriculum reform as alien. Ouyang (2000, p. 412) comments that

She was no longer a model teacher, obedient and trustworthy, both in school and in public settings. Now she made important decisions by herself, worked independently ... and [taught] students in ways different from those used by senior professors and other teachers.

This lack of support and understanding added to the stress that the teacher had already undergone in making sense of the new curriculum and helped in her decision to leave the school and district.

Middle managers do not always view themselves as change agents. Instead there is a tendency for them to be perceived by both themselves and others, as managers, planners and evaluators following government policy (Qian and Walker, 2013; Fullan, 2001; Zheng and Davidson, 2008). Looking at reform in China, Yin et al (2014) point out that this is particularly the case in contexts, like Vietnam, where there is a ‘culture of compliance’; where stakeholders view change as something they have to do. While educational managers may see problems with implementation, they feel under

pressure to follow policy and so tend to be prescriptive and technical in the kind of support they provide teachers (Yin et al, 2014). Relationships of trust and emotional empathy are likely to be difficult to foster in such a culture of compliance.

A recurring theme in the literature is that of the need to develop the skills and capacity of middle managers (Qian and Walker, 2014; Coburn and Russell, 2008; Zheng and Davidson, 2008; Pyhältö et al, 2011), if they are to be able to support teachers and be the kind of 'experts' that can help create the required level of dissonance in collaborative learning spaces. Coburn and Russell (2008) point out that simply providing mentors or coaches in schools, as characterised by district specialists in Vietnam, is not enough to enact change in classrooms. Actors such as DSs draw on their own professional frameworks (their previous learning experiences and beliefs and values) to structure their interactions with teachers and so are likely to promote existing classroom practices and behaviours (Spillane et al, 2002). Support for middle managers therefore is as vital as support for teachers during times of change. Fullan (2001; p.83) highlights this need in relation to school principals and suggests that the psychological and sociological challenges of change (i.e. perceptions of risks and feelings of vulnerability) are experienced by all those involved in the change process.

The subjective world of principals is such that many of them suffer from the same problem in 'implementing a new role as facilitator of change' as do teachers in implementing new teaching roles: What the principal should do specifically to manage change at the school level is a complex affair for which the principal has little preparation. The psychological and sociological problems of change that confront a principal are at least as great as those that confront teachers. Without this sociological sympathy, many principals feel exactly the same as teachers do: Other people simply do not seem to understand the problems they face.

Yet apart from the studies mentioned above (Zheng and Davidson, 2008; Ouyang, 2000; Wang, 2010; Wedell and Al Sumaimeri, 2014) there seems to be relatively little research in the TESOL change literature which looks at the role of middle managers in the change process and the relationships and interactions teachers have with them. This appears to reflect the predominant technicist view discussed in earlier sections of this chapter; that teachers play the key role in change implementation, with little overt recognition that they are not autonomous agents but part of a dynamic web of relationships and interactions with others. Some research, while focusing on the role of the teacher in curriculum change, does mention the importance of other stakeholders, but this is often a cursory observation at the end of a report with little in-depth analysis of how these other stakeholders might experience change (e.g. see Hardman and A-

Rahman, 2014). The majority of studies that have focused specifically on people operating at the district level tend to be situated in general educational contexts (e.g. Yin et al, 2014; Coburn and Russell, 2005, Coburn, 2005; Spillane, 2000; Pyhältö et al, 2011; Qian and Walker, 2013; Spillane, et al, 2002). The focus of my research on the dynamic relationships that teachers have with DSs and INSET trainers helps to address this gap in the TESOL change literature. Also, since as the literature suggests, sense-making is an important part of affecting change and sense-making is both an emotional and social experience, it would be useful for those responsible for planning change to investigate how the human relationships and interactions involved in curriculum implementation mediate what ultimately happens in the classroom.

3.4.3.2 The role of the INSET trainer

The previous sub-section argued that the role of middle managers and how they make sense of a curriculum change can mediate teachers' sense-making process. Yet this has tended to be overlooked in the TESOL change literature. This also seems to be true of the role of INSET trainers. Section 3.3.4.2 highlighted the reported failings of INSET as a means of facilitating pedagogical change. However while much of the TESOL literature recommends more training (Li, 2001; Carless, 2001; Canh and Chi, 2012), improved content (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009; Yan and He, 2015), on-going, school-based models of teacher development (Park and Sung, 2013; Hardman and A-Rahman, 2014; Waters and Vilches, 2008), there appears to be little mention of how trainers supporting the professional development of existing teachers make sense of change and their role in the dynamics of the reform process.

Like middle managers, INSET trainers are change agents, and what they think and do (and feel) in relation to pedagogical change is likely to influence the nature of any INSET provision. Kirkgöz (2008), in her study of 32 teachers in Turkey, found that the INSET trainers' understandings of the new English language curriculum had a significant effect on how teachers were able to implement the curriculum as desired. She suggests that trainers need to be able to understand and recognise the extent of the cultural shift that the changes require of teachers. This would enable the trainers to (p.1861)

provide meaningful bridges between the culture of the innovation and the existing local professional culture...and help teachers make the transition

However in many contexts this seems to be the ideal rather than the reality. Very often trainers have little familiarity with the daily challenges in state school teaching (Zein,

2014, 2015; Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008) and so find it difficult to provide appropriate examples and models, often resorting to theoretical input delivered in transmission modes of training (Schweisfurth, 2011; 2013). While teachers are usually blamed for failures in implementation, it is often the INSET trainers themselves that may be partly responsible for poor uptake of new pedagogy, since they may fail to fully understand the contexts in which teachers work and fail to adapt INSET materials accordingly (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008). O' Dwyer and Atli (2015) point out that in many TESOL contexts, the role of INSET trainer is not given much thought by change planners; they are equated with good teachers. However they found that in their study of INSET trainers in Turkey, "simply equating the role [of INSET trainer] with a good teacher belies the intricacies of the job" (p.17) since they need to be able to explore potential pedagogical tensions with teachers and tackle embedded practices and behaviours. In contexts like Vietnam, where teaching English to young learners is a relative new phenomenon and pre-service training in primary ELT is often limited or non-existent, the role of the INSET trainer becomes all the more important (Zein, 2014, 2015; Hayes, 2014). The lack of focus in the literature on the relationships between teachers and trainers in the sense-making process and how trainers think, feel and act in relation to their role as change agents in curriculum reform suggests a lack of recognition of the role of others in change implementation. This is an area that my research investigates further.

My aim in this chapter so far has been to highlight to the reader the 'messiness' of English language curriculum change, as evident in the literature. The chapter started with recurring accounts of the failure of educational change around the world, partly attributed to the overtly technical approach to change planning. More and more research has recognised the "huge underestimation of what is involved in learner-centred education" (O'Sullivan, 2002) and the fact that it constitutes new pedagogical norms and values imported from Western educational systems. I highlighted that much of this research still leans towards a reductionist view of change and provides lists of mainly technical impediments to successful implementation. Such 'lists' also accommodate the view that since teachers are key agents in the implementation process, reform difficulties or failures can be attributed to issues of teacher capacity and resistance.

The discussion so far has also shown how a more human perspective of change is gaining ground with increasing focus on the sense-making process of teachers. Research has begun to investigate not only how teachers as individuals make sense of an innovation, but how their professional relationships with others might enable or

hinder the sense-making process. Yet what is surprising is that very few studies of English language curriculum change reviewed in the literature have addressed this relational dimension of change. This is all the more significant because the move in TESOL contexts around the world towards more communicative pedagogy probably constitutes a cultural change for everyone involved in English language education, not only teachers.

It would seem that despite decades of reform efforts and a large number of research studies on curriculum change implementation around the world highlighting the failings of a technicist approach to reform, curriculum planning appears to continue to be simplistic and linear in its assumptions and approaches. I now ask the reader to consider a different way of looking at curriculum change, through a complexity lens, which embraces messiness and which recognises that “educational change is a complex process involving many interconnected elements that have a dynamic effect on each other” (Hoban, 2002, p. 29). Rather than looking for solutions and ways to control the change process, a complexity perspective allows us to “find different ways of engaging with its unpredictability and uncertainty” (Murray, 2008, p.9).

3.5 Curriculum change as a complex process

This section presents an outline of Complexity Theory. It discusses how a conceptual framework based on complexity can facilitate an investigation of the relationships and interactions involved in how actors make sense of change and how these relationships and interactions may shape the implementation process.

3.5.1 An understanding of complexity

It is only recently that complexity thinking, which originated in the physical sciences, mathematics and biology, has found its way into educational research literature. This phenomenon has been part of a “complexity turn” in the social sciences generally (Urray, 2005) and which Mercer (2011a, 2011b) also identifies as happening in the field of applied linguistics. In 2008, a special issue of the *Educational Philosophy and Theory* journal was dedicated to complexity theory and education. Recent research has suggested the benefits of adopting a complexity perspective in educational research (e.g. Davis et al, 2012; McQuillan, 2008; O’ Day, 2002; Toh, 2016) as a means of adopting a more holistic approach to investigations of educational change. For example Toh (2016), in her recent study of technological pedagogical reform in Singapore, found that a complexity-informed perspective helped her to better understand the extent of ‘ecological coherence’ across the many layers of the school

system. Similar holistic approaches have been taken up in English language education research (e.g. Mercer, 2011a, 2011b; Tudor, 2003, 2001; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008; Zheng, 2015) in an attempt to move away from reductionist approaches to research. Zheng (2015) explains that her adoption of a framework of complexity theory is more relevant than purely causal frameworks because the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices should be viewed as a dynamic process which occurs within a wider contextual environment.

A special issue of *Current Issues in Language Planning* journal (Volume 14, 2013) has made a call for more investigation by those involved in language education research into how a complexity approach might benefit language planners and contexts. My research attempts to follow this call.

However trying to understand complexity is no easy matter (Ovens et al, 2013) since there is a myriad of associated terminology, for example Complexity Theory (Byrne, 1998; Byrne and Callaghan, 2014; Mason, 2008), Complex Systems Theory (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008), Dynamic Systems (de Bot et al, 2013), and Complex Adaptive Systems (Waldrop, 1992). Coupled with this is the notion of different communities within the field of complexity, as identified by Cilliers (2001). *Hard complexity* aims to reveal and gain an understanding of reality and probably best describes the application of complexity in the physical sciences. *Soft complexity* uses complexity as a metaphor to understand and interpret what is going on in the world. *Complexity thinking* takes a more philosophical approach to describe a way of thinking which is based on an understanding of the world as being made up of interacting and dynamic complex systems (Byrne and Callaghan, 2014). The idea of 'complexity thinking' (which I refer to throughout this thesis as a complexity approach or a complexity perspective) fits with my own ontological assumptions which underpin this thesis (see section 4.1.1 in the next chapter). While a complexity approach might not be able to provide concrete solutions to many of the difficulties that exist in educational change, it "shows us (in a rigorous way) why these problems are so difficult" (Cilliers, 2005, p.257).

According to Mason (2008, p. 33), complexity

concerns itself with environments, organisations or systems that are complex in the sense that very large numbers of constituent elements are connected to and interacting with each other in many different ways.

Adopting a complexity perspective is an acknowledgement that complexity actually exists and that how we attempt to understand complex systems, such as curriculum change implementation, will need to change accordingly (Cilliers, 2007). Thus,

[t]he message ...about complex systems is that in the past we focused on parts of a system and how they functioned – looking at them in isolation. Now we need to focus on the interactions between these parts and how the relationships determine the identity not only of the parts but also of the whole system. Everything is connected to everything else ...

(Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack, 2007, p.25)

In this sense, it is the interactions between the different parts of the system and the influence of its environment that help to create the conditions for the particular collective behaviour of that system (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008, p.1). A complexity approach to educational change therefore, helps us to see that there is little benefit in trying to isolate individual factors or elements as a way of explaining the failure of change or as a way of effecting change (Mason, 2009). Indeed, focusing on isolated, discrete structures misses the fact that the sum of the whole system is greater and more complex than the sum of the different parts (McQuillan, 2008). A complexity approach provides a different way of looking at education, away from technical, causal models to a focus on the relationships that connect and interact with people, practices and events across multiple levels of a system (Lemke and Sabelli, 2008).

Curriculum change is complex because it involves not only a change in curriculum content, but also changes in constituent parts, which are themselves complex systems (Hoban, 2002). These elements (e.g. textbooks, policy documents, assessment systems, curricula) and actors (e.g. teachers, parents, students, head teachers, teacher educators, administrators, policy makers) are all connected, not in a linear, sequential fashion, but in an overlapping, entwined web affecting different parts at different times (Wallace and Pocklington, 2002). Peurach (2011, p.17) refers to this as 'a full world' perspective in which

the world is full of complex parts, problems, solutions and challenges, all in dense, interconnected, networked relationships, a world full of individuals, groups and organizations working in interaction to understand, confront and reform these parts and their dense interrelated relationships.

Thus the complex system of curriculum change is intertwined with numerous other 'complex systems' of different people and parts, all (probably) interacting and

interconnected in different ways. In this study I use the concept of 'complex system' to refer to the sense-making of the different research participants rather than the Vietnamese education system as a whole. However investigating sense-making as a complex system, and thus the interrelated understandings, perceptions and feelings of the individuals involved, also necessitates a wider view of the larger complex system in which it (sense-making) is nested.

Complexity thinking is not the only emerging approach in the social sciences to focus on holism and the web of interactions between the human and non-human elements of a system. Fenwick et al (2011) suggest that other research approaches (such as ecological, social network and socio-materiality approaches) have evolved in the wake of the post-structuralism and post-method 'turn' in the social sciences. While these approaches display some differences, they also have important common core characteristics mirroring those mentioned above related to the notion of complexity. The complexity perspective that I have chosen to develop in my study does not suggest that other approaches are less relevant (see section 8.6 in Chapter 8 for a reflection on using a complexity perspective), but what I have found is that the ideas and concepts within complexity have the most resonance with the context of my study.

While the field of complexity is diverse and perhaps difficult to define, there does exist a shared set of concepts and ideas that are used within the main literature on complexity (e.g. Byrne, 1998; Cameron, 2004; Cilliers, 1998; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008; Mason, 2008) and which I have touched on in this section. The next section provides an overview of some of the key characteristics of complex systems which have implications for education and curriculum change. The concepts of *connectedness*, *feedback*, *emergence* and *self-organisation*, which I discuss below, have the most relevance to this study of how stakeholders make sense of English language curriculum change in Vietnam.

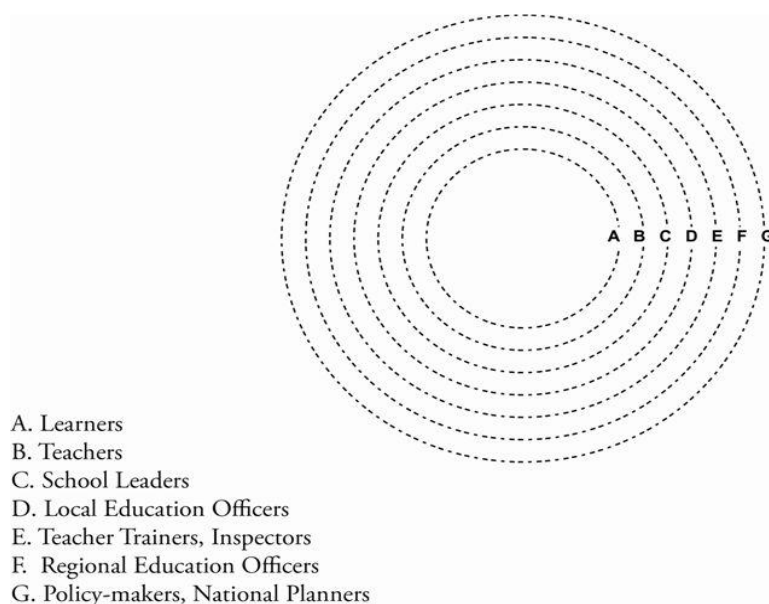
3.5.2 A conceptual framework of complexity

3.5.2.1 Connectedness

One of the central features of complexity theory and complex systems is the relationship or connectedness between multiple agents and elements (Mason, 2008). Connectedness has been a key focus in the literature of complex educational change (Haggis, 2008; Davis et al, 2012; Davis and Sumara, 2006) in which complex systems have been described as 'nested systems' where there are 'trans-level' (Davis and

Sumara, 2006) interactions and interrelationships. This 'nestedness' can be seen in the layers of interwoven complex systems within the bigger system of education. So, for example, a language lesson is a complex system (Tudor, 2003) and is embedded in other complex systems of the teacher (Mercer, 2011a; 2011b; Zheng, 2015), the curriculum (Doll, 2008; Osberg and Biesta, 2008), the school and district (Davis and Sumara, 2006), and so on through the educational system hierarchy. The connectedness of a complex system can also be seen in the nature of its 'openness', in the sense that it is shaped by its environment and in turn the environment is shaped by it (Cilliers, 2000).

However, while the interconnectedness of the different levels has tended to be viewed as a hierarchical relationship, this has dangers of reinforcing the top-down, controlled and deterministic view of educational change that complexity thinking is attempting to move away from. Rather than levels, Wedell and Malderez (2013) conceive of the notion of *layers*, similar to the inside of an onion, which are identifiable in terms of the people operating in them and where the boundaries of the layers are permeable so that there are (potentially) multiple interactions happening within and across layers. This can be seen in Figure 3.1, where the permeability of the layers is highlighted by the dotted lines.



*Figure 3.1 Interconnected, permeable layers of a complex system
 (from Wedell and Malderez, 2013, p.218)*

The multiple interacting layers in Figure 3.1 are similar to Levin and Fullan’s (2008) idea of “permeable connectivity”, where there is mutual interaction and influence across the different layers. The people-focused notion of connectedness fits with a ‘complexity thinking’ view of educational change and allows for a recognition of multiple roles involved in sense-making, as discussed in section 3.4.

Section 3.3 highlighted how in contexts such as Vietnam, where new pedagogies such as CLT have been introduced into curricula, change usually demands some kind of cultural change. This means that individuals in all layers of the system need to acquire new skills and new learning in order to carry out new roles and responsibilities. In this sense, change can be viewed, as O’ Day (2002) and Davis and Sumara (2006) suggest, as a *learning* system dependent on the flow of ‘information’ or learning between and within layers. New behaviours that emerge from new learning will be influenced by how individuals within the system interact in relation to the ‘information’, and ultimately how they interpret the ‘information’. Indeed, Levin and Fullan (2008, p. 298) remark that

[t]he nature of human interaction requires constant efforts to communicate and never more so than when some significant change from the status quo is being attempted.

This would seem to be the case in the context of this study in Vietnam.

Perceived failure of change implementation may be linked to connectedness (or lack of it), and may suggest that the educational system has not sufficiently adjusted to complexity, or that the agents within it have not fully recognised the complexity of the change that the particular system is undergoing (Nordtveit, 2010). Connectedness then is an important part of complexity since the behaviour of the system is determined by the nature of the interactions and relationships and not the content of the components of the system (Cilliers, 2000).

3.5.2.2 Feedback

Linked to the connectedness of a system is the idea of feedback and two-way communication. As has already been mentioned, relationships are crucial to complex systems. However this does not mean all communication must be positive (Cilliers, 2000), and indeed feedback between and within different layers of the system requires both information about what is working and what is not working so that the system can adapt and adjust. Feedback and information flow are the drivers of emergence and help move actors in the desired direction of, for example, a curriculum change (Davis and Sumara, 2006). So, as Wedell and Malderez (2013) suggest, (in a ideal world) where a system is undergoing curriculum change, each of the different layers of actors and roles as shown in Figure 3.2 will need to obtain information about what others are doing and thinking in other layers so that as far as possible coherence across the system can be maintained. As the discussion of the literature in section 3.4 highlighted, this coherence is particularly important for sense-making across the layers whose behaviours most directly affect what happens in classrooms.

The extent of these “knowledge networks” (Davis and Sumara, 2006, p.97) can help the system to reach a critical mass where a phase transition occurs and emergence of new behaviours and practices can be seen. I discuss this further in the next subsection. Of interest to my research is the nature of feedback that exists between different implementers in different layers of the system and how this feedback and communication influence what sense they make of the new curriculum.

3.5.2.3 Self-organisation and emergence

A complex system is dynamic and therefore constantly evolving and adapting and ultimately learning (Byrne, 1998; Cilliers, 1998). This suggests that a mandated change policy will not be implemented along a determined, predictable trajectory since

sub-systems evolve in different ways depending on the nature of the relationships among their constituent parts. Therefore, components may self-organise in response to change and the changing external environment, meaning different emergent behaviours may appear at different places and times across the system (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008). In the case of curriculum reform, while there might be a centrally planned and controlled curriculum policy, complex systems in different layers of the bigger system modify and adjust their behaviour according to local conditions. Self-organisation and emergence are key concepts in complexity and it is through the connectedness and a flow of learning and information that a system will self-organise and emerge with new properties and behaviours.

The significance of self-organisation and emergence is that they emphasise the unpredictable nature of educational systems and that a reductionist approach to reform focusing on specific individual elements and predetermined outcomes may not be the best means of understanding curriculum change (Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2008). The implications for my study lie in how actors make sense of change and how this sense-making process might lead to self-organisation and the emergence of new curriculum practices and behaviours.

Systems, such as education systems, are naturally conservative and tend to lean towards the status quo in an attempt to 'survive'. Complex systems are embedded in their history and so what has happened in the past will affect the behaviour of the system in the present (Mason, 2008). In the context of English language education, this historical aspect can be seen in the persistence of traditional norms and values surrounding teaching and learning in the wake of the introduction of new pedagogical practices.

For change to occur, or for transformative learning, an education system needs to reach a tipping point between the order of the status quo and the potentially chaotic embrace of change. This has been described as a 'phase shift' (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008, p.57), which occurs when a 'system' moves from one attractor state to another. For example, in the case of curriculum change, this may be a move from a traditional pedagogy to a new pedagogical approach. The term 'phase shift' is similar to Kuhn's (1962) notion of a 'paradigm shift' (as already mentioned in section 3.3.2.). Thus, through the connectedness of the system and the flow of information between and across layers, actors, such as teachers, may begin to question and examine previous teaching practices (Cameron, 2004). This questioning of current practice and behaviours is likely to create turbulence in the system and actors may choose different

paths to follow depending on particular forces or 'attractors'. Thus, different parts of the system will emerge in new ways. Similarly, control parameters can have a significant influence on actors and the trajectory they choose to follow and aim to keep the system in equilibrium by maintaining the status quo. These parameters may be certain structural parts of the system, the rate of the flow of information or the degree of connectivity (Cameron, 2004). McQuillan (2008) adds that where a complex system comprises of humans, such as an education system, one of the control parameters acting to maintain existing ways of working is likely to be that of culture.

To make change sustainable there needs to be significant momentum (Mason, 2008; 2009), or a 'critical mass' (Markee, 1997), heading in the same direction towards a new attractor state. This suggests a need for some harmony or coherence in the understandings and contributions of the many individuals involved in a curriculum change (Carpay et al, 2013) in order for a tipping point to be reached. However, while some degree of congruence may be necessary, it is, as Cilliers (2010, p. 4) points out, the very differences and diversities in the relationships and interactions between and among the different actors of the system that creates richness, meaning and complexity. This difference becomes important in situations of curriculum change where actors are trying to make sense of new pedagogical ideas and concepts. Hiver (2015) suggests that change in teaching practices and behaviours is unlikely to happen without a major disturbance or dissonance that acts a trigger. As was discussed in section 3.4.3, such a trigger could be a reflection on existing practices in the light of new ideas and conceptual thinking aided by 'expert' others in zones of enactment or learning spaces. Osberg and Biesta (2008) use the term '*space of emergence*' in a similar way in relation to the curriculum. They argue that in a classroom, the teacher needs to create enough dissonance to allow a transformation and emergence of learning. Applying *spaces of emergence* in a more general sense to curriculum change, suggests learning spaces where groups of actors are grappling with making sense of a new pedagogy and where their beliefs, values and ideas about existing conceptions of teaching and learning are questioned.

Of interest to the investigation in this thesis is what these attractors and control parameters may be and how they may influence the change process.

3.5.3 Issues with using a complexity perspective

While there has been a growing interest in adopting a complexity perspective in educational research, questions have also been raised. There appear to be three main concerns levelled at a complexity approach in relation to education. Firstly, viewing

educational change as complex is nothing new since many of the issues surrounding complexity are part of everyday discussions and discourse on educational change (Morrison, 2006: 2008). Applying complexity theory may therefore not add any extra value to research. Indeed, Morrison (2006, p.6) asks how far complexity theories might simply be 'old wine in new bottles'. Secondly, complexity theory is thought of as a descriptive theory and because of the nature of complex systems, cannot provide a predictive, linear, clear-cut solution to the challenges of educational change (Morrison, 2006; 2008; Cilliers, 2010). Thirdly, the mathematical modelling used in much complexity research may not necessarily lend itself to social systems such as education (Radford, 2006). Radford (2006) and Horn (2008) point out that biological systems (on which much of complexity theory is based) self-organise around a single attractor of survival that drives the system. They suggest that while individuals in an education system will very likely have an interest in survival during policy change, there may be more than one kind of survival attractor in different parts of the system. This means that individuals will be acting in their own interests unlike biological organisms in a body which generally serve one master.

Complexity thinking is at an early stage in the arena of educational change (Morrison, 2006; 2008) and so researchers are still grappling with how best to operationalize what is essentially "a metaphorical perspective based on a set of exhortations backed up by a descriptive report" (Morrison, 2008, p. 28). This does not mean that it is 'unworthy' of the attention of educational research. McQuillan (2008, p.1793) rightly argues that complexity theory is "good to think with" and that although "it is not precise and not predictive, it offers a holistic framework for understanding the systemic nature of educational reform". As mentioned at the start of this section (3.5) and worth reiterating here, similar conclusions have been made by Mercer (2011a, 2011,b), with reference to her research on agency in Second Language Acquisition, more recently by Toh (2016) in a study of ICT curriculum change in school in Singapore, and by Zheng (2015), in an investigation of the dynamic processes involved in the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. Davis et al's (2012) study of school districts aimed to investigate how a complexity perspective might be useful in interpreting and informing research. They see complexity theory as offering a way of analysing the interrelationships among the elements and agents of the district system and its sub systems. This, their research suggests, can help to highlight how far the parts of a disparate system are working together (or not) within a complex learning system.

I believe that viewing curriculum change through a complexity lens increases awareness in curriculum change contexts of the complexity of change; that is the

complexities surrounding the individuals involved and the systems in which they operate. Recognising that education systems are social systems means understanding that individuals within the system are themselves complex systems. In turn, this necessitates a need to understand not only structural influences but also the 'human' - the relational dimension of the change process, how this may be shaped by complexity and how a system may be shaped by the complex nature of the individuals and their sense-making and the different elements in it. The next section discusses how this relates to my research and the context of primary English language curriculum change in Vietnam.

3.6 Linking the literature to this research study in Vietnam

How different people make sense of a new curriculum is affected by the richness of the connectedness between actors in a system and the rate of information flow and learning (Stacey, 1996, p.99). Sense-making is thus intertwined with the concepts of self-organisation and emergence since the sense that an actor makes of a new curriculum will likely mediate their behaviours and practices and the nature and sustainability of any phase transition. There appears to be a scarcity of research that brings together sense-making and a complexity perspective on educational change to investigate the experiences of multiple actors across different layers of the system during curriculum implementation. As highlighted in section 3.4, although sense-making is influenced by interactions and connections with others and what sense these others also make of a change initiative (Coburn, 2001; 2005; Spillane, 2000), the focus in much of the research on the sense-making process in change implementation has been on the teacher. There still seems to be little known about how different actors in the implementation process of a new English language curriculum make sense of change and how their sense-making may influence teachers' interpretations and understandings of new curriculum policies. In a complex system, it is this sense-making which is likely to lead to self-organisation and emergence. Thus, to understand the change process through a complexity lens, we need to explore the thoughts, feelings and responses individuals have about the change, their working contexts, and the interrelationships of *not just teachers*, but *other* participants within a multi-layered educational system. My research investigates how actors in the provincial education system in Vietnam make sense of curriculum change, how this sense-making is embedded in the complexity of the system and its interconnections, and to what extent sense-making influences implementation, or in complexity terms, self-organisation and emergence.

3.7 Chapter summary

This literature review has shown that there is a scarcity of research on the relational dimension of curriculum change in TESOL contexts – in particular the relationships and interactions between different actors involved in implementing change. Although the role of the teacher has been at the forefront of much of the research, there has been little investigation of other change participants and how they influence teachers' sense-making process. While there has been increasing recognition of the need for a complexity approach to researching curriculum change, there are still relatively few studies which have explicitly addressed this call and fewer still which have focused on English language curriculum change. This literature review has discussed some of the issues surrounding English language curriculum change and developed a conceptual framework based on a complexity approach.

Positioning how actors make sense of curriculum change within a complexity perspective provides a means to identify and examine:

- patterns that emerge in perceptions, feelings and responses (sense-making) to curriculum change within and across levels
- the connections and interactions between different actors within and across levels.
- control parameters that have influenced the new learning and emergence of particular behaviours and practices in different layers of the system.
- possible conditions for emergence which can help inform policy makers and change planners about what they might want to address to make educational change sustainable.

The main research questions for this thesis were drawn from both this review of the literature and my initial puzzle, and they are framed in concepts of sense-making and complexity.

- How do teachers make sense of primary English language curriculum change?
- How do other key implementers (district specialists and university INSET) supporting these teachers, make sense of the change?
- What insights does this multi-layered sense-making reveal about the complexity of curriculum change?

The following chapter describes the research design and methodology that developed from my research questions and these areas for investigation.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes my research design and methodology. It outlines the relationship between the methods I have chosen to use and the data this has generated, and the complexity perspective in which my study is framed. I begin with an outline of my research stance, showing how the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a complex-sense-making framework within a 'complexity thinking' approach have informed my research design. I then go into details of my methodology framework. The rest of this chapter details my research design: the purpose of my study and the research questions I have explored based on the discussions and issues highlighted in the previous chapters; the participants; data generation methods, and data analysis. I identify some of the methodological limitations of the case study in this chapter. I also outline how I have addressed ethical issues and attempted to ensure the trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the study.

4.1.1 My research stance

My philosophical stance in relation to my research has influenced the decisions I have made around the research topic, research design and methodology.

I see people as complex beings comprised of their own thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values that influence how they perceive life and events (Gillings de Gonzalez, 2009). Therefore there is no one reality or one perception of an event or process. In this sense, I believe, as Smit (2003, p. 3) suggests, that within the phenomenon of educational change,

... each [actor] experiences and emotionally understands education policy change from his or her own point of view, and so encounters and conceives a different reality.

However how people perceive reality is not a unilateral process. The production of knowledge is a complex relationship between human perception, the structural reality of the context in which a person lives and works, the socio-cultural environment, and relationships and connections with others (Kincheloe, 2004,

pp.23-27). My ontological and epistemological stance fits within an interpretative worldview, which sees reality as relative and socially constructed, with multiple accounts and interpretations of it, and therefore subjective in the sense that there is no absolute truth (Cresswell, 2013; Hennink et al, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Positioning myself within the constructivist ontology of an interpretative paradigm also allows me to address the complex nature of the world and the people in it through complexity theory, since, as Kincheloe (2004, p. 26) suggests, complexity theory emphasises the ontology of relationships and connections and the notion that the human self is dependent on and influenced by the nature of these relationships and connections.

My methodological choices reflect my epistemological and ontological standpoints. I describe and justify these choices in the proceeding sections.

4.2 Methodological framework – case study

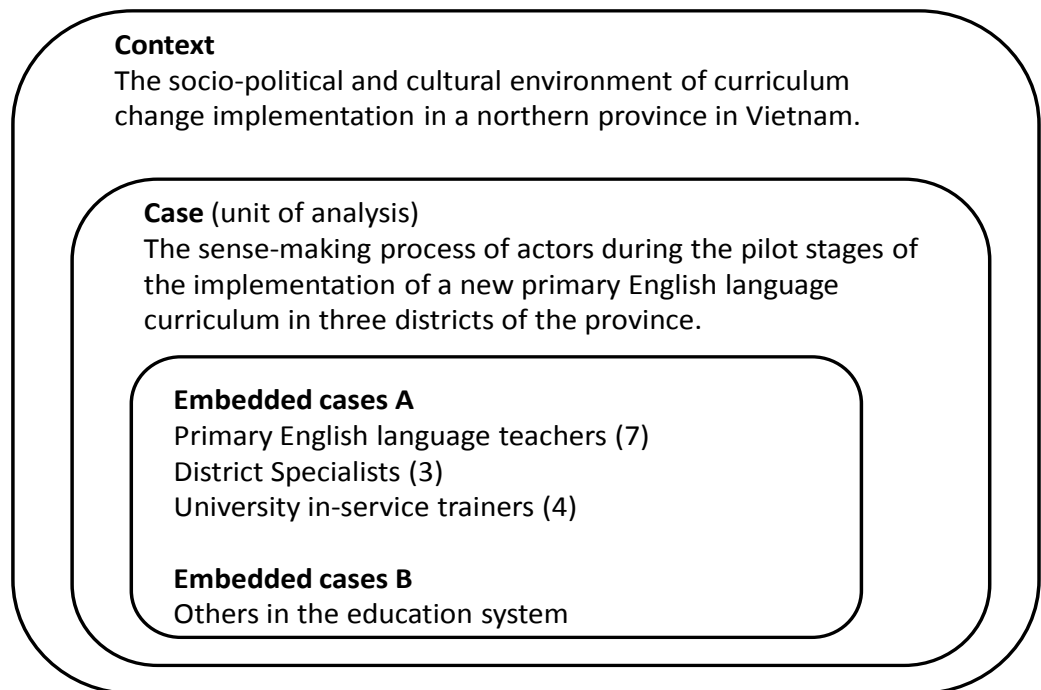
A case study approach is the most appropriate methodological choice for my research because of its potential for exploring and highlighting the contextual nature of complex systems. Haggis (2008) and Byrne (1998, 2005) argue that to better understand a complex system in terms of its history and relationships within itself and across other systems, we need to gain contextual knowledge of that system. Similarly, Simons (2009, p.21) suggests that case study enables “the exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexities” of a particular phenomenon. My study involves looking at the multiple interconnected layers and relationships of the education system undergoing complex change in the context of three districts in a province in Vietnam. A qualitative case study approach has helped me to develop rich, detailed and contextualised descriptions and understandings of the specific case in Vietnam and its complexities (Simons, 2009; Flyvberg, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

While the exploration of a particular case allows for depth and thick description using multiple methods, the very fact that a case *is* particular and unique means that generalizing the findings to other settings, times or populations becomes problematic (Flyvberg, 2011; Yin, 2009). This is considered to be one of the limitations of case study research. However what happens in a complex system cannot be generalised since its emergent nature means that what occurs in another context is unpredictable and will depend on the initial conditions and the interrelationships with the different parts and people in that context. I believe my

case study presents a rich picture of the experiences and complexities of curriculum change. The claims and inferences I make are not generalizations but rather understandings and interpretations which add to the existing knowledge of sense-making and curriculum reform, and allow readers a situated understanding of how this example might link to other cases and contexts.

One of the characteristics of a complex system is that it cannot be bound since the interrelationships and connections are limitless across space and time. The problem of trying to define boundaries within a case study approach risks complexity reduction since deciding to focus on one particular case inevitably means that other aspects, connections and relationships are ignored. Cilliers (1998, p. 4) points out that "...in a complex system everything is connected to everything else whether directly or indirectly. Therefore there is a blurred notion of boundary..." which creates a paradox for the researcher since there will always be something outside the defined boundary of a research case which affects the system's behaviour. However Cilliers (2007) rightly argues that there has to be a degree of research pragmatism and although locating a focus of interest in a part of a complex system requires the researcher to set boundaries, this approach can still offer valuable insights into the multiple interactions and connections, despite the complexity reduction it suggests.

This case study focuses on how three groups of individuals (primary English language teachers, district specialists and university INSET trainers) linked with three districts in one province in the north of Vietnam make sense of the new primary English language curriculum. My overall case is the process of making sense of curriculum change in three districts in one province. It is temporally situated in the context of the three-year pilot implementation programme which started in September 2010 and finished in May 2013. In Figure 4.1, adapting Yin's (2009) holistic embedded case study, I show how the case, and the individuals in it, are nested within the wider contextual environment of the education system. This nested approach has helped me to focus on 'complexity thinking' and the need to consider not just the perspectives of the three groups of individuals but how they interact with each other within district clusters and others in the system, and the extent to which these relationships and interactions affect how they make sense of the change.



*Figure 4.1 A holistic embedded case study
(adapted from Yin, 2009,p.46)*

4.3 Purpose and research questions

My study aims to better understand the nature of primary English language teachers', university teacher trainers' (hereafter UTs) and district specialists' (hereafter DSs) sense-making in the context of the primary English language curriculum pilot implementation programme in one province in the north of Vietnam. It explores relationships and connections in the sense-making process and the extent to which different actors' perceptions, feelings and responses (sense-making) are influenced by people, elements and events around them and how this mediates the implementation process. In doing so, I aim to highlight the process of transformation and emergence in a complex system and bring to the attention of researchers, change planners and policy makers the complexities of different actors' understandings and responses to change. This may contribute to policy makers and

change planners' understanding of how they may facilitate implementation of curriculum reform. I wish to stress that my intention in conducting this research is not to evaluate the implementation process in Vietnam or the national reform project, but rather to understand what sense the participants make of the changes required of them during the implementation period.

My research questions consist of three main questions with sub-questions:

1. How do teachers make sense of primary English language curriculum change?
 - What are their perceptions and interpretations of the new curriculum?
 - What appears to influence the sense they make of the new curriculum?
2. How do other key implementers (district specialists and university INSET trainers) involved in supporting these teachers, make sense of the change?
 - What are their perceptions and interpretations of the new curriculum?
 - What appears to influence the sense they make of the new curriculum?
3. What insights does this multi-layered sense-making reveal about the complexity of curriculum change?

4.4 The site

My choice of setting is based on convenience. The province I have selected is familiar to me and I have good relationships with many teachers, teacher educators, local education officials and staff from international agencies which helped in gaining access to schools and participants. While a convenience sample may be regarded negatively in contrast with a more purposeful selection, the realities of gaining access, cost and time, along with the challenges of an unknown site, exist for all researchers (Maxwell, 2012, p.95) and “ to dismiss these [realities] as ‘unrigorous’ is to ignore the real conditions that will influence how data can be collected ...”.

4.5 The participants

4.5.1 Access and selection

I used a purposive sample to select my participants, choosing individuals that best fitted the goal of my study and "... are most accessible and conducive to gaining the understanding [I] seek" (Maxwell, 2012, p.94).

I gained access to my participants through the British Council, whom I previously worked for, and they secured permission from the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam for me to conduct my research. This permission was acquired prior to the first phase of data gathering.

A concern I had with planning my case study was how many participants to have. Mason (2002, p.134) suggests that "the key question to ask is whether your sample provides access to enough data, and with the right focus, to enable you to address your research questions". The sub sections below provide a justification for my decisions on the number of participants as well as details of how I selected and gained access to them.

4.5.2 Teachers and district specialists

Primary English language teachers are my main participants since educational change is ultimately about what happens in the classroom. The pilot curriculum implementation programme involves 92 schools and 93 teachers across the whole of Vietnam. In the province I selected as my research site, the pilot programme involves eight primary English language teachers in eight different schools, each in a separate district. Five of the eight districts involved in the pilot are located in urban areas and three are situated in rural areas. My original plan was to select five teachers involved in the pilot curriculum implementation programme from both rural and urban districts in my chosen province. However once I was in the field, the 'messiness' of the implementation of the pilot programme became evident. Although officially there were eight schools and teachers identified in the pilot programme, the pilot phase appeared to have merged with the whole-scale adoption of the new curriculum in other schools in the province. The pilot programme officially ended in May 2013, but a significant number of schools and teachers who were not involved in the pilot programme began implementing the new curriculum and using the new textbooks as early as 2011. I therefore decided to select four 'pilot' districts, which was half the total district population and within each district, select the pilot teacher and another non-pilot teacher from a non-pilot school along with the DS responsible

for primary level English language teaching and learning. I felt that having perspectives from two teachers within each district would provide a richer picture of what was happening in the curriculum change process over the three-year ‘pilot’ period.

The teachers and DSs were selected based on the following criteria:

| District Specialist | Pilot programme teacher | Non-pilot programme teacher |
|--|---|--|
| Works in a district involved in the pilot programme. | Identified by MOET as involved in the initial pilot programme starting in 2010. | Works in an ‘average’ school. |
| | | Has been implementing the new curriculum/using the new textbooks since 2011. |

Table 4.1 Criteria for selecting teachers and DSs

I gained access to the teachers and DSs initially through my intermediary in the British Council who contacted the local provincial Department of Education and Training (DOET) by email and phone providing details of my research in Vietnamese. The English Language Specialist working in the DOET contacted the eight DSs to inform them about my research and to get volunteers. In Vietnam, it is considered acceptable for gatekeepers to give consent on behalf of those working under them. Indeed this was the most efficient way of getting things done in the cultural context of my study because individual teachers were unlikely to consent to participate in the research if I had not sought consent on their behalf from the authorities at school and district level beforehand. This is also true in other parts of Asia (e.g. see Katyal, 2011; Hamid, 2010b; Shamim and Qureshi, 2013). Katyal (2011) reports in her research in Hong Kong of how participants may be ‘directed’ to consent. This was a particular concern I had with recruiting the pilot districts, since there is only one pilot teacher and one DS in each district. This raised questions about the voluntary nature of individuals’ participation, and to mitigate this, I made every effort by email and phone (using the intermediary) to stress to both the DSs and the specialist at DOET level that participation needed to be voluntary.

The recruitment of the districts and DSs was not a smooth process. Initially there were four districts keen to take part. After I had conducted the pilot (see section

4.8), one of the districts withdrew. The DOET suggested that I work with the pilot district as an alternative since no other districts were willing. This was not something I was happy to do since I had already interviewed the DS and one of the teachers. However, it would not have helped the relationships I was building with both the district and DOET if I had refused, so the pilot district also became one of my study districts. Luckily the teacher in my trial was not the pilot programme teacher in that district, so I was able to identify and gain consent from two other suitable teachers. Since there is only one DS I decided to interview her again in Phase 1 in order to address some of the changes I had made to interviews 1 and 2 following the pilot. In total she was interviewed four times (three times in Phase 1, which included the pilot interviews, and once in Phase 2) and I decided that all the interview data would be used for analysis.

At this stage there were four districts (three urban and one rural) who were happy to be involved in my research. However after Phase 1 of data gathering it became clear that the participants in one of the urban districts were not really keen to take part. It was too late to recruit another district, so my embedded case focused on three districts (as previously shown in Figure 2). While this does not give me my initial plan of a 50% sample from the total population, I do not believe that it has affected my data.

Through my intermediary, I contacted the DSs directly by email (in Vietnamese) to provide more details about my research and their involvement and also the kind of teachers I was looking for to help in my research. I was also able to gain access to schools for classroom observations through the DSs who provided written permission letters which were sent to the school principals. The three DSs all gave their consent by email that they were willing to take part in the research.

I had confirmation from the DSs of seven willing teacher participants. One DS identified three teachers and it would have been difficult to insist on only two without creating bad feeling with both district and provincial level DOET. Therefore my final teacher sample consisted of seven teachers from three districts. I contacted these teachers directly by email providing details of my research and their role in it in both English and Vietnamese and emphasising again that they were under no obligation to take part.

Signing a written form is likely to be viewed as a formal and possibly threatening process by some people in Vietnam. This is linked to the socio-political context and the worries that some may have about longer-term implications of signing what

might look like an official form. Normally agreement to participate in a project is done by people telling you that they agree to take part. Although I planned to seek written informed consent for teachers and DSs using consent forms (see Appendix 1 for an example of a consent form for teachers), the participants seemed uncomfortable with signing a form. Taking advice from Katyal's study (2011) in Hong Kong where a similar situation arose, rather than asking the participants to sign consent forms, I gave the form to each participant at the start of the interviews and the details were explained orally, allowing an opportunity for the participants to ask further questions and to confirm their willingness to participate.

4.5.3 University in-service trainers

There are three universities in my chosen province which have been granted permission by the Ministry of Education and Training to be involved in supporting teacher capacity building as part of the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP 2020). These universities have been responsible for delivering 400-hour in-service training (language proficiency and methodology) programmes to primary English language teachers in my research province and also in neighbouring provinces, as well as shorter one or two-day workshops. There are about 30 UTs across the three universities who deliver in-service training to primary English language teachers. While it was not possible to match UTs with specific teachers, the four UTs I selected have worked with teachers in the three districts and therefore will have interacted with the teacher participants through a training relationship. I decided to select four trainers to allow for attrition as I was aware that UTs have many academic commitments which might have meant they were unavailable for the second phase of my data gathering.

Gaining access to the UTs was an easier process than with the teachers and DSs as I was able to make contact directly with the university departments through a university contact I have and get expressions of interest from trainers. Through the university departments, UTs were informed about the nature of my research and their role in it. Five UTs emailed me to confirm their willingness to participate. Three of the UTs came from one university, so with agreement, I selected one of these UTs to help pilot my interview schedules, leaving a more balanced sample across the universities.

Once I had initial confirmation from the UTs, I contacted them directly myself by email giving more details about what participation involved for them and also providing a copy of the consent form. Unlike the other participant groups, the UTs

were willing to sign the consent forms at the start of the first interview, probably because they are familiar with the ethical requirements of research.

I realised once I had identified my key participants that maintaining absolute confidentiality and anonymity would be difficult for two reasons. Firstly, I had to make use of gatekeepers to access them, and secondly there are strong collegial relationships between the groups of participants and others working in the same setting. I acknowledged this at the start of the data gathering process.

I provide detailed profiles of the teachers and their districts in Chapter 5, and of the UTs and DSs in Chapter 6.

4.5.4 Peripheral participants (Others)

It had been over a year since I was last in Vietnam and so I had planned in the first few weeks of Phase 1 of data gathering to obtain up-to-date background information about the research context and case and to rebuild contacts. With the help of my intermediary, I identified key people in the education system who would be able to provide such contextual information. They were contacted by phone and email in Vietnamese and given written details of my research and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also assured that I would, to the best of my ability, maintain confidentiality and anonymity, a sensitive issue for many of them because of their roles and positions within the education system.

I also envisaged that there would be other peripheral roles important for my case that I had not included in the background information gathering stage of my research. I wanted the identity of these participants to emerge from the data I gathered in Interview 2, where I asked participants about relationships and connections with people, things and events in their experience of curriculum change. (See sections 4.7.1.4 and 4.7.1.5 for more details about how these participants fit into the case study). Adopting snowballing sampling in this way by leaving the selection of these participants until the later stages of data gathering allowed for a more open approach to the possibilities emerging from the main participants' responses as I became more immersed in the web of complexity of both the case and my research; an approach Kincheloe (2004) suggests fits well with the unpredictability and complexity of the reality of research contexts. (I discuss the rationale for my methods in greater detail in section 4.7.). These participants were contacted in the same way as the 'background' participants. Some of them were the same people I had identified in Phase 1, and they were willing for me to

conduct a second interview with them. Table 4.2 below provides a profile of the peripheral participants. Since many of these participants have unique roles and could be easily identifiable, I refer to them in general role terms within their department or institution in an attempt to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

| Person | Role | When interviewed |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| Senior official in the primary department of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) | Responsible for the teaching and learning of English in primary schools across the country. Involved in implementing the new curriculum in the pilot schools. | Phase 1 and Phase 2 |
| Senior official in the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP 2020) | Involved in policy design and decision-making in relation to NFLP 2020. | Phase 1 |
| Official in the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP 2020) | Responsible for teacher capacity building for NFLP 2020. | Phase 2 |
| Official in the provincial Department of Education and Training (DOET) | Responsible for the teaching and learning of English in primary schools across the 27 districts in province. | Phase 1 and Phase 2 |
| Official in Vietnam National Institute of Educational Science (VNIES) | Involved in the development of the new curriculum as well as an author of Tieng Anh and a trainer for the new textbooks. | Phase 1 and Phase 2 |
| An author of Tieng Anh textbook | Involved in the writing and design of Tieng Anh and in the training for the textbooks. | Phase 2 |
| An editor of the Tieng Anh textbook 3-5 series | Involved in the editing process of the new textbooks | Phase 2 |
| Manager of in-service training at University B | Responsible for the delivery of all in-service training in University B under the NFLP 2020 | Phase 2 |
| Lecturer from the local teacher training college | Participant in a Trainer Training programme for primary level and involved in a new pre-service programme for primary English language teachers. | Phase 1 |
| Nhung's school principal | Has an overview of all subjects in the school and of the curriculum change. | Phase 2 |
| Chau's vice-principal | Has a monitoring and assessment role of teachers for all subjects. | Phase 2 |

Table 4.2 Profile of peripheral participants

4.6 Ethical Issues

My research design and process was guided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines for ethical conduct (BERA, 2004) and followed as far as possible the code of good ethical practice for research in the Faculty of Social Sciences in the University of Leeds. I obtained approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee on 9 May 2013, before beginning the data generation phases. The main ethical issues in my study related to informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, my position as a researcher and language. I have described how I have addressed the first three issues in the previous sections on participant selection (see 4.5). Section 4.13.3 on data quality discusses my role as a researcher and so in this section I focus on the latter issue of language.

At the start of the research process I was very conscious of my cultural and linguistic ‘outsider’ position in my research. The first language of my research participants is Vietnamese yet my own proficiency in Vietnamese is not at the level to be able to conduct qualitative interviews. I was aware that my methodological approach required participants to reveal, through talk, a considerable amount about themselves and that language plays a key role in the dynamics of such interviews, since the participants would need to be able to elaborate on underlying meanings and descriptions. At the same time, the language of the interviewer, both what she says and how she says it, would have an influence on how much the participants were able to and willing to contribute to the conversation and the degree of mutual understanding that would take place. The choice of language used for interviews was likely therefore to have an influence on the research process. Indeed, I was also aware that, as Hennink (2008, p.21) stresses:

[f]ailure to recognise and acknowledge the role of language and communication issues in cross-cultural research may impact on the rigour and reliability of the research.

This call for a brighter spotlight on language choice in qualitative interviews and how it might affect interview talk has also been made more recently by Mann (2011) and so this section attempts to address this.

All my research participants work in the field of English language education and most have a minimum intermediate/upper intermediate level of English proficiency. However I was aware that primary teachers and some of the peripheral participants

were likely to have lower proficiency levels and may be better able to express themselves in their first language.

The language of access for all participants needed to be Vietnamese which was done through my intermediary and other contacts. All documentation about my research was given to the participants in Vietnamese. However the main participants (teachers, DSs and UTs) also got the same information in English as I felt they would want to see both sets of documents. I conducted the first interview with the 14 key participants in English. The interviews with the two school principals and the official from MOET were conducted with an interpreter (see section 4.7.1.7 for more about interpretation). I wanted to remain flexible and open to language options during the whole research process as I thought that through the continual communication and interaction between the participants and me, their language choices may change. Therefore, the participants were given the opportunity to change the language of interview at each stage of the data generation phase.

Three teachers (Thanh, Chi and Chau) and one DS (Diep) requested that the second interview was conducted with an interpreter and myself, allowing them to use both English and Vietnamese. In the second interview with Thanh from District C, although he had requested an interpreter, he was reluctant to use her and chose to respond in English despite some difficulties. I would have preferred Thanh to use Vietnamese so that I could get possibly richer data and because I had paid for the interpreter's time, but as Richards (2003, p. 139) points out "the ultimate arbiter of what is right and wrong is your own conscience" and I realised that Thanh had a high level of professional pride and did not want to lose face by using Vietnamese. To ask him to use Vietnamese would have 'harmed' him by putting him in a face-threatening situation.

A similar dilemma arose with the group interviews in Phase 2 of the research process. Following Thanh's interview with the interpreter, I thought that other teachers may have chosen to use English in their interviews because they did not want to lose face. I therefore decided to employ an interpreter to help with the group interviews. The participants were informed about this in advance and all agreed, but I sensed through our telephone calls that some of the teachers were a little surprised that there would be an interpreter and so I was aware that I needed to handle the situation sensitively with both the interpreter and teachers. The interpreter worked well with the group of non-pilot teachers and much of this interview was conducted in Vietnamese. However the group of pilot teachers chose to use English

throughout their interview and seemed irritated when the interpreter did occasionally intervene. For these teachers, the threat of losing face was stronger in the group interview setting as they had both me and their peers to consider. Again I chose to 'act in the moment' in an ethical way (Hetherington, 2013) and did not insist on the participants using Vietnamese since I felt it was important that they should not leave "the research situation with greater anxiety or lower levels of self-esteem than they came with" (Cohen et al, 2011, p. 64).

I was conscious that these language issues might compromise the "cross-language trustworthiness" (Squires, 2009, p.285) of the data generated. Prior to commencing this doctoral research, I had conducted a small-scale study which explored the differences in data generated from qualitative interviews conducted with primary English language teachers in L1 (Vietnamese) and L2 (English) (Grassick, 2012). I found that the implications of language choice go beyond differences in linguistic features and it would be over simplistic to assume that interviews conducted in L1 are better able to generate the kind of data required for my case study. What emerged from the data was that, regardless of language choice, what kind of data generated is influenced by the position of the interviewer and whether she may inhibit or encourage talk, something also reported in Katayal and King's (2011) study in Hong Kong.

While I have had to take some contingent ethical actions during the course of my research, my overall ethical aim of not doing harm to my participants has been achieved. Many of the participants commented that they had found the opportunity to give voice to their experiences and opinions very interesting and also valuable in terms of having a chance to use their English and to find out more about the NFLP 2020.

4.7 Data gathering

Case study research normally employs a range of data gathering methods since real-life situations are complex and the phenomenon being studied is usually tangled up in numerous contextual connections (Yin, 2009). Therefore the multiple methods of semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and document analysis, along with my research journal, helped to unravel and understand the complexity of participants' sense-making and curriculum change. Since my research focus is on multiple perspectives of sense-making, my design aimed to generate data from a range of different participants. Yin (2009) and others (e.g. Bryman,

2012; Creswell, 2013; Cohen et al, 2011) point out that multiple data and methods can act as triangulation and a means of helping to ensure trustworthiness. With this in mind, my primary data generation consisted of semi-structured interviews in which I used different interview approaches (based on a similar design used by Gillings de Gonzalez (2009)) to generate different kinds of rich data. I was conscious that my main method of data collection (interviews) can only provide a snapshot of the case at a particular time. However, one of the benefits of having a series of semi-structured interviews over two phases was that I was able to include questions which elicited not only present perspectives of change but also past and future perspectives.

Triangulation does not necessarily mean increased reliability and validity. Fielding and Fielding (1986, cited in Maxwell, 2010) argue against assuming the implicitness of this association, since the different methods used could have similar biases. A limitation of März and Kelchtermans' (2013) research of teachers' complex sense-making was their reliance on self-report methods of questionnaires and interviews. Learning from this, I have balanced the self-report shortcomings of interviews against teacher observations (since teachers are my main participants) and documents.

Data gathering was carried out between October 2013 and April 2014 over a period of four months split into two phases. Table 4.3 shows a timeline of this data collection. I found that having two separate phases in the field allowed me time to start initial analysis of the data after Phase 1, before returning for the follow-up phase. This design also fitted with a complex case study approach as I was able to be more responsive to the uncertainty and complexity of the case and the emergent data. This is similar to what Kincheloe (2004) calls a 'bricolage' approach where the researcher needs to be able to step back and reflect on the data and methods and respond to what emerges while moving deeper into the complexity of both the case and the research itself.

For example, after Phase 1, although I had originally planned to conduct a third *individual* interview with each of the teachers, I felt that I would get a richer perspective if I changed the dynamics to a group interview and used an interpreter. This group setting gave me the opportunity to clarify and verify emergent data with multiple participants and to explore further their collective perceptions of the relationships and connections influencing their experiences.

The rationale and procedure I followed for each method is discussed in the next sections.

| Phase | | Date | Activity |
|-------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 1a | Exploration | 7/10/2013 to 5/11/2013 | Exploration of context Background information interviews (5 peripheral participants) Pilot interviews and observation (1 teacher, 1 District Specialist, 1 trainer) Gaining access and selecting participants Document gathering (curriculum, syllabus, policy documents, textbooks) |
| 1b | Initial data gathering | 5/11/2013 to 18/12/2013 | <i>Experiences and perceptions</i> interviews (7 teachers, 3 District Specialists, 4 trainers) Classroom observation 1 and follow-up interview (7 teachers) <i>Relational mapping</i> interviews (7 teachers, 3 District Specialists, 4 trainers) Classroom observation 2 and follow-up interview (7 teachers) Document gathering (lesson plans, sample tests) Observation of two model lesson events (Districts B and C) Observation of three B2 language proficiency INSET classes Observation of one-day INSET DOET workshop for teachers |
| 2. | Follow-up | 28/3/2014 to 30/4/2014 | Individual interviews (3 District Specialists, 4 trainers) Group interviews (Group A: 3 pilot teachers, Group B: 4 non-pilot teachers) Classroom observation 3 and follow-up interview (7 teachers) Document gathering (lesson plans) Individual interviews with peripheral participants (10) |

Table 4.3 Timeline of data generation

4.7.1 Primary methods: Interviews

The qualitative interview is commonly used to explore insights into people's beliefs, attitudes and lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews (my primary data generation method), as Mason (2002) and Kvale (2007) state, are characterised by: their informality; their topic or theme-based approach; their flexibility and openness to allow for other topics that emerge, new direction, changes in sequence, follow-up questions and probes, and their situated and contextualised co-construction of knowledge and meaning between the interviewer and interviewee. The interview, then, is a special kind of conversation (Richards, 2003), where the interviewer and participant are interacting and collaborating in knowledge and meaning making, creating a rich and full account of the topic. Viewing interview talk as jointly constructed between the interviewer and interviewee (Briggs, 1986; Mischler, 1986; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) means that the interactional context of the interview is likely to shape what each person says (Briggs, 1986). The consideration of interviews as a discursive practice is an issue I discuss further in section 4.13.3 in relation to my own role in the research process.

The semi-structured interviews I used employed different approaches according to the corresponding research questions. I have summarised this in Table 4.4. Samples of the interview schedules can be found in Appendices 2, 3 and 5. A more detailed breakdown of the date of each of the interviews with the key participants is provided in Appendix 6.

| Interview Type | Time | Description | Participants | Phase |
|--|---------------------------|--|---|---------------------|
| 1 Experiences and perceptions interviews | Approx. 1 hour | to explore participants' perceptions of and responses to change | Teachers/DSSs/UTs | Phase 1 |
| 2 Relational mapping interviews | Approx. 1 hour | to explore participants' perceived relationships and connections with people, things and events in the change implementation process | Teachers/DSSs/UTs | Phase 1 |
| 3 Observation-based interviews (3 per teacher) | Approx. 20 mins. | to explore teachers' perceptions of their lesson. | Teachers | Phase 1 and Phase 2 |
| 4 Peripheral interviews | Approx. 1 hour | to explore participants' perceptions of change and their relationships with the other participants and parts of the system | Peripheral participants (mostly identified after interview 2) | Phase 2 |
| 5 Further probing interviews (group and individual) | Approx 1 hour – 1.5 hours | to clarify concepts and perceptions raised in previous interviews | Teachers/DSSs/UTs | Phase 2 |

Table 4.4 Semi-structured interviews

4.7.1.1 Experiences and perceptions interviews

The first interview gathered data about participants' professional selves (as part of sense-making), perceptions of the curriculum change and responses to the change, drawing on ideas from März and Kelchtermans (2013, p.22). Since many of the questions asked were retrospective referring to participants' background and to perceptions at the start of the implementation process, I sent the participants an outline of the topics we would be discussing (in both Vietnamese and English) up to one week before the interview date. Most of the participants came to the first interview with notes (although they tended not to refer to them once the interview started) and I felt that this helped to give the teachers in particular more confidence in using English.

I based the background interviews with peripheral others at the start of Phase 1 on topics from this interview schedule.

4.7.1.2 Relational mapping interviews

In this second interview I used a participatory technique to help engage the participants in reflection and discussion. Participatory mapping is a relatively new approach in the social sciences and is an arts-based stimulus technique which can be an additional method of finding out how people make sense of the world (Hurworth, 2012). Emmel (2008) describes how this technique was used in a Leeds-based project investigating social networks to allow participants to describe and elaborate on the interview topic through drawing and talking. By asking participants to draw and describe the connections they have with others in the educational system I hoped to complement and add to purely verbal reports. The drawings provided the framework for the first part of the interview and in the second part I used a themed schedule to encourage the participants to elaborate on their maps. To allow for thinking time and reflection, I informed the participants in advance by email (in both English and Vietnamese) of the purpose and their role in the interview.

This interview proved to be challenging for both me and the participants and in later sections I discuss the adaptations I made following the pilot and my experience of the interview process.

4.7.1.3 Observation interviews

This interview (with teachers only) followed up the observations (see section 4.7.2 for more about observations), and were conducted as soon after the observations as possible. Two interviews for each teacher were done in Phase 1 and one interview in Phase 2. There was no fixed schedule for these interviews as I wanted to see what emerged from the observations and base the questions on that. The interviews involved the teachers talking about why they had chosen particular learning activities, their perceptions of their learners and their own role in the teaching-learning process. The majority of these interviews happened in the teachers' classrooms or in the school staffroom. This was not possible with two teachers for the first observation and we agreed to have the post-observation discussion at the start of Interview 2.

4.7.1.4 Peripheral participant interviews

This interview involved the 10 peripheral participants. These participants were identified from the Relational Mapping interviews with the key participants. To do this, I started with the teacher interviews and identified possible participants and

then cross-checked with the DSs and UTs to see if there was any overlap. This meant that there were multiple professional connections between the 10 peripheral participants and the three participant groups. Table 4.5 below shows these connections.

| Peripheral participant | Connection with teachers | Connection with DSs | Connection with UTs |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Senior official in the primary department of MOET | X | X | |
| Official in the NFLP 2020 | | | X |
| Official in DOET | X | X | X |
| Official in VNIES | X | X | |
| An author of Tieng Anh textbook | X | X | |
| An editor of the Tieng Anh textbook 3-5 series | X | | |
| Manager of in-service training at University B | | | X |
| School principal District A | X | X | |
| Vice principal District C | X | X | |

Table 4.5. Professional connections between Case A and Case B participants

The schedule for this interview combined questions about perceptions of change from Interview 1 along with more specific questions based on my initial analysis of Interviews 1 and 2; themes that I also included in Interview 5 with the key participants.

The interviews with the peripheral participants working within departments and levels of MOET were challenging as these participants had their own agenda about the change process and it was often difficult to get beyond factual reports of implementation. However I tried as much as possible to elicit perceptions of change. I realised in writing up my notes after these interviews that a lot of what was not said, either through omission or by the participant declining to comment, was significant.

The peripheral participants did not agree to be recorded. For these interviews I made notes while we talked and then immediately afterwards reviewed them. I wrote up more detailed interview records later the same day while the meeting was

still fresh in my mind. The interviews with the school principal, vice-principals and the MOET official were conducted with interpretation.

4.7.1.5 Follow-up interviews

A follow-up interview was conducted with the key participants in Phase 2 after initial data analysis. This allowed me to develop an interview schedule based on emergent ideas from initial analysis of the interviews conducted in Phase 1. These themes related to the tensions and disharmonies in the implementation process: perceptions of who needs to change and how; perceptions of teaching and learning, and perceptions of support in the implementation process. (These themes were later refined after further analysis – see section 4.12). In the follow-up interviews, I wanted to delve deeper into these emerging ideas by asking the participants more directly about possible contradictions and tensions in the implementation process. Although my focus was to gather data in relation to my third research question, there was some overlap with topics in Interview 1 and 2. However I did not see this as a problem as it gave participants an opportunity to restate and confirm perceptions and experiences and for me to gain richer insights into the change process.

It had been a few months since I had last seen the participants and so the interviews began with a short informal chat. I also went orally through the consent form again to confirm participation and restate issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants all agreed for this follow-up interview to be digitally recorded.

I designed a guide for this interview to help me focus on key themes and I informed the participants that I wanted to talk with them about some of the themes that were emerging from the data. The interviews with the DSs and UTs were conducted individually. I decided that the interviews with the teachers should be done in two groups of pilot and non-pilot teachers using an interpreter to facilitate in L1. I describe the rationale for this below.

4.7.1.6 Follow-up group interviews

I chose to use group interviews at this stage of data gathering rather than my initially planned individual interviews. There seems to be little distinction in the literature between the methods of 'focus groups' and 'group interviews' (Bryman, 2012). My preference for using the term *group interviews* is because it suggests an interactive conversation, which is in keeping with the notion of interviews as a co-construction

of knowledge and meanings mentioned, as previously in section 4.7.1. My rationale for deciding to conduct group interviews is given below:

- I wanted to give the participants an opportunity to discuss topics in L1 which I hoped will allow them to elaborate and delve deeper than they would be able to do in L2.
- I had limited time in the field and limited money available for interpretation and translation costs (assuming that these costs would be higher with individual interviews).
- I saw the opportunity for a group interview to generate several perceptions of an issue or versions of an event which could provide a cross-check (Arksey and Knight, 1999). I saw this as particularly useful as a follow-up to data gathered in L2 in Phase 1, since some of the themes in Phase 2 will overlap with topics from Phase 1 interviews.
- I would have the opportunity to triangulate some of the initial data by exploring the extent to which individual teachers' perceptions gathered from data in Phase 1 are applicable to a group and discover insights into the complexities of their perceptions and attitudes. In this sense, as Watts and Ebbutt (1987) point out, a group interview is more than the sum of separate individual interviews because participants in a group interview will question each other and explain themselves to each other. It is this "group effect" (Carey, 1994) that is likely to provide valuable data through interaction.

One weakness of using group interviews is that views offered by participants may only be those deemed socially acceptable rather than more candid, personal response (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This is something I was aware of in my study where individuals can be reticent to speak out in front of others for fear of losing face or offering a response deemed too critical of the political system, producing what Cohen et al (2011) refer to as 'group think' and any instances that arose I noted down in my Research Journal and also discussed with the interpreter to help get a closer cultural understanding. This was my rationale for not conducting group interviews with the trainers and district specialists as they were likely to be more conscious of being 'critical' in front of each other than the teachers.

The group interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. I designed an interview guide (similar to the individual Interview 3) to help me focus on key themes. I did not prepare a list of topics for the participants before the interviews this time. The interviews were conducted in a classroom in the British Council. This was the best location for all the teachers to be able to travel to easily and it also ensured that I would have a quiet space for interpretation and audio-recording. There were two group interviews: Group A was with the three pilot school teachers, and Group B consisted of the four teachers from non-pilot school. I felt that small groups would work better than having one group of seven teachers as the participants would have more opportunity to talk and perhaps feel more comfortable. There were also differences in experience of curriculum implementation between the two groups which I could explore further in these groupings. What I found interesting in the group interview process were the issues which led to lengthy debates (e.g. training support) and how, in this dialogic approach, the teachers were on several occasions surprised at the experiences of their peers, either because they had unexpectedly similar experiences or because they were quite different.

There were some language issues that arose during the group interviews which I have discussed previously in section 4.6.

4.7.1.7 Interpretation

The following interviews, shown in Table 4.6, were conducted through an interpreter as agreed by the participants.

| Interview | Participant | District |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Relational Mapping | District Specialist (Diep) | B |
| | Teacher (Chi) | |
| | Teacher (Chau) | C |
| | Teacher (Thanh) | |
| Group interview | Non-pilot programme teachers | A,B,C |
| Others interview | School principal | A |
| | School vice-principal | C |
| | MOET official | n/a |

Table 4.6 Interviews carried out with interpretation

I found a suitable interpreter through one of my university contacts. She was a trained English interpreter and translator and had worked with various international organisations involved in education. Before returning to District B for the second round of interviews, I met the interpreter to discuss how we would approach the interview. I stressed the importance of transparency and the need to give verbatim accounts of the conversation. We agreed that we would both take notes during the interview and then compare them afterwards to see if there was anything in what the teacher said and in her behaviour that we might have missed. The interpreter also translated the interview, a process I describe in section 4.12.3.

My interpreter acted as a 'cultural broker' (Hennink, 2008) by providing perspectives and insights into Vietnamese society. For example she told me about current feelings expressed in the media regarding the NFLP 2020, and at a more micro level, why a participant seemed to react in a certain way to a question or idea. We spent a lot of time travelling together in taxis from one interview location to another and these turned out to be the most suitable spaces for conducting many of our post interview discussions. The interpreter also transcribed the interviews into L1 and then translated these transcripts into English. I was concerned that the confidentiality of the data might be at risk with the interpreter being involved in the interviews and having access to the transcripts. In an attempt to address this, I emphasised in our initial meeting that in agreeing to take on her role, she was also consenting to the ethical codes of anonymity and confidentiality of data.

Having an interpreter in the interview added another potential power dimension to the situation. However it helped that the interpreter was not known to the participants and did not appear to exude authority. The meetings prior to the interviews were an opportunity for us to discuss possible issues of power and how we were to behave in the interview.

4.7.2 Secondary data: Observations

Observation is often used alongside interviews in case study because it can provide live, first-hand information about social interactions or events in a natural setting such as a classroom (Simpson and Tuson, 2003; Simons, 2009), allowing for a more holistic interpretation of the research phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Simons (2009, p.55) identifies five strengths of using observation in case study research, which I mention below in relation to my own study:

- Observations enabled me to get a holistic and contextualised picture of curriculum change and teachers' sense-making, which might not have been possible through interviews alone.
- They provided additional rich description for further analysis and interpretation.
- They helped me to discover underlying beliefs, norms and values of teachers since often what teachers revealed in an interview was not necessarily what they actually did in the classroom. Trying to gain an understanding of and experiencing what teachers believe and do is an important part of understanding their professional selves in the sense-making process.
- Observation was also a means of cross-checking data and a way of strengthening the trustworthiness of my study. The data gathered provided the stimulus and background information for the proceeding interviews.

Each teacher was observed on three separate occasions, twice in Phase 1 and once in Phase 2, as shown in Table 4.7.

| Teacher | Lesson observation | Class | Number of students | Date |
|----------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|------------|
| T1 Mai | 1 | Grade 4 | 62 | 03/12/2013 |
| | 2 | Grade 5 | 61 | 06/12/2013 |
| | 3 | Grade 5 | 65 | 11/04/2014 |
| T2 Bao | 1 | Grade 4 | 44 | 28/11/2013 |
| | 2 | Grade 5 | 45 | 29/11/2013 |
| | 3 | Grade 5 | 37 | 10/04/2014 |
| T3 Nhung | 1 | Grade 4 | 65 | 18/12/2013 |
| | 2 | Grade 4 | 66 | 11/04/2014 |
| T4 Lien | 1 | Grade 4 | 48 | 05/11/2013 |
| | 2 | Grade 3 | 32 | 07/11/2013 |
| | 3 | Grade 3 | 45 | 15/04/2014 |
| T5 Chi | 1 | Grade 3 | 32 | 12/11/2013 |
| | 2 | Grade 4 | 36 | 13/11/2013 |
| | 3 | Grade 4 | 36 | 15/04/2014 |
| T6 Thanh | 1 | Grade 4 | 50 | 05/12/2013 |
| | 2 | Grade 3 | 50 | 10/12/2013 |
| | 3 | Grade 5 | 52 | 10/04/2014 |
| T7 Chau | 1 | Grade 4 | 50 | 03/12/2013 |
| | 2 | Grade 3 | 52 | 04/12/2013 |
| | 3 | Grade 3 | 52 | 14/04/2014 |

Table 4.7 Lesson observation schedule map

I used a form of semi-structured classroom observation with broad themes or guidelines focus on classroom activities and teacher-student interaction (since the new approach in curriculum requires changes in these) to help focus me, but which still allowed for any unexpected behaviours or events that may occur. This meant that I went to the observation with a kind of checklist of topics to help me focus, but also an open mind and blank notebook which allowed me to be responsive to what was happening in particular classes. See Appendix 4 for the observation schedule.

Each observation lasted 35 minutes, which is the length of an English language period in primary schools. The choice of grade (3-5) was decided by the teacher. The observations were not video-recorded since from my experience of conducting observations previously in primary schools in Vietnam, cameras can be intrusive

and lead to unnatural display lessons and behaviour, similar to the ‘Hawthorne effect’ described by Gass and Mackey (2004, p.171). In my initial research planning, I had considered using audio-recordings of the lessons as a way of backing up my observation notes. However my memories of classrooms in Vietnam were that they are large and noisy with competing sounds from the students, playground and street life. I decided that it was unlikely that a small voice recorder would be able to pick up much that was audible in such a setting, and my memories were confirmed when I returned to Vietnam for Phase 1 of the data gathering.

As well as classroom observations, I also observed the following:

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------|
| Three B2 language proficiency classes as part of an INSET programme. | University B | Phase 1 |
| Two model lessons and the feedback discussions that followed. | District B and District C | Phase 1 |
| One-day workshop for teachers as part of the DOET provision for the NFLP 2020. | Provincial level | Phase 1 |

Table 4.8. Non-classroom observations

The observations set out in Table 4.8 were not planned, but were opportunities that came up during time in the field, and as I developed relationships with the peripheral participants in Phase 1. While observing these events, I took notes on what was happening and later reflected on what I had seen and heard in my Research Journal, in an attempt to make initial links with the interview data. I was formally invited to these events and observed along with up to 20 others and so gaining consent from the teachers involved would have been inappropriate. Indeed when I enquired about trying to do this, my request was perceived by the officials concerned as “superfluous steps” (Katy, 2011, p. 151).

4.7.3 Secondary methods: Documents

The use of documents had helped me to triangulate the observed and self-report data. Simons (2009, p. 63) comments that documents can be used to help gain a better understanding of the culture of an organization, the values underlying policies

and also the beliefs and attitudes of a writer. At the start of Phase 1 I obtained through my intermediary policy documents related to the NFLP 2020 and the new primary English language curriculum. The majority of these were in Vietnamese which I got translated. The translations were then checked for accuracy by a local contact (see section 4.12.3 for more about the translation process). These documents helped me to explore the case and provided a historical background for the initial interviews with the peripheral participants. In Phase 1 I also obtained the Tieng Anh series of textbooks which my participants were using. The teachers agreed to provide me with a lesson plan for their observed lessons and some teachers also gave me copies of mid-term tests they had designed for their classes that semester. I informed them that, like their interview talk, I would do my utmost to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality surrounding the lesson plans and tests.

4.8 Piloting the interview and observation schedules

The pilot was carried out in Vietnam from 23 October – 1 November 2013 at the beginning of Phase 1 of data gathering. It involved conducting Interview 1 and 2 with a primary teacher, DS and UT, and observing one of the teacher's classes with a follow-up interview. My aim in conducting a pilot was to assess the suitability of the interview tasks in relation to my research questions and to consider which questions might be "ambiguous, confusing or insensible" (Wellington, 2000, p 78).

The UT was one of the participants who was recommended by my university contact to be a research participant. I chose her to be a pilot participant because she was the least involved in the 2020 project training to primary teachers and so I wanted to 'save' the other trainers for the main study. I emailed her directly explaining my research and her role. I sent her the research information sheet in English and Vietnamese. She gave her agreement by email.

At the beginning stages of my field visit, it was a considerable challenge to work with DOET to select the main participants for my study. I thought that to ask them to select a teacher and DS for a pilot would confuse matters and make them feel that they had extra administration work to do. I therefore decided to contact a teacher known to me and who is using the new curriculum and textbooks. I emailed her directly explaining my research and her involvement and she was very happy to agree to take part. I sent her the research information sheet in Vietnamese. Through my intermediary, I then contacted the teacher's DS explaining the research and what the involvement of the teacher/school and the DS herself was. I got agreement

by email. An official letter from the DS was then sent to the teacher's school to allow me to observe a class.

The interviews 1 and 2 were conducted two or three days apart with each of the participants. The interviews with the teacher and trainer were held at the British Council. This was their choice as they were unable to find quiet rooms in their work places. However I met the DS in her office.

At the end of each interview I discussed with the participant how they felt about the interview, the questions asked and the use of English. The pilot was a valuable process as it afforded me participants' perspectives through their feedback and suggestions, and it allowed me to reflect on my data gathering methods and tools and to reconsider both the tasks themselves and the procedures.

Interview 1 went well with all participants. The topics and questions were relevant to the participants and they were able to talk at length. The interviews all lasted about one hour. The observation schedule was relatively easy to follow and the criteria I had selected to focus on fitted well with what was happening in the classroom.

Table 4.9 below highlights some of the concerns that the pilot raised and how I dealt with them.

| Reflections | Changes to my interview strategy and tools |
|---|--|
| When listening to the interviews again I noticed that there were times I did not probe enough, possibly because I was too focused on moving on to the next theme. | I ensured I was familiar with the schedules so I didn't need to keep referring to it. I tried to take a step back in the interviews and let the talk emerge and listen to the participants. |
| All the participants were willing to conduct the interviews in English and I did not find language to be any hindrance in data gathering. | Although language did not seem to be a problem in the pilot, I still felt it I needed to ensure participants were given the choice of language before each interview for ethical reasons. |
| Sometimes the discussions seemed slightly abstract without confirmation of common understanding of what 'thing' we were talking about. | I decided to bring documents to the interviews such as curriculum, textbooks to help discussion and recall of experiences related to them. This worked well. |
| All three participants found Interview 2 confusing and commented after the interview that they had not fully understood the task. This seemed to be because they wanted to focus not just on people in their professional world, but also things. | I redesigned the schedule to make it more explicit that relationships could be with people, things and/or events. The final schedule is included in the appendix. |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>It was difficult to get the participants to talk about their feelings about their relationships with others and with particular events. When I talked to them about this they commented that it was not something they had considered before and felt that they needed more guidance.</p> | <p>In discussion with the participants, I decided to prepare 'emotional prompt cards' to help elicit responses in the Relational Mapping interview. I chose <i>anxiety</i>, <i>confidence</i> and <i>isolation</i>. These are feelings that teachers from other contexts (e.g. see Marshak, 1996) have expressed and so might also have relevance to my case participants. A danger of using such prompts is that it might lead participants in a particular direction. However I found that participants did not always feel the need to respond to all the cards and there were some interviews where I did not need them as the participants willingly revealed how they felt about the relationships they had mapped.</p> |
| <p>All the participants were keen to draw relational maps and they were detailed.</p> | <p>This turned out not to be so with my case participants, which I go on to discuss in section 4.9.</p> |
| <p>The classroom observation was a Grade 3 class, a 35-minute lesson with 60 students. Although the teacher insisted that it was not a rehearsed lesson, it did appear to be more of a performance and the students seemed to know what was going to happen next.</p> | <p>My initial plan of conducting two observations was probably not enough to build a relationship of trust with the teachers to ensure that I got to see 'normal' lessons. I decided to observe each teacher three times. As I discuss in section 4.10, this worked well.</p> |

Table 4.9. Reflections on the pilot process and changes made

Although I piloted my interview and observation schedules at the start of the field work, the process of piloting was ongoing throughout the data gathering in the sense that in each interview I was able to learn more about both my interview skills and the participants. I discuss this further in the next section.

4.9 The interview process

The location of the interviews was the interviewees' choice since as Herzog (2012: 210) argues, "the location of the interview is not just a logistical tool but rather constitutes an integral part of the interview". For the teachers, most of the interviews took place in the British Council office where I was given access to a meeting room. While this location might have heightened my position of power, I felt that it was less so than having the interviews in their schools where I was treated as someone special and where the interview was likely to be observed by others as an opportunity for them to hear and practise English. For the other participants, the

interviews happened in their workplaces which helped the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed.

I had prepared loose interview guides for each of the interviews to help the interview flow in the direction of my research topic and questions. These schedules were adapted slightly to fit the different participant groups. However I also kept the interviews open and was responsive to the participants' responses and ideas, not always following my questions in sequence and sometimes choosing to insert others as the need arose. This meant there were times when I stuck closely to the interview schedule, other times when the schedule was more of a rough check list, and some points in interviews when I was led by the participant in an unexpected direction.

I was careful to ask for clarification during the interviews to avoid making assumptions based on my own biases. I also summarised or paraphrased parts of the conversation so that the participants could confirm whether I had understood their comments. I allowed for pauses, particularly with the teachers who were on occasions struggling to find ways to express themselves in English. As the data gathering progressed, both I and the participants became more comfortable with the process and more trusting of each other. I was able to develop my interview techniques by listening to the recordings and noting when I seemed to be leading the participants or where I needed to encourage them to expand on their responses. The participants' follow-up interview in Phase 2 produced longer turns, with the participants talking at ease with fewer interruptions from me.

Although the relational maps in Interview 2 in the pilot had worked well, in the actual process of data gathering with my participants, the relational maps were not as significant a feature as I had hoped. The teachers seemed to feel that they needed to produce a work of art which caused them some anxiety, contrary to my original rationale for using the mapping exercise. The majority of them drew only a couple of connections and then reverted to oral description. The relational map seemed to work best with the UTs and they produced fairly detailed illustrations of their interactions and relationships. Many of them mentioned that they had had to do something similar in training workshops so they were probably more familiar with the exercise than the other participant groups. However, although some participants did not produce full relational maps, they were able to give detailed oral accounts, so I feel the lack of visual data did not impede data gathering and still enabled me to get a rich picture of the connections and relationships of the case.

4.10 The observation process

I was aware that observation is only a snapshot of reality. One of the dangers may be that events and interaction within a classroom are viewed as isolated phenomena and interpreted through the observer's own beliefs and values (Usher, 1996; Walker and Adelman, 1993). To help mitigate this I conducted three observations. I had originally planned to do only two, however once in the field I realised the importance of building rapport and trust with the teachers and felt a third observation and school visit would help me to ensure that my interpretations of the observation data were to some extent co-constructed with those of the teachers', keeping my own subjectivity and biases in balance. The third observation in Phase 2 was, in many ways, significant for my data. By Phase 2 the teachers developed sufficient trust and ease with the observations to show me what they normally do in a lesson, rather than an ideal lesson, which had been the case in some of the previous observations. However even by Phase 2 I was still regarded as a special visitor to the teachers' schools and to show respect to me other observers in the lessons usually included the other English teacher, the vice-principal and sometimes the class teacher. The teachers and students seemed to be used to multiple observers and our presence in the classroom did not seem to disrupt them.

There was a lot to take in during the observations in terms of what I could see, hear and sense, and I found this the most challenging of my data methods. The classrooms were crowded and noisy and at times it was difficult to hear the teacher and students. I recorded these contextual features of the classroom in my Research Journal to refer to later.

4.11 Research Journal

Throughout the data generation and analysis process I made notes in my research journal. These included descriptive comments of the setting for interviews and observations and the behaviour of the participants (as well as my own). I also noted down my reflections and comments on the data I was gathering after each interview, observation or meeting and between research phases. These notes were an important reflective approach to my research as well as a means of keeping my biases and subjectivity in check during data generation. Gillings de Gonzalez (2009) reports how her personal log helped in the analysis stage of her research. This was

also true for me. During analysis I referred to specific entries that related to conversations with the participants, my feelings during the research process, my relationship with the participants and my initial perceptions and thoughts about emerging themes and issues that were emerging from the data.

4.12 Data analysis

Making sense of data involves analytical procedures such as coding and categorizing, and generating themes to help establish connections and patterns. It also requires interpretation, where the researcher gains more intuitive and holistic understandings and insights from the data and is sensitive to the unpredictability of what emerges from the data (Simons, 2009). Simons (2009) advocates a holistic approach where the researcher starts with the whole, breaks it into parts, and then repeatedly goes back to the whole. This is similar to thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013). A holistic thematic approach fits with a complexity perspective since the whole is more than simply the sum of all the parts. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) suggest that within a complexity perspective data needs to be analysed from multiple perspectives. Therefore I used several approaches (within thematic analysis) to explore my data which included open coding and theoretically-driven coding. I also compared codes and emerging themes across participants, participant groups and districts, as well as across data sets. This section gives an account of the process of coding and thematic analysis I undertook.

4.12.1 Familiarisation with the data

Initial data analysis started during data gathering in Phase 1. I was keen to get an overall feel for my data as soon as possible, to become immersed in it (Wellington, 2000). I began analysis by listening to the recorded interviews several times. Once I had transcribed the interviews I read and re-read the data making notes in my research journal as well as on the interview transcripts. At this stage I found it useful to summarise the interviews for each participant and to reflect on what they were saying in relation to the wider context. Categories began to emerge from this initial manual process which fed into Phase 2 of my data gathering. I followed the same initial procedure for interview data gathered during Phase 2.

4.12.2 Transcription procedures and decisions

Transcription “facilitates the close attention and interpretative thinking that is needed to make sense of the data” (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999, p.82) and so the process of

transcribing was an important part of the initial stage of my data analysis. After listening to the interviews, I decided that I needed to transcribe them from the beginning to the end as there was little redundant talk in them. This also included transcriptions of interviewer talk in recognition that the interviews were co-constructs rather than 'reports' of participants' experiences and that extracts from transcripts "should always be presented in the context in which they occurred" (Rapley, 2001, p.319). Therefore the surrounding interviewer talk was an important part of understanding the interactional context of the interviews.

Following Hammersley (2010), my approach to transcription attempted to make sense of both the words and their meaning. For example, I highlighted long pauses because they were likely to represent the speaker's attitude, whether they might be certain or less sure about particular topics or information they were talking about. For the same reason, I also included emotional signals such as laughs and exclamations. I was keen to keep to 'strict transcription' and avoid the dangers that any alteration of the data might have on the quality of the research (Poland, 1995), and so I included features such as repetitions, stammers and false starts. Although the focus of my study is not on language, I felt that maintaining these features added to the individuality of each of the participants and helped me to place them in context when I was rereading the transcripts in a different time and space. I decided, however, to omit such performance features from the extracts chosen for write-up because I was conscious that many of my participants lacked confidence about their English language skills and to have their 'mistakes' written down and made public, even though anonymised, might lead to a loss of face and may cause unnecessary harm. For this reason the transcripts I sent to the participants for verification (see section 4.12.2) were edited and the quotations used in chapters 5 and 6 come from these edited transcripts (since some of the participants also requested to read a copy of completed research). Similar transcription concerns and strategies are reported by Corden and Sainsbury (2006) in their use of participants' verbatim quotations.

There are numerous transcription codes suggested in the literature. I found Richards (2003) provided a code which seemed to best suit my approach to transcribing, described above. An adapted version is provided in Appendix 7.

I started transcribing the interviews while I was gathering data in Phase 1. Between November 2013 and March 2014, full transcription and initial analysis was carried out for Phase 1 interviews. The transcription and initial analysis of Phase 2 data

happened between April and June 2014. The interviews were transcribed onto a word document and after the initial analysis were then uploaded into my NVivo project.

4.12.3 Translation

As I mentioned in section 4.7.1.7, there were eight occasions when an interview or meeting was conducted in L1 with an interpreter. The interviews that were audio-recorded were transcribed into Vietnamese by the interpreter and then translated into English. I decided on this double process because I wanted to have L1 transcriptions which I could then get checked by someone else against the recordings and who would also be able to compare the translated transcript with the original one in Vietnamese. Before starting to transcribe, I met with the interpreter to go through the transcription conventions and to agree a format for the documents. Translating L1 transcripts into L2 using a direct translation approach was likely to create difficulties in keeping original meanings, nuances and subtleties. I agreed with the translator that she would adopt a more meanings-based approach which would take into account the local and cultural context, an approach advocated by many researchers (e.g. Eckhardt, 2004; Marschan-Piekkari et al, 2004; Temple and Young, 2004). Once the transcriptions and translations were finished and I had had a chance to read through them, I met the interpreter again to discuss any parts I was unclear about. This was a relatively smooth process since the interpreter was an experienced professional at both interpretation and translation. All the translated transcripts were checked against the L1 originals by one of my contacts at a local university. However I was aware that translation is a complex process and as Hennink (2008, p.26) points out, translators are “active producers of knowledge who add an additional layer of subjective understanding to the data”, something I have tried to deal with through the discussions about the transcripts with the translator.

The meetings with the school principals and MOET official were translated into English directly from the notes taken by the interpreter during the meetings. We agreed that there was no need to have a copy of the notes in Vietnamese.

The official documents that were part of my data collection had to be translated into English. My interpreter was unable to do these as she had a busy workload, so I recruited another translator recommended to me by a contact. The documents were lengthy and it was difficult to ask a busy contact to verify the L1-L2 translations. However the parts of the documents I coded in NVivo were checked by one of my contacts in Vietnam against the L1 originals to ensure reliability.

I was aware that the confidentiality of the data may be at risk with the L1 interviewer and translator having access to the transcripts. To lessen this risk, I clearly stated by email that in agreeing to take on their roles, they were also consenting to the ethical codes of the anonymity and confidentiality of data. They both confirmed their agreement by email.

4.12.4 Generating codes and themes

Once I felt that I was sufficiently immersed in my data, I moved onto coding which I did using NVivo 10 software. Each of my data sets (interviews, observations, meeting notes with others, documents) was organised in separate files in NVivo. The interviews were then sub-divided into file groups of teachers, trainers and district specialists. I began with the primary data (interviews) from the teachers, district specialists and trainers and taking individuals in each group in turn, attached descriptive codes to extracts of data which were interesting in relation to my research topic. This can be seen in Table 4.10 below which gives some example data extracts from different teacher interviews and the codes I assigned them.

| | Extract | Coding |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | T: Of course I er we can't do everything only er the main contents so for example this part you can miss out. L: So that's the 'Talk'? T: Because they talk at home. You only teach them part 1, 2 and 3. | Omission of communicative tasks |
| 2 | T: er the new textbooks were published for students to learn four periods each week, but er (.) er in our district the manager of our DOET give the timetable for each school only two periods but in fact I wonder a lot because it's er it's only two periods is not enough time for students and for teacher to teach all the contents of the textbooks especially Grade 5, the contents is very complicated and very long and the number of new words are very big. | Concerns about reduced syllabus time |
| 3 | L: Do you have any friends using this book? T: No, only me (.) only me teach this book. | Isolation |
| 4 | T3: It depends on trainers. Trainers are very important. Who is the trainer? Who is the trainee? I think it's really important. T7: Those who trained us {T3: The trainers are important ones} only teach adult learners so they have nothing to teach us. | Trainers' knowledge and experience |

Table 4.10 Example coding of data extracts

The coded extracts included sentences, longer paragraphs and interviewer/interviewee interaction. I took an open coding approach at this stage, allowing the data to lead me to codes. Although my coding approach at this stage was data-driven and semantic based, I was also looking for patterns of similarity and difference in the participants' experiences and their interactions with others in the implementation process. I had a rough idea of a coding scheme gleaned during my initial familiarisation with the data which influenced this open-coding process. As codes emerged, I noted down my interpretations and thoughts in memos linked to the data in NVivo. I then repeated this process of analysis for the other data sets. There were times when I was aware that the process of coding had become a bit mechanical and I had to take a step back and look beyond description to the meaning of the data. I found Braun and Clarke's (2013, p. 205) advice useful, where they suggest that the researcher continually interrogates the data with questions which refer to what is happening, why something is happening in one way and not another way, what this tells us, and what kind of world is revealed through the participants' accounts.

I then searched for codes across the data sets which could be collapsed into parent nodes. Figure 4.2 shows how I assigned child nodes to the category of 'support for teachers'.

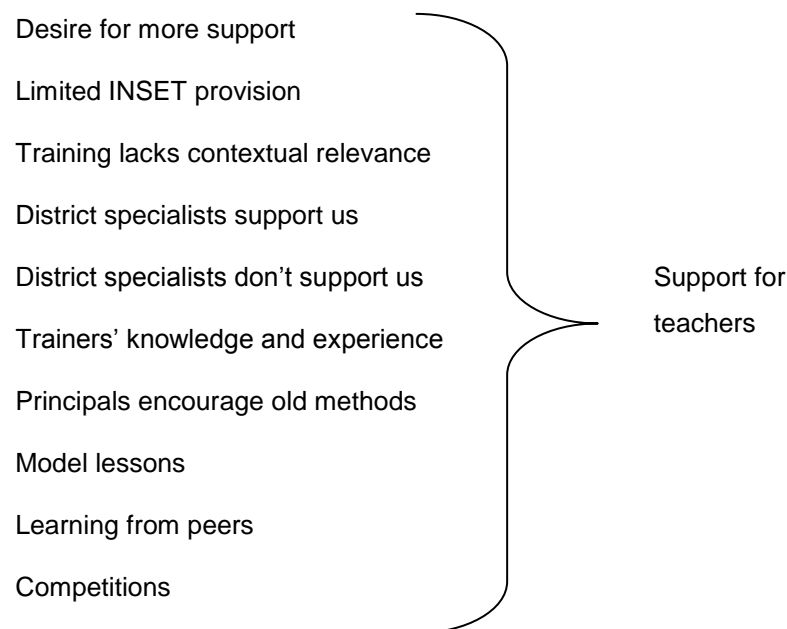


Figure 4.2 An example of a parent node

These codes were reviewed and refined many times. Not all the categories and sub-categories were related to all the participants or cases and I carried out cross-case analysis at this stage and in subsequent stages to see how applicable categories and higher-level themes were to the different participants and participant groups.

Once I had developed parent nodes, I continued to look within and across data sets and reflect on the literature to get a sense of how the codes fitted into the wider context of my case, the research questions and my complexity framework. Table 4.11 on the next page shows the final categories, sub-categories and themes that derived from the data.

| Sub-categories | Categories | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Perceptions of change Perceptions of the effort that change requires Understandings of 'communicativeness' Enacting 'communicativeness' Enacting support for teachers | Making sense of the new curriculum | Emergence: a paradigm shuffle Control parameter 1: Curriculum change as a cultural change Control parameter 2: Perceptions of risk Control parameter 3: Feeling supported Control parameter 4: Communication flow |
| Teachers' professional self The perceived role of teachers The perceived role of DSs The perceived role of UTs | Influences on sense-making 1: Perceptions of the roles in the change process | |
| Time and a centralized curriculum Time and ad hoc planning Time and roles Time and the challenge of change | Influences on sense-making 2: Issues of time | |
| Congruence with curriculum aims Student assessment Support materials | Influences on sense-making 3: Curriculum materials | |
| Support for teachers Support for DSs and UTs Perceptions of the need for support | Influences on sense-making 4: Initial support | |
| Information flow Feedback loops Shared learning A sense of isolation Spaces of possibility | Influences on sense-making 5: Relationships and communication | |

Table 4.11 An analysis map of categories and themes

Holliday (2007) points out that the fine-tuning of analysis continues into the writing up of the study, and this was certainly my experience. Initially, I found it quite a

struggle to present the data in a way that the reader would get a sense of the layered complexities of the story of curriculum change and I felt I needed to change and re-arrange some of the sections in Chapters 5 and 6 several times. This process of reflection and re-reading of data and the draft chapters helped to give me further analytical insights into the multi-dimensional issues involved in the participants' sense-making, and it is likely that this process will continue as I write up work for publication.

4.12.5 A note on observation data analysis

While classroom observations were not the primary source of data in this study, they did constitute a significant amount of secondary data, with 20 lessons observed. My approach to conducting the observations was holistic in that my aim was to be an observer in what was happening in the classroom. In keeping with this approach, the analysis of the observations also took a whole lesson perspective, since, as Alexander (2000, p.296) points out, if an aspect of teaching or learning is to be fully understood it has to be interpreted in the context of what happens before and after it. To do this I transformed the observation notes I had made into narratives (one for each observation) which described what the teacher and students were doing at each stage of the lesson. The process of writing up the notes enabled me to become familiar with the data and begin the analysis process. There was a risk that this writing up process might result in my account of the lesson moving away from what I had observed towards my own interpretation. However I was aware of this and consciously used my notes to complete the narrative. At the same time, I felt that by reviewing my observation notes I was actually able to add to the reality of what I had seen since the physical reading and writing process aided my memory and I was able to annotate my notes with contextual features, events and behaviours that I had missed while taking notes.

The narratives were uploaded onto NVivo to be coded. My approach to the analysis was, like with the interviews and other data sets, data-driven, but with, at the back of my mind, the overarching question of what sense the teachers seemed to be making of the new curriculum in relation to their teaching practices and behaviours. Categories emerged which were reviewed and refined across other observations and with the other data, particularly the post-observation interviews. These were: lesson structure; importance of oral accuracy; classroom interaction; the role of repetition; the role of the teacher, and using a young learner approach.

4.13 Trustworthiness

As Merriam (2009) notes, for research studies to have any effect on practice or theory in the particular field, they need to be conducted with rigour. A rigorous study presents “insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners and other researchers” (Merriam, 2009, p.210). To achieve this, the reader needs to feel confident in the findings and in the researcher’s competence and to be assured that the study has been carried out ethically. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to these methodological and ethical criteria as credibility and reliability, and these two concepts are an integral part of their notion of ‘trustworthiness’. Section 4.6 discussed the main ethical issues I encountered in the research process and how I dealt with them, and aspects of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality have been clearly set out in previous sections on data gathering. Therefore this section describes the strategies I undertook throughout the research process to ensure the trustworthiness of the study in terms of the credibility and reliability of the findings.

4.13.1 Credibility

As a way of ensuring that the reader would ‘believe’ the findings and insights I propose in the final chapters of this study, I employed triangulation of methods, data and participants, as I mentioned in section 4.7. The complex triangulation of different types of interviews coupled with observations, relevant documents and a range of participants, both core and periphery, allowed me to compare and contrast participants’ perceptions and understandings and emerging categories and themes within the data for each participant and also across that of the different participants. This approach helped me in verifying and constructing a trustworthy account of the participants’ experiences.

Ensuring the credibility of the findings also means giving the reader confidence that the insights that have emerged come from the data themselves and not the researcher’s own biases and assumptions. According to Maxwell (2005, p. 111), sharing findings and emerging themes with the research participants

...is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed.

This 'member-checking' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was an on-going process throughout the two phases on my research in the following ways:

- At the end of the interviews I tried to summarise what I had understood from the conversation and to check with the participants that this was what they had said/meant.
- I started the Relational Mapping interviews by sharing with the participants what I had understood from their first interview and asked for verification of my interpretations and understandings. In many of the interviews I also used this time at the start to clarify anything that I was confused about or that seemed to contradict what others were saying. For example, the initial training support teachers reported receiving seemed to be different and I wanted to clarify these differences.
- The interviews in Phase 2 were an opportunity to share with the participants some of the preliminary findings and to see if they were able to recognise their experiences in my interpretations (Merriam, 2009). This also allowed me to see some of my own biases and over-interpretations.
- The participants were sent the transcripts from their final interview a few months after Phase 2. Where translation was involved I sent the participants both L1 and L2 versions. My intention was to give them the opportunity to verify what they had said and to add any further comments or insights. While I am aware that this process of reviewing transcripts can have limited response from participants (Harvey, 2014), it seemed the most practical way to include the participants in the final stage of my data analysis since I was unable to return to the field for a third research visit. I received eight replies confirming that they were happy with the transcripts. However none of the participants, perhaps unsurprisingly (Harvey, 2014), provided any further thoughts or insights regarding their data. I see this as one of the limitations of this study.

The five months I spent in Vietnam allowed me to develop a deep understanding of the context, and to reflect on the research process and findings, adding to the credibility of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I was aware of the importance of

relationship building in Vietnamese cultural society and how this was a necessary process in my research design in order to gain the trust and confidence of my key research participants and to lessen any potential threat that I might create. This was part of the rationale behind having two phases of data gathering and also having multiple interviews with the 14 main participants. In the final interviews many of the participants were more relaxed than in previous interviews and willing to disclose quite personal perceptions and feelings. I also made efforts to maintain contact with the participants by text during phases and by email between Phase 1 and 2 when I returned to Leeds, which helped to build trust and cooperation and a relationship of 'professional friend'.

Prolonged engagement in the case study site also enabled me to reach a saturation point in the data gathering, and by the end of Phase 2 I was, as Merriam (2009) puts it, beginning to see and hear the same things and no new insights were emerging. Having the two research phases helped me to create a 'rich, thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the curriculum change context. This thick description complements triangulation in that it requires the researcher to move beyond simply checking something from different angles, to looking at the connections within a social setting to gain greater depth of the meanings of a particular perception or act (Holliday, 2007). I feel that this is one of the strengths of my study and I hope that this richness of description might help a reader operating in a different context to see similarities or particularities between their change context and that of this case study.

4.13.2 Reliability

Merriam (2009) states that for research to be reliable it needs to show that the findings are consistent with the data gathered. To help ensure this, I invited a 'critical friend' (Rallis and Rossman, 2009) to review my study by reading through it with a critical eye and challenging the insights and conclusions I presented. I have given a detailed account of the research process in this chapter and feel that the transparency of both the methodology and the theoretical rationales underpinning them adds to the trustworthiness of the study. Hennink (2008) argues that many cross-cultural studies fail to make explicit the use of interpretation and translation which could affect how the reader might view the findings. This failing is something I have tried to address in this chapter.

As I have previously mentioned in relation to data analysis, I kept an account of all stages of the research process in my research journal. This included both methodological procedures and reflections on what was emerging from the data. This audit trail or 'chain of evidence' (Yin, 2009, p.41) has helped in ensuring the quality of the data through providing a detailed and transparent account of how I arrived at my findings.

4.13.3 Ensuring data quality

4.13.3.1 Reflections on my role as researcher and data quality

Reflexivity is an important part of helping to create credible and reliable data (Simons, 2009; Merriam, 2009). In this section, I reflect on who I am as researcher and the effect that this might have had on the quality of the data; 'quality' being a particular area of concern in qualitative interviewing (e.g. see Roulston, 2010; Mann, 2011). My attempts below at making transparent to the reader how my position, biases and expectations may have shaped the interview talk address the call for greater reflexivity in qualitative interviews (Mann, 2011; Talmy, 2010; 2011)

When I began my research I was aware that my previous experience of working in Vietnam would have an effect on the case study. However it was only once the process of data gathering started that I began to realise how complex my position as researcher was, since I am neither an insider nor outsider, as Waljee (2010) also found when conducting her doctoral research. I am not Vietnamese, yet I have lived and worked in the country for many years and feel I have some cultural knowledge, enough to be able to interpret the experiences of the participants in the curriculum change context. My previous role as project manager for an international organisation implies status and perceptions of power in a very hierarchical socio-political and cultural education system in Vietnam. With this positionality come my own beliefs, values and biases about teaching and learning, Vietnam and the NFLP 2020.

I came to realise that my previous involvement in English language teaching in Vietnam and indeed in the very beginnings of the NFL2020 project, and the fact that although they did not know me personally, many of the participants had met me in work situations or knew of me through others, influenced how the participants responded to me and the kind of experiences, thoughts and feelings they revealed or chose not to reveal. For many of the participants, the conversations with me seemed to be an opportunity for a kind of outpouring of discontent about the new

curriculum and implementation process. At the end of the group interview with the four non-pilot teachers, which had revealed some strong views and feelings about their experiences of change, one of the teachers remarked that previously no one had ever asked *them* about *their* perceptions of the new curriculum and they hoped that through my research their voices would help lead to positive changes in the curriculum change implementation. However I was also aware that my perceived position of power could potentially make the participants feel that they should reveal more than they might want to. I was sensitive to this and respected their wishes not to include 'off the record' comments. I also assured the participants that their responses and behaviour during the data generation were confidential and would not be disclosed to either their employers or other education authorities, something some of them expressed concern about.

In contrast to the interviews with the teachers, my dual identity of foreign researcher and former project manager seemed to make my meetings with DOET and MOET officials more reserved, with no one really wanting to share insights into how *they* felt about and experienced the change process.

An unintentional consequence of my role as researcher was that I found that as I "travelled through the system, I seemed to carry it with me" (Hall, 1995, p.409). The participants knew that I was exploring perceptions and experiences across different parts of the education system and were keen to gather insights and information from other layers. This added to the data I was gathering which seemed to suggest limited learning, information flow or feedback across different layers of the system. As 'a traveller through the system' (Hall, 1995), I was also able to see how participants' actions and responses seemed to be affected by what they were unaware of and therefore did not take into consideration.

My reflections on the effects of my researcher role did not stop once I returned from the field. In analysing and writing up I found that there were times when I "struggled with how I knew what I knew" (Waljee, 2010, p.116). In my former role as project manager I had gained considerable knowledge of the ELT sector in Vietnam which informed how I viewed and analysed my data. Van Lier (1990) points out that the experience and knowledge that the researcher already has about the study constitutes a baseline which can help with description and analysis. While this has benefits in providing insights into the context of curriculum change in Vietnam, it also meant I had to be careful about over-interpreting participants' experiences and putting too much of my own voice into their talk. Indeed, my initial interest in

conducting this research, the methodological approach I took and my analysis and interpretations were all to some extent affected by my 'baseline' (Van Lier, 1990), but being aware of this helped me to be open to all that the data threw up. More positively, this knowledge baseline allowed both me and the participants to draw on common reference points in the past to help frame current experiences, which seemed to put the participants at ease because maybe they felt that I knew 'where they were coming from' (Sayer, 2012). In this way I feel that my dual position has provided me with some degree of 'insider' insights into the case study, with an 'outsider' objectivity that is still attune to the cultural and emotional sensitivities of the participants.

One of my struggles with the data analysis and write up was to keep in mind the purpose of my case study. Many of my participants were very forthcoming in their criticisms of the implementation process and I felt concerned that my findings may read like an 'outsider expert's' critique of an educational change context, a simplistic approach I am at pains to avoid by the very nature of this case study. Indeed my intention is *not* to provide an evaluation of Vietnam's primary English language curriculum change process, but to give voice to the participants' experiences of curriculum change through presentation and interpretation of *their* words, in order to gain a better understanding of the influences across the system which underlie the extent to which the participants achieve the desired transformation of behaviours and working practices. The findings come from the participants and reveal, albeit through my interpretation, their insights on curriculum change. Similarly, while this case study is not an evaluation of teachers' classroom practices, part of the findings highlight how teachers enact change because I feel that this is an important part of the sense making process and a crucial part of education change as a whole. In the discussions of the data, I highlight learner-centred and communicative pedagogy, as implicit in the new curriculum, in contrast to more didactic traditional practices. In doing so my intention is to provide insights into the mismatch of what actually happens in teachers' classrooms and working environments (based on the evidence from classroom observations and interviews) and the desired outcomes of policy rhetoric. My aim, in line with Phan's (2014) argument about the politics of pedagogical names, is not to promulgate the conception of learner-centredness as a modern and progressive imperative for all education systems and that "teacher-centred is a taboo and a sin that must be discarded" (Phan, 2014, p.393). Ultimately it is the reader who will make judgements about the influence of my role on the insights, interpretations and political tone of my research, but I hope that I have

gone some way to helping the reader feel confident about the findings and helping them understand better where I am coming from.

4.13.3.2 A note on the process of selecting quotations

One of the dangers of qualitative research is the possibility of cherry picking quotations from interview talk to suit a particular argument the researcher wishes to follow (Cohen et al, 2011; Corden and Sainsbury, 2006). Such an approach to data selection may be influenced by researcher bias and has the potential to undermine the trustworthiness of the research. In Chapters 5 and 6, the reader is provided with brief glimpses of the data through extracts from interviews, observations, field notes and documents. To ensure that the reader feels this data is credible, I now set out the principled approach I have used in the selection of data extracts.

For each theme discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, I selected data extracts which gave the fullest picture of the data as a whole. However I was also conscious of being inclusive of all the participants and so where there might have been a quotation from the interview talk which was 'the best', on occasions the 'second best' was chosen so that the voice of a less-used participant could be heard. For some themes, extracts from several participants have been included to show either the differences between participants or to emphasise commonalities. Following Briggs (1986) and Mischler (1986), I have already established that I see the qualitative interview as a co-construction of talk between both the interviewer and interviewee. Therefore where possible I have tried to present the extracts in context (Rapley, 2010) by providing longer quotations so the reader can begin to 'feel' the voice of the participant. While there are obvious space considerations in this thesis, I have attempted to include the voice of the interviewer in some of the quotations since the reader needs to be able to see how the researcher's involvement is "significantly implicated in what the respondents end up saying" (Wooffitt and Widdicombe, 2006, p.56).

The next two chapters present an analysis of the data gathered through the methodological process described and justified in this chapter.

Chapter 5 Teachers making sense of change

5.1 Introduction

One of the challenges of exploring how people make sense of curriculum change through a lens of complexity is finding a balance between maintaining a sense of the whole and the need for analytical clarity in the presentation of the findings (Hetherington, 2013). What became apparent during the analysis of my data was the intricate web of relationships and interactions involved in how the participants make sense of the new curriculum. In an attempt to highlight this entanglement, yet at the same time maintaining clarity for the reader, my analysis of the case is presented across two chapters.

This first chapter focuses on the seven teachers operating within three districts, as shown in figure 5.1 below.

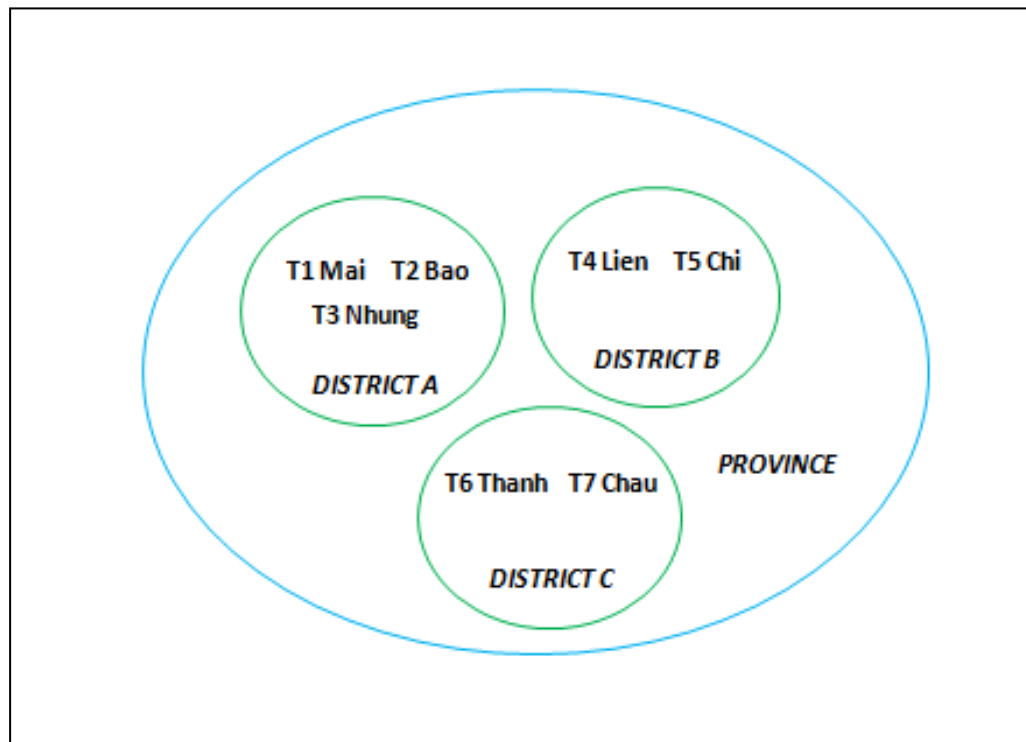


Figure 5.1 The district clusters of teacher participants

In the first part I focus my analysis on what the teachers understand by the new curriculum and how they interpret that understanding in their teaching practices and behaviours in the classroom. This section sets the scene for the rest of the analysis in both chapters and aims to help the reader to begin to grasp “where the participants are coming from” (Sayer, 2012, p.18). The data shows that although the teachers perceive the approach required in the new curriculum as something positive, in most cases they only appear to make minimal, if any, changes in their classroom practices and behaviours.

In the second part of the chapter, I focus on how structural and relational influences within the teachers’ immediate implementation environment appear to shape their classroom practices and behaviours. The data shows how the feelings of uncertainty and anxiety the teachers have in relation to interactions and conditions at the school level partly shape how they come to understand and respond to change in a way that pulls teachers towards the status quo rather than fostering possible emergence of new pedagogical practices.

The following chapter (Chapter 6) takes the reader beyond the school and deeper into the tangled layers of the education system. It introduces the other key implementing actors in this case study (DSs and UTs) and analyses the extent to which they, and the conditions and interactions that shape their own sense-making of the new curriculum, influence what the teachers think, feel and do.

This chapter (Chapter 5) addresses the following research question and sub-questions

- How do teachers make sense of primary English language curriculum change?
 - What are their perceptions and interpretations of the new curriculum?
 - What appears to influence the sense they make of the new curriculum?

The latter sub-question is partially addressed in this chapter, as I will only be focusing on influences at the school level. Chapter 6 will provide further insights related to this research question when I discuss influences within and across other layers of the education system.

The chapter now moves onto my findings and I begin with background descriptions of the teachers and the district in which they work.

5.2 Profile of the teachers and their districts

| Teacher | Profile | District Profile |
|---------|---|---|
| Mai | Mai is the pilot teacher in District A and has been following the new curriculum and textbooks since 2010. She has permanent contractual status. Mai has been teaching for 14 years. She started working as an English language teacher in a secondary school and became a primary English language teacher in 2003. She has been working in her current school for five years. Her school is large with over 1,800 students and her classes have around 63 students. Mai attended both the local teacher training college and university and was trained to be a teacher of secondary level English language. There are two other English teachers in her school who are not on permanent contracts. | <p><i>District A</i></p> <p>District A is a growing residential and commercial area with a population of around 140,000 (Hanoi Government Portal, 2009) and is one of 12 urban districts in the province. It is a relatively affluent district and parents are keen to send their children to private language centres for extra English tuition. There has been recent, rapid expansion in the number of newly built high rise residential and commercial buildings. As with all urban districts in the province, District A has seen a rising influx of people from outer-lying rural areas over the last five years putting pressure on available places for the top state schools. This has led to large class sizes, often over 60 students in some schools. There are 16 primary schools in the district and 45 primary English language teachers, with 28 of those having permanent contractual status in their schools.</p> |
| Bao | Bao is on a permanent contract and has been teaching for 6 years. Her school started following the new curriculum and textbooks in 2011. There are approximately 1000 students in her school and she has around 50 students in her classes. There are two other hourly-paid English teachers in her school. Bao attended the local teacher training college to train to be an English language teacher at secondary level. She also has a BA in Interpretation and Translation. | |
| Nhung | Nhung started teaching in 2001 in her current primary school. She is on a permanent contract and there are four other English teachers in her school, all of whom are also on permanent contracts. Her school is large and modern with around 2000 students from Grade 1 to Grade 5. She has about 60 students in her classes. Nhung was trained to be a secondary English language teacher and attended the local teacher training college. | |
| Lien | <p>Lien is the 'pilot teacher' in District B and became involved in the implementation of the new curriculum in September 2010. She has been teaching for 12 years and became a permanent teacher in 2008. She graduated from the local teacher training college with a teaching certificate in teaching English at secondary level and then went on to complete a BA in English language teaching at university.</p> <p>Her school is smaller than the ones in the urban districts and there are around 800 students. Lien has about 35 students in her class. There is one</p> | <p><i>District B</i></p> <p>District B is a rural district with a total population of about 205,000 (Hanoi Government Portal, 2009). The majority of people are employed in agriculture, although it is becoming increasingly urban with improved road links and infrastructure projects. As the teachers report, English is</p> |

| | | |
|-------|--|--|
| | other hourly-paid English teacher in her school. | hardly used outside the school setting and the majority of parents do not speak English. Unlike District A, there are few private language centres or schools where parents can send their children. |
| Chi | <p>Chi has been working as a primary teacher for 9 years and became a permanent teacher 4 years ago. She started implementing the new curriculum and using the new textbooks in September 2011. She attended the local teacher training college and was trained to teach at secondary level.</p> <p>Chi has around 35 students in her classes. She is the only English teacher in her school.</p> | <p>Class sizes are smaller than in the urban districts and most classes in the two schools I visited have around 35 students. Being located in a rural area, schools have more space to expand, and the two schools I visited had bigger classrooms than in the urban districts and a spacious outside playground. There are 24 primary schools in the district and around 36 English language teachers (24 of whom are on permanent contracts)</p> |
| Thanh | Thanh is the 'pilot teacher' in District C. He has been a primary English language teacher for 16 years working in the same school. He is on a permanent contract. Like the other pilot teachers, he started implementing the new curriculum in September 2010. He graduated from university with a BA in teaching English at secondary level. There is one other hourly-paid teacher working in the school. | <p><i>District C</i></p> <p>District C is a small urban district with a population of around 107,000. It is located in the old part of the provincial city and the architecture of the old buildings means that it is very difficult to expand school areas to accommodate the growing number of students. There are 14 primary schools in the district and these have around 60 students in a class. This district services a relatively wealthy population and most parents are able to send their children to private language centres for extra lessons.</p> |
| Chau | Chau has been teaching English at primary level for 18 years. She is a permanent teacher. She has been implementing the new curriculum in her school since 2011. She graduated from university with a BA in teaching English at secondary level. She is the only English teacher in her school. | |

Table 5.1 Profile of teachers and their districts

The names of the teachers have been changed. Throughout this chapter I include extracts from classroom observations and interviews. I have coded them to show the particular teacher and data source. So for example:

(T.Mai.INT1/4.11.13) refers to Interview 1 with (teacher) Mai from District B on 4 November 2013.

(T.Bao.O3/10.4.14) refers to the third observation follow-up interview I had with Bao on 10 April 2014.

(T.Mai.LO3/11.4.14) refers to the third lesson observation I had with Mai on 11 April 2014.

(T.Thanh.TGP/18.4.14) refers to an extract from Thanh during the group interview with the three pilot teachers on 18 April 2014.

(T.Chau.TGNP.translation/17.4.14) refers to an extract from Chau during the group interview with the four non-pilot teachers on 17 April 2014.

Where the teachers' words have been translated, I indicate this as above.

5.3 Making sense of the new curriculum

5.3.1 Perceptions of change

The seven teachers view the new curriculum and the wider National Foreign Language 2020 Project as a positive change and something that will benefit their students. Their reactions can be summed up by Mai:

...English is very important for them [children] ...when they are older, when they finish high school they come to college or university, when they go to work they have, all of them have to know English because it's the international language. So if they want to get a good job they have to know English well.

(T.Mai.INT1/4.11.13)

Concomitant with this positive perception of change, is the perception by most of the teachers that the new curriculum requires them to teach in ways different to what they were doing previously. This view is exemplified by Lien and Thanh:

L: So your teaching before the pilot programme was it different to your teaching now?

Lien: I think so.

L: So maybe can you give me an example of what you do differently?

Lien: ...before the pilot programme I just go to class "ok and now look at the board and write! And now answer my question!" That mean between

teacher and student, the teacher ask and the student answer, but now it's not. The teacher and student are friends. It is very different.

(T.Lien.INT1/5.11.13)

L: You said it's a new method. In what way is the method new?

Thanh: It's interaction activities... for example you talk about the topics...the children do the action and the teacher is only the organiser...for example the teacher ask children to work in groups, work in pairs and so the teacher only watch how they work ...the children can speak by themselves so they can become more interested in learning English.

(T.Thanh. INT1/29.11.13)

These extracts show the teachers' awareness of not just the move to speaking and listening skills, but also the implicit shift in the roles of the teacher and student to create a more informal and facilitative learning atmosphere. In contrast to the other teachers, Bao views the new approach of the new curriculum not as something significantly new, but rather as a way of teaching which reflects what she has already been doing in her classroom.

Bao: In our teaching we have two main kinds of lessons, this is the new lesson the grammar lessons and the skill, the skills lesson.

L: Is that different to what you did before?

Bao: No it's the same. It is the same technique but for other textbooks...for example when we teach the new words or the new structures I often use some games to check the vocab like 'slap the board'."

(T.Bao. INT1/8.11.13)

While Bao suggests that the new curriculum is 'easy' for her to implement because it constitutes little significant change in teaching practices, this perception seems to be contradicted in much of her later talk when she shows as much anxiety and uncertainty about the implementation process as the others (see section 5.4).

5.3.2 Understandings of 'communicativeness'

One of the main aims of the new curriculum (as already discussed in the background to this study in Chapter 2) is to encourage the development of learners' communicative competence, in particular oral proficiency, through a more learner-centred, communicative approach which emphasises creative and independent learning. This is a significant shift from previous practices requiring a focus on grammar and reading and writing skills. When asked what communicative teaching meant to them, the

teachers showed knowledge of the discourse surrounding the new curriculum, as these extracts highlight.

...communicative teaching is all about the teaching material given by the teacher. The structures introduced must be practical to students' daily life so that students can use these structures productively and students can then communicate in English...

(T.Bao.TGNP.translated/17.4.14)

... they can use their English to communicate in real situation to speak, especially for children they can talk, they can communicate together, not only in the classroom, in all their life.

(T.Mai. TGP/18.4.14)

...free talk for children, it means they can speak fluently and they can talk about their opinions, their choice, they can talk about their likes and dislikes so free talk...

(T.Thanh.INT2/9.12.13)

There is reference to the notion of language being *practical* so it has relevance *outside the classroom* and an assumption that there will be opportunities for learners to be able to use this language in *real situations*. However when the teachers were asked if their students were able to use English with others beyond the classroom, they commented that there were few opportunities, particularly for students in the rural District B. Lien expresses frustration with this reality:

They have no chance to practise at home. Their parents don't know English ok so just at school they speak with their friends and their teacher, at school. No one speak English at home. No one can speak English with her [the student], so it's difficult.

(T.Lien. INT1/5.11.13).

For the majority of the teachers, providing suitable oral practice activities in the classroom would seem to be important since it may be the only chance students have to use the language. Indeed, the teachers' words in the extracts above focus on methods and ways of encouraging communication through classroom activities, and notions of 'production' and 'free talk', were commonly expressed. Many of the teachers readily described what they would do in their lessons based on these understandings of 'communicativeness', as Mai shows below:

...it's very important to help students to understand when and where they use the new grammar point or new dialogue. I give the students the situation and then let them practise the new model in ...at first I do as

model and then I ask them to practise in big groups and then in smaller groups and then in pairs and maybe at first controlled practice. I give them the guide, the guiding words and then later I don't give, I want less controlled practice and finally imagine the real situation and they can make their own dialogues in the real situation; they think. Maybe sometimes we let them do some report or maybe some survey or maybe some interview with friends or their partners or their friends around.

(T.Mai.INT1/4/11/13)

Here Mai describes a fairly standard 'PPP' lesson moving from controlled to freer practice. She stresses the need to help students to use new language in meaningful situations through communicative tasks. However while this suggests that Mai does seem to have assimilated some of the curriculum discourse, an underlying current of existing conceptions of language teaching remains evident in all the teachers' classroom practices and behaviours. The following section highlights this from the data.

5.3.3 Enacting 'communicativeness'

This section is based on an analysis of the 20 classroom observations, drawing on the teachers' own definitions of a communicative approach. The findings are arranged under the following headings: lesson structure; opportunities for creativity; different modes of interaction; the use of repetition; the role of the teacher; the pace of the lesson, and adopting a young learner approach.

One of the dilemmas I had with interpreting the data from the observations was whether they were truly representative of a normal lesson, particularly given my role as both researcher and former project manager and the associations with a 'progressive teaching approach' and authority. This might lead the teachers to exaggerate their allegiance to the ideas in the new curriculum and indeed from conversations with others, this would seem to be the case. For example one of the university trainers makes the following comments about what she perceives to be typical teaching in primary English language classes:

...normally it's a kind of formal teaching ...they may just teach around 15 minutes and for the other they ask student to do homework or to do the exercises and then they call and check on the board, no activities...because they have observations so they have to arrange a lot of activities, but without observation they just ask them [the students] to do the exercises and then they check 'if you are right, so put a tick, if you are wrong so cross' and then they correct mistake. No activities.

(UT.Tam.INT3/21.4.14)

The interview talk with some of the teachers in Phase 2 of my fieldwork confirms this (see section 5.3.3.7). However even though it is likely that many of the lessons I observed were untypical, particularly in Phase 1 of data gathering when the participants were still getting to know me, what the teachers *do* manage to do in these ‘untypical’ lessons is still worthy of exploration because they suggest an ‘ideal’; that is what the teachers feel they should be doing every day. Moreover, even in this ideal classroom, the ‘ideal’ still seems to be constrained by the same influences as the ‘normal’ lesson, making my findings and interpretations still valid and relevant.

5.3.3.1 Lesson structure

Typically in the 20 lessons I observed, the bulk of lesson time was taken up with language input and controlled practice. This is similar to findings from other studies of teachers in Vietnam (Moon, 2005, 2009; Nguyen, 2011) and China (Wang, 2007).

In most lessons, the lesson structure consisted of a teacher-led presentation of language, usually vocabulary, followed by controlled practice, leading into the introduction of new structures, usually through a short dialogue. Figure 5.2 shows the stages of one of Mai’s observed lessons which exemplify this typical lesson structure.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Setting | <i>This is a 35-minute Grade 5 class with 65 students, aged between 10 and 11. The lesson is based on Unit 5 Lesson 1 in Tieng Anh 5 and the focus is on the language “How do you get to your home town?/ By ...”</i> |
| 1. | Mai introduces transport vocabulary using flashcards. She models and gets the whole class to repeat each word. She checks the meaning in Vietnamese. |
| 2. | Mai nominates individual students to repeat words. The students are keen to volunteer. She sticks the flashcards on the b/b and gets the whole class to repeat each word again. |
| 3. | Mai orally highlights the final consonant of each word and writes up the six new words on the board with Vietnamese translations. Then Mai nominates individual students to repeat all the words on the board again. She corrects pronunciation of final consonants. |
| 4. | Mai proceeds to rub out the English words on the b/b and asks for volunteers to come and write them back in. She picks students at the front of the class who are able to get to the b/b. |
| 5. | Mai introduces language (How do you get to.../ by ...) through a dialogue in the textbook. She asks students questions about the picture in the book related to the dialogue. |
| 6. | Mai plays a dialogue and the students listen and follow in their books. She plays the CD again and gets the whole class to repeat each line. The students repeat almost as a chant. She then drills each line in two groups, and then open pairs. |
| 7. | Mai asks students to work in pairs to practise the dialogue again. The students do this activity quickly and finish after about 30 seconds. Mai nominates three pairs to display their dialogue. She writes the new language on the b/b and asks students what it means in Vietnamese. |

| | |
|-----|---|
| 8. | Mai shows flashcards of transport again and gets the students to say each word chorally. She then asks a question 'How do you get to your hometown?' and shows a card to elicit a response from the whole class. She does this for all the transport vocab. cards. |
| 9. | Mai asks the students to complete the mini dialogues in their books. This is a Q/A activity. Feedback is through open pairs. |
| 10. | Mai asks the students to listen to children talking about their hometown. She asks the students to circle the type of transport they hear. After listening Mai elicits the answer for each question onto the b/b. She plays the CD again and the students listen and check. |
| 11. | Mai demonstrates a short dialogue with one student using the target language. The students practise this dialogue in pairs. This activity is about 1 minute long and is interrupted by the sound of a drum indicating break time. |

Figure 5.2 Lesson extract from T.Mai.

(LO3.11.04.14)

As Figure 5.2 shows, Mai begins the lesson by introducing different kinds of transport vocabulary (stages 1 and 2) and later introduces language to use this vocabulary through a dialogue in the textbook (stage 6). Practice involves whole-class and pair repetition of vocabulary or structures in mechanical drills. The focus of the lesson is predominantly on language accuracy with a very tightly controlled manipulation of set target language. The final stage of the lesson has potential to allow students to be more creative and free with their language choice and use. However in reality the students were using language decided by the teacher and repeating set structures from the lesson, with almost no personalisation. Interestingly, this contrasts with Mai's own rationale for this activity. In the post observation interview, Mai commented that she felt that the final stage *was* an opportunity for her students to

show everything they like, maybe other things not only the question part...I want them to make production about themselves, yeah.

(T.Mai. O3/11.4.14)

This also reflects what she says in section 5.3.2 about the need for students to have a chance to use the language freely: "*I want to less controlled practice and finally imagine the real situation and they can make their own dialogues in the real situation; they think*" (T.Mai.INT1/4/11/13). It would seem that Mai is aware of the need for students to be creative with language, but has not planned activities which give students an opportunity to create a real situation and contextualise the language. Indeed, all the teachers commented that the procedures and activities in the main part of their lessons are reflective of the "communicativeness" implicit in the new curriculum

because the students are involved in speaking. Yet in all the lessons I observed, there was little attention paid to ‘production’ or ‘free talk’ previously mentioned in teachers’ talk about ‘communicativeness’ (see section 5.3.2). This highlights some of the misconceptions the teachers have about the notion of ‘communicativeness’; that it is all about speaking and as long as the students are saying something, then they are communicating.

In the majority of lessons I observed, the final practice stage of the lesson was very rushed and usually lasted no more than two minutes, so probably even if Mai (or the other teachers) did plan a freer practice activity, there would be very little time to exploit it fully before the drum sounded to signal the end of the lesson. Figure 5.3 shows an extract of the final stages of one of Chi’s lessons with a Grade 4 class. Here she has already introduced vocabulary for school subjects and days of the week and is practising the structure “*What lessons have you got on?/ I’ve got ...*”.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Setting | <i>This is a 35-minute Grade 4 class with 36 students, aged between 9 and 10. The lesson is based on Unit 7 Lesson 1 in Tieng Anh 4 and the focus is on the language “What lessons have you got on ...? I’ve got ...”</i> |
| 1. | Chi elicits the target Q/A from the dialogue in the book using the PPT. |
| 2. | Chi drills the Q/A chorally and the gets groups to repeat it. She bangs the ruler on the desk to signal when the groups should swap roles. Then individual students repeat each line. |
| 3. | Chi asks students to practise the dialogue in pairs. She stops them after about 30 seconds. Not all the students are ready. |
| 4. | Chi provides feedback through open pair repetition of the dialogue. Students are keen to volunteer. |
| 5. | Chi drills the Q/A again with the whole class. Chi gets open pairs to display their questions and responses. Chi corrects pronunciation of ‘the subjects Vietnamese’ and ‘Science’. |
| 6. | Chi asks students to do the listening activity where they tick the school subjects they hear. She shows the pictures from the listening activity on a PPT and drills each word in the picture chorally before the students listen to the CD. |
| 7. | Chi gets students to swap books to check. Then she elicits answers from individual students and writes the answers on the b/b. |
| 8. | Chi asks students to repeat the Q/A structure again chorally from the listening activity in the textbook. |
| 9. | Chi ends the class by referring to the target language of the lesson on the b/b and asking students to copy it into their notebooks. |

Figure 5.3 *Lesson extract from T.Chi*
(LO1.13.11.13)

Like in Mai's lesson, Chi's focus (Figure 5.3) is on language and accuracy of form and the practice stages only allow for tightly controlled repetition of limited vocabulary items and grammatical structure. This seems to reflect Chi's beliefs about the importance of the role of grammar and language knowledge and the notion of communication as something that can be learnt rather than communication as a way of learning.

In my opinion teaching students communication means the teacher provides students with certain vocabulary and then structures. Based on this, students will be able to listen and speak successfully. Without vocabulary and structures given by the teacher, it is unlikely that the students will be able to communicate.

(T.Chi.TGNP.translation/17.4.14).

Chi's reference here to *successful* communication being dependent on the lexical and grammatical input from the teacher suggests an understanding of communicative outcomes bound up in notions of accuracy. This is reflected in all the teachers' classroom practices, which, as Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3 have exemplified, focus on accuracy of spoken grammatical form through controlled practice.

What is interesting is that all the teachers seem to equate the 'communicative' aspect of the new curriculum with speaking, regardless of how controlled this speaking might be. The teachers appear to see the new curriculum in terms of a shift from written grammatical accuracy to oral accuracy, and correct pronunciation is viewed as an important feature of oral accuracy, which reflects the prevailing beliefs and norms about education and that there is a 'right' way of producing language 'knowledge'.

I think when we teach primary students, pronunciation is the most important part. Good pronunciation gives students confidence in speaking. If they see a word but fail to pronounce it, they will feel discouraged. So if we want to encourage students to communicate in English, we have to help them pronounce words correctly, then they will be more motivated with learning English

(T.Nhung.TGNP.Translation/17.4.14)

The first one is the pronunciation skill... if you teach the young children, the very young children, their pronunciation is not as good as the native speaker, but it must be good because it is the basic. When they grow up if you pronounce some words incorrect, the children will be incorrect too.

(T.Lien. INT1/5.11.13)

While these extracts exemplify the importance the teachers place on pronunciation, their words also suggest the important role they perceive they themselves play in ensuring ‘correct’ pronunciation outcomes. This seems to also have implications on teachers’ conceptions of themselves and the threat that the new curriculum has on their professional self, something I discuss further in section 5.4.1.

It was noticeable that in many of the observations I carried out in Phase 1, the lesson structure differed slightly to include stages where more child-friendly activities such as games and songs were used. However in the observations in Phase 2, these kinds of activities tended not to be present, which suggests that a ‘normal’ lesson closely follows the activities in the textbook. Figure 5.4 summarises the lesson structure for the observed lessons, showing how the lessons are divided into beginning, middle and end stages. The stages with the dotted lines are the ones which were not always included, while the stages with the bold lines formed the basis of all the lessons observed.

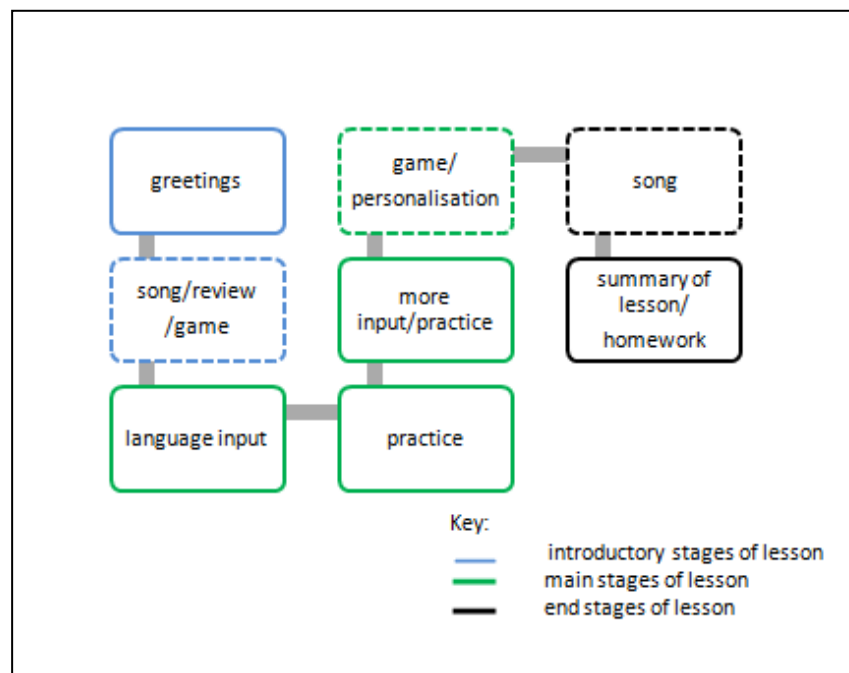


Figure 5.4 Typical stages of a lesson
(adapted from Wang, 2007, p.173)

5.3.3.2 Opportunities for creativity

In all the observed lessons, the teachers followed the structure of the textbook unit. Most of the activities in the Tieng Anh books offered only controlled, often uncontextualized language practice and so the books themselves seemed to have a significant influence on what teachers did and were able to do in their lessons (something I discuss further in section 5.4.3). As already mentioned, the majority of the lessons had few opportunities for students to use language creatively and provided few opportunities for the teachers to tap into students' existing language repertoire beyond the textbook. There were occasions when the students themselves made attempts to personalise the language, but this was often 'corrected' by the teacher and the students were asked to stick to the language provided in the book. For example, in stage 4 in Chi's lesson (see Figure 5.3), the students display what they have been practising in a pair work activity through open pair feedback (see Figure 5.6 for the textbook activity). The lesson episode below in Figure 5.5 shows how the students' attempts to be creative during open pair feedback are counteracted by Chi's desire to bring the activity under control and ensure the language used is predictable and predetermined. Student B asks student A a real question about their timetable later in the week, rather than sticking to the fixed question and answer provided in exercise 2, shown in Figure 5.6 below.

| | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| Student A: | What lessons have you got today? |
| Student B: | I've got Maths. |
| Student B: | What lessons have you got on Friday? |
| Student A: | I've got Music and English. |
| Chi: | No, from the book. |
| Student B: | What lessons have you got today? |
| Student A: | I've got Vietnamese. |
| Chi: | Right. |

*Figure 5.5. Lesson Episode from T. Chi.
(L02/13.11.13)*

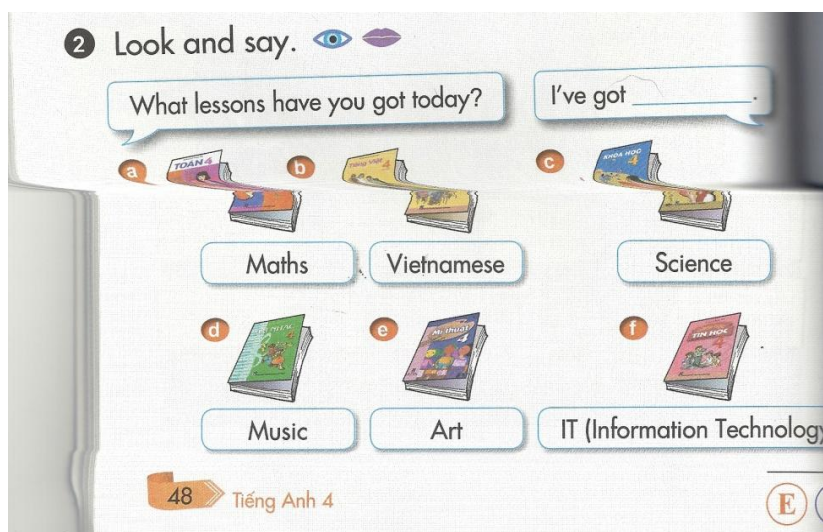


Figure 5.6 Pairwork practice exercise from *Tieng Anh 4* (p.48)

There were a few instances in some lessons when the students were given opportunities to be creative and exploit their own knowledge of language and vocabulary. For example towards the end of a lesson on hobbies and related language of “I like...”, Lien (T.Lien.LO1/5/11/213) includes a short freer practice stage. Students are asked to make sentences about themselves and their own hobbies using the “like + gerund” structure and also “I can ...” and to share this with the rest of the class. When asked why she did this in her post-observation interview, Lien remarked that:

...if you look at 'Look and Say' in the textbook you can see 'I like' very clearly and students just do the mechanical practice, but now I miss it out...so students have to review the words in their mind, not to look here ok. They can say what they like and in the classroom you can see students just say about their own, not based on the picture.

(T.Lien.O4/5/11/2013)

Similarly, Mai ends one of her lessons (T.Mai.LO2/6/12/2013) with a real question related to the lesson “*What’s your favourite sport or game?*”. This was the only point in the lesson where students had the opportunity to personalise the language and use it to talk about themselves and their own lives. However there was only time for three students to give an answer.

Instances like these across all the lessons were rare and the teachers seemed to feel obliged to follow the language and set activities in the text book. Indeed, while there is general agreement among the teachers of the need for 'practical' and 'real life' language (see section 5.3.2), only occasionally did the teachers seem to reflect on and consider the usefulness of the language in the textbooks. Where this does happen it stands out. For example, in her Grade 4 class (15.4.14), Lien adapts a chant from the textbook to make the language more meaningful and appropriate for her students, and reflects in the post observation interview that this will help to achieve a communicative purpose.

This one [the chant] the purpose is communicate. I think that it is about daily communication. Children play with each other and sometimes they invite their friends to play the game... they never say 'Do you want to play?' or 'Would you like to ..?' [as in the textbook]. They say "Come on! Play football! Like that.

(Lien.O3/15.4.14)

However it is interesting that Lien came up to me during the observation to ask my permission to allow the students to change some of the words in a dialogue. The students had already repeated the lines of the dialogue chorally and individually and she wanted them to work in pairs and adapt the language to make it more meaningful for them. Lien seemed to need my permission or reassurance to feel comfortable about doing this. This suggests that the messages she is getting from other 'layers' in the education system are related to 'following the book' and hint at the incoherence evident in the sense-making process of others which I go on to present in the next chapter.

5.3.3.3 Different modes of classroom interaction

In their interview talk, the teachers mention the importance of group work and pair work as a means of getting the students to practise speaking skills, so that "*children can speak by themselves and so they can become interested in learning English*" (T.Thanh.INT1/29.11.13). Most of the group work and pair work the teachers set up is a form of whole-class activity with the emphasis on repetition of set structures, rather than a more autonomous approach as suggested by Thanh's words. Figure 5.7 provides an example of the interaction in four stages in the main part of one of Nhung's lessons (T.Nhung.LO2/11.4.14). The corresponding textbook pages can be found in Appendix 8.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Setting | <i>This is part of a 35-minute Grade 4 class with 63 students, aged between 9 and 10. The lesson is based on Unit 17 Lesson 1 in Tieng Anh 4 and the focus is on the language for giving suggestions.</i> |
| 1. | Nhung asks the students to open their books and look at the dialogue. She plays the dialogue and the students listen and follow in their books. She then plays it again and the whole class repeats each line chorally. She then divides the class into two large groups and they take on the roles in the dialogue and repeat it again. After that open pairs repeat the dialogue. |
| 2. | Nhung writes 'great idea!' and 'I'm sorry I'm busy' on the board. She then shows the class happy face and sad face flashcards and asks the class which phrase goes with which face. The whole class repeats the phrase for the card she holds up four times. |
| 3. | Nhung divides the class into two large groups. Each group gives a choral suggestion and response according to the cards. Nhung does this for 6 place cards and then repeats all the cards again in the same group drill. |
| 4. | The students work in pairs to make the same questions and answers from the textbook. Nhung selects open pairs for feedback. |

*Figure 5.7 Lesson extract from T.Nhung
(LO2/11.4.14)*

As this extract (figure 5.7) shows, much of the whole-class work carried out by the teachers involves the children in repetition, either copying what the teacher says or the voice on the CD. This is done through whole class choral drills, group repetition and individual students standing up to repeat target structures. This was a common feature across all the lessons. In Nhung's lesson in stage 4 the students were asked to do a pair work activity. This was a repetition of the target structure and vocabulary and in many ways similar to a drill since it did not involve autonomous pair work where the students were thinking about and using a range of language. In most of the observed lessons, any pair work was of a similar tightly controlled activity. This was often the case with group work. Figure 5.7 shows how Nhung uses groups as a way of alternating the choral repetition of language. In a follow-up interview, Nhung suggests that her choice of whole class activities is due to the large class and lack of space.

The space is difficult for me. It's difficult for me to organise the classroom activities because there is not enough of space for them [the students] to move or to arrange the tables.

(T.Nhung.INT1/)

The teachers in District A have the largest number of students in their classes, with an average of around 60, while the teachers in more rural District C have classes with around 35 students. However, this variety in student numbers did not seem to make significant difference in the kinds of activities and modes of interaction the teachers employed.

5.3.3.4 The use of repetition

Repetition is a common feature of all the observed lessons. The importance of repetition as a whole-class activity is seen by Nhung as a technique to help her students understand new vocabulary and structures and remember them accurately.

L: In today's lesson how do you feel you helped your students with speaking, what did you do that helped?

Nhung: Ok today I think the students imitate or do a repetition drill. All of them learn by heart the model.

L: Why do you feel that's important?

Nhung: So that they can speak. When they want to ask their friend to go somewhere, you use this model.

(T.Nhung.O3/11.4.14)

The extract above is from the interview with Nhung following her lesson partly described in Figure 5.7. It reveals Nhung's beliefs about repetition as a way of fostering communication, a view also expressed by the majority of teachers. However Chau's comment below suggests a different view.

I think sometimes repeating is good, but repeating is 'repeat, repeat!' and they [the students] don't like. They want to talk...they want to talk about themselves, tell about their friends.

(T.Chau. INT1/12.11.13)

Chau's conversation seems to show a teacher who is grappling with new ideas and concepts, yet much of what she does in the classroom involves the similar controlled repetition activities common to all the teachers.

While repetition is a characteristic of how young children learn a language (Moon, 2001; Pinter, 2006; 2011), the emphasis on choral drilling of set structures with no opportunity for the creative and imaginative activities that are also key features of young learner pedagogy, suggests a more behaviourist view of learning a language which is inconsistent with the kind of approach required in the new curriculum.

5.3.3.5 The role of the teacher

The focus on repetition by most teachers also suggests a particular role of the teacher, which contrasts with notions of ‘facilitator’ and ‘guider’ that appeared in teachers’ talk in section 5.3.2. As discussed in Chapter 2, the new curriculum states that

...the predominant method for teaching English at primary education level is that of communicative language teaching (CLT), seeing students as active participants in the learning process and teachers as organizers and facilitators of learning activities for students.

(Primary Education English language curriculum, MOET, 2010:14)

Implicit in this statement is the expected role of teacher and students in the classroom. What was striking about all the lessons observed was the high level of teacher control in both classroom management and in the choice of language used. As has already been highlighted, there are few opportunities for the students to use language beyond the set structures of the textbook and fewer opportunities for the students and teacher to engage in real communication between themselves. Chau’s words below, confirmed by Chi, suggest that teachers feel their role is to support students and by controlling input and practice they are perhaps ‘guiding’ and helping their students.

Chau: Students should be taught sentence patterns before doing exercises.

Chi: Exactly.

Chau: This is not maths! Students can’t work out English sentence patterns themselves.

Chi: Precisely.

(TGNP- translated/17.4.14)

The importance in the classroom of supporting students also comes across in the kind of questions teachers ask. Although much of the classroom talk is procedural with the teacher giving instructions, where the teacher does ask questions, these usually require yes/no answers and are addressed to the whole class encouraging a choral response, as seen in Figure 5.2, Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.7

The episode from Nhung’s lesson (T.Nhung.LO2/11.4.2014) in Figure 5.8 gives an example of a whole class question requiring a choral response.

Nhung: Do you want to play a game?
Whole class: Yes!

*Figure 5.8. Episode from T.Nhung
(LO2/11.04.14)*

What is noticeable about the nature of this questioning in Figure 5.8 is that it is non-threatening for both the teacher and students. The aim appears to be to maintain group harmony and a form of classroom management to bring the group together (Tomlinson and Bao, 2004). All the teachers seem to be reluctant to create situations where there may be a loss of face for either themselves or the students. This is similar to what Chick (1996) refers to as 'safe talk' in the context of South African maths lessons where he interpreted that the teacher and students 'created interactions where there was no possibility of getting it wrong or showing 'academic incompetence' (Hornberger and Chick (2001). Where the teachers do ask more open questions, the students seem reluctant to respond and the teachers usually revert to simple, closed question forms.

This can be seen in Figure 5.9 in an episode from stage 5 in Mai's lesson (see *Figure 5.2* for the complete stages of her lesson).

Mai: Where are they? What are they talking about?
{SS: silence}
Mai: Are they talking about school?
Whole class: No
Mai: Are they talking about their Tet holiday?
Whole class: Yes.

*Figure 5.9 Episode from T.Mai
(LO3.11.04.14)*

It is through classroom interaction that considerable learning takes place (Alexander, 2000) and in particular instances of 'initiation and response' in the form of questioning. In the observed lessons, the teachers initiate questions and students respond, but there is little follow-up response in the form of either praise and encouragement or further comments to expand on the students' responses and continue the interaction. In some of the lessons I observed there were a few instances when this happened. For example, in one lesson (T.Nhung.LO2.11.4.14), when Nhung elicits the names of each of the places in a town, she adds in an extra question not in the textbook: '*What can you buy there?*'. The students are keen to answer and draw on their own knowledge. However examples like this across all the observed lessons were rare.

5.3.3.6 The pace of the lesson

Also noticeable in the teachers' lessons was the fast interactive pace. There are no visible pauses in the lessons, with new questions coming "hard on the heels" of answers (Alexander, 2000; p.421), and minimal transition time between activities and stages. This fast pace appears to be maintained by the used of repetition and seems to be an important aspect of the lessons. With the worries teachers have about covering the required syllabus content, it is perhaps hardly surprising that teachers are keen to maintain a swift pace during lessons and the use of whole-class repetition would seem to be a way for teachers to do this. This fits with the findings from Lamb and Wedell's (2015) portraits of teachers in China and also Alexander's (2000, p.421) study of teachers in India, where lessons are characterised by:

...heavily reiterative interactions and lesson structures in order to move students along together...

A dilemma and cause of concern for teachers is balancing this need for a fast interactive pace with the demands of mixed ability classes. This is particularly acute in the urban districts, where the disparity between students attending private language centres and those whose sole language learning happens in their regular classes is evident in the differences in English language proficiency. As Bao notes:

...there are not only the strong students but also the weak students, so I think if the class is too big so I don't have enough time to help my students and the students don't have enough chance to practise English.

(T.Bao.INT2/14.11.13)

Therefore the fast interactive pace in the teachers' lessons maintained by whole-class reiterative activities is perhaps the most pragmatic way for teachers to cover the required material and also ensure that all the students 'learn' the key language for each lesson. This reflects Alexander's (2000, p. 421) study which found that in contexts of large, mixed ability classes

...rote learning is a kind of blunderbuss which, if fired often enough, eventually has some kind of impact on the learning of most pupils, if not all of them.

5.3.3.7 Adopting a young learner approach

None of the teachers were trained to be primary English language teachers. They all attended pre-services courses that prepared them for secondary classrooms and all the teachers comment that they found it challenging when they started working as a primary teacher. Bao's concerns below reflect the feelings of all the teachers.

At first I feel really difficult because in one lesson you teach only 4-6 new words and very simple structures. So how can I spend 30 minutes to teach just a few language items? So I really have difficulties at first

(T.Bao.INT2/ 14.11.13)

While some teachers mention that they have gained confidence in teaching young children through attending workshops organised by international publishers and organisations and "know now how to teach children, how to teach at primary school" (T.Nhung.INT1), others continue to struggle. These feelings are expressed well by Bao and Thanh:

It is hard work because the young children they are very energetic ...they talk so much in class and the class is too crowded for me to teach English, so sometimes I feel exhausted...I was not trained to be a primary teacher

(T.Bao.INT1/8/11/13)

...difficult because the work with children, working with children, it's a big problem. They are so young and so their memory is not long and it's difficult to teach them and so for teaching them I have to design some activity according to the children, mostly it's games, songs and chants.

(T.Thanh.INT1/29/11/13)

Like the other teachers, Thanh uses games, songs and chants in his lessons often at the start and end as Figure 5.4 highlighted. As well as games, songs and chants, the

teachers also perceive the emphasis on speaking and listening in the new curriculum as reflecting a more child-friendly pedagogy suitable for young learners in primary schools.

...in the past many teachers they always focus on grammar and writing but for children, especially for young learners, speaking is very important

(T.Mai.TGP/18.4.14)

However it is interesting that data from the observed lessons suggests that this is the only attendance to a young learner approach the teachers seem to use. The majority of their lessons follow an adult-oriented approach to language presentation and practice, with games and chants used to practise discrete language items. This was something identified by Moon (2005) and Nguyen (2012) in their studies of primary teachers in Vietnam prior to the introduction of the new curriculum. An exception was observed in one of Chi's classes (T.Chi.LO3/15.4.14) where the students were put into small groups of four or five students to colour, cut and paste clothes onto characters from the textbook as the photo in Figure 5.10 shows.



Figure 5.10 Chi's Grade 3 class

(T.Chi.LO3/15.04.14)

However, although this activity had the potential to create meaningful language, it was not fully exploited and a familiar whole class repetition of language from the textbook

followed. Indeed in the post-observation interview, Chi seemed to be unsure about the usefulness of this activity and the time 'wasted' with cutting and pasting, suggesting that this lesson probably did not reflect what she normally does.

It is interesting that both Nhung and Mai were keen to point out that their final observation was a 'normal' class and that, as Mai puts it,

*I didn't prepare anything. This is usual because I want you to see the fact..
I teach as usual*

(T.Mai.O3/11.4.14).

In these lessons it is noticeable that games and songs they included in their previous observations were missing, suggesting that there is probably little overt adherence to a young learner approach or aspects of 'communicativeness' through games and songs in normal lessons (see my comments earlier in section 5.3.3.1)

In section 5.3.2, the teachers' talk revealed an awareness of the shift in teacher and student roles required in the new curriculum and many teachers linked this to a young learner approach, as Nhung articulates below:

Teaching primary students is more difficult than secondary students. Yeah, you have to be active, you have to be friendly, you have to encourage, you use a lot of comments, good comments to students, yeah. I think it's difficult.

(T.Nhung. INT1/5.12.13)

However, the observation data showed that in the majority of lessons, the relationship between the teacher and students is formal with almost no talk beyond the set structures of the textbook. The teachers provide little praise or feedback at the end of activities. This sense of distance between the teacher and students is also reflected in the layout of the classrooms. The class sizes are large and the students sit in rows with little space for movement around the room by either the students or teacher, as the photo in figure 5.11 on the next page exemplifies.



*Figure 5.11 Nhung's Grade 4 class (63 students)
(T.Nhung.LO3/04.04.14)*

Chau in particular appeared to be adopting more of a young learner approach than the others. I noted in my Research Journal how Chau's lessons made me feel, "*there is a lovely atmosphere in her classes, a kind of warmth that I don't feel in the others*" (RJ/14.4.14). The lesson extract in Figure 5.12 below taken from Chau's Grade 3 class, highlights what she does to help foster this feeling I got (shown in underlined italics). A copy of the corresponding textbook pages for the lesson can be found in Appendix 8.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Setting | <i>This is a 35-minute Grade 3 class with 52 students, aged between 8 and 9. The lesson is based on Unit 18 Lesson 1 in Tieng Anh 3 and the focus is on colours: What colour is it? /It's ...</i> |
| 1. | Chau starts the lesson with a song about weather. The students stand up to sing. They seem to like it. She then asks: What's the weather like today? Students answer individually (e.g. sunny, cloudy). 1. <u>Chau uses the students' names to nominate them.</u> Chau then asks the whole class to repeat today's date and writes it on the b/b. |
| 2. | Chau introduces colours using coloured hats cut from card. She shows a hat and drills the word with the whole class (red, orange, yellow, green). After each word is drilled, Chau sticks the hat and corresponding word card on the b/b. She drills all the colours again chorally in groups. 2. <u>She laughs and smiles when students repeat in a funny way.</u> |
| 3. | Chau chorally drills all the vocab items again. She asks students to close their eyes and she removes a coloured hat. The students open their eyes and say which colour has been removed. |
| 4. | Chau asks: Do you want to play a game? Students: 'yes!'. Chau divides the class into two teams. She sticks the hats on the b/b. Two students come to the front of the class. Chau asks a student sitting down to say a colour. Then the two students at the front slap the correct hat. 3. <u>Chau puts a smiley face sticker on the students' hand if they win.</u> At the end of the game she counts the number of smiley faces on their hands and gives points to the team. |
| 5. | Chau asks students to look at their books and to listen to the dialogue and read. She plays the CD again and students repeat each line chorally. |
| 6. | She then 4. <u>puts puppets on the b/b to represent the characters in the dialogue</u> and gets open pairs to repeat. |
| 7. | Chau elicits the target language in Vietnamese and writes it on the b/b: 'What colour is it?/ It's red' |
| 8. | Chau demonstrates the textbook exercise with two students and asks the students to do it in pairs. 5. <u>She monitors students and talks to them</u> |
| 9. | Chau asks pairs to repeat the dialogue and corrects some pronunciation. |
| 10. | Chau gets the students to play a game 'remember, remember'. She divides the class into two groups and asks one student from each group to alternately say a letter for a colour card and a word card. If they match 6. <u>they get a smiley face on their hand.</u> She then asks students the colour of things in the classroom. |
| 11. | Chau ends the lesson with a song from the textbook. She counts the number of smiley faces and the class claps the winning team. She then repeats the target language on the b/b and drills the whole class. |

*Figure 5.12 Lesson Extract from T.Chau.
(T.Chau.LO3/14.04.14)*

Particular behaviours that typify Chau's lessons include using students' names (1), careful monitoring of students (5), using child-friendly incentives (smiley faces and puppets) (3, 4, and 6), showing she is relaxed and enjoying her time with the students (2). Although these may be display lessons for my benefit, the fact that such behaviour seemed familiar to the students suggests that this is more or less how Chau would normally behave and respond to students in non-observed classes and was also typical of her behaviour in the other two lessons I observed. However the majority of teachers show little use of child-friendly activities, techniques or behaviours implicit in the communicative approach for young learners, sticking to familiar student-teacher relationships and teaching practices.

5.3.4 Section summary

Section 5.3 has analysed teachers' understandings of the new curriculum and how they are enacting the required communicative approach through their classroom practices and behaviours. This analysis has shown that:

- the teachers view the curriculum change as something positive and beneficial for their students.
- rather than being resistant, they are willing to implement changes to their teaching practice in line with their understanding of the requirements of the new curriculum.
- many of the teachers feel that they *are* making the desired changes and indeed have been doing so for some time.
- they recognise the difficulties in shifting from their long-established ways of teaching to the new communicative methods that the curriculum brings.
- the teachers are able to use the 'correct' curriculum discourse in conversations about their teaching and have assimilated some new techniques such as pair work and games into their normal routines and procedures, but there seems to be little deeper understanding of the principles behind the new practice.
- the teachers' use of pair work and some group work is mainly in ways that reinforce language accuracy and form, rather than for communicative practice.
- lessons appear to follow the classic 'Presentation-Practice-production' structure, but without the 'production'.
- teachers use games and songs in the observed lessons as a means of making their lessons age-appropriate, but their talk suggests that this is the exception rather than the norm, with most normal lessons following the textbook tasks.

- there is little evidence of ‘communicativeness’ through teacher-student interaction and formal, whole-class reiterative activities seem to be the norm.

The next section examines how teachers come to interpret and enact the new curriculum in this way. It focuses on the teachers’ perceptions of the curriculum change process and how their immediate implementation environment seems to influence the kind of pedagogical choices they make.

5.4 Influences on sense-making

As already discussed in the previous section, the teachers appear to be positively implementing the new curriculum as they have interpreted it, yet they also express concerns about the constraints they face which influence the extent to which they are able to do the kind of activities they would like to do or feel they should do. These constraints seem to unsettle the teachers leading to a sense of uncertainty about whether they are doing enough of the right thing or indeed whether they are actually doing the right thing at all (Ball, 2003). These uncertainties and anxieties shape teachers’ understandings and enactment of the new curriculum and are mediated by relationships and social structures in the teachers’ implementation environment. I discuss these under the following headings:

- Teachers’ professional self
- Issues of time
- The curriculum materials
- Support for teachers
- Communication

5.4.1 Teachers’ professional self

In this sub-section I focus on how the teachers view themselves as English language teachers and how others perceive them. The data reveals how these perceptions are interwoven with concepts of normativity in relation to primary English language teaching.

For many of the teachers, the increased focus on the importance of English that the NFLP 2020 has brought, has had a positive effect on their conceptions of themselves as English language teachers; *“I think we are very important person in Vietnam today”*

(T.Nhung.INT2/10.12.13). Indeed, societal pressures to begin English from an early age suggest the importance placed on primary English language teachers, as Chi notes below:

...in recent years it has been more concerned [about English] and people have been aware of the benefits of English to find a job, a good job, so parents want their children to learn English from young age to have the basics for the next level of education.

(T.Chi.INT1/12/11/13)

This increased attention on English language teachers (and particularly those in the primary sector since English is a new addition to the basic national curriculum) has raised their profile in society. Yet it has also raised questions surrounding the normative values of what constitutes a good teacher in terms of their language level and methodological practices. Indeed although the teachers in my study recognise the growing importance of their role, they all had qualms about their ability as English language teachers implementing the new curriculum.

I was very nervous because the curriculum is different from what we used to do. The approach is speaking and listening, while we teach the children the grammar, the basic grammar so that I feel very nervous. How, by what way could children reach it? So nervous.

(T.Lien.INT2/7.11.13)

...it's my job, it's very important but it's difficult too. Difficult because working with children it's a big problem... they are so young and their memory is not long yes and it's difficult to teach them.

(T.Thanh.INT1/29/11/13)

These extracts illuminate the fact that none of the teachers had prior training in teaching English to young learners, as was highlighted in section 5.3.3.7, and thus many continue to lack confidence in how to deal with primary students. The extracts also highlight the worries many of the teachers have about adopting a new communicative approach; a way of teaching which constitutes a significant shift from previous behaviours and practices.

The main requirement for teachers as part of the new curriculum is to achieve a B2 level of English language proficiency. The teachers in my study view the B2 certificate as an essential qualification in order “...to become a teacher to teach the new textbooks” (T.Bao.INT1/8/11/13). They also recognised that with the increased importance of English at primary level, a good level of English is necessary to avoid professional loss of face, particularly in urban schools where many of the students

attend classes in private language centres and have a better level of language knowledge and proficiency than their teacher, as Chau articulates below:

...some teacher don't get B2, I think they don't know how to teach the children with their knowledge. English is important. English is spoken all over the world and many of my students can speak English very well and if I can't speak English they say 'oh', and they look at me!

(T.Chau.INT1/29.11.13)

The pressure on teachers to pass the B2 course is considerable in order to avoid both this loss of face and more permanent repercussions.

...if I cannot get the B2 I think the way they [principal and parents] look at me will be different.

(T.Bao.INT1/8.11.13)

I mean many teachers afraid of being sacked if they don't get B2 .

(T.Lien.INT1/5.11.13)

However it is interesting that although all the teacher participants hold a B2 certificate, many of them still feel their level of English is poor, as Lien (T.Lien.INT1/5.11.13) explains “...although I have B2, I always consider that I am under B2 level”. Similarly, Chi (T.Chi.INT1/12/11/13) expresses concern about her English ability “I think my speaking skill is very, very bad...” and dismisses her achievement of B2, “I don't believe myself!” This view seems to be slightly contradictory because on the one hand many of the teachers feel that they have gained some degree of status and credibility in getting their B2 certificate because it required them to take an exam which incorporated similar components to the valorised IELTS and TOEFL tests, yet at the same time they express concern particularly about their level of pronunciation. When teachers talk about their low English language proficiency, it seems to be their pronunciation they are referring to. This may be because there is a clearer norm and means of evaluation of pronunciation in terms of what is perceived as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ or ‘good’ or ‘bad’, while more general communication is harder to evaluate in the same way. Chi below remarks on the importance of pronunciation and the effect ‘bad’ pronunciation may have on her students, yet as shown in her words above, she feels that she lacks this ability to motivate her students.

I think when we teach primary students, pronunciation is the most important part. Good pronunciation gives students confidence in speaking. In case they see a word but fail to pronounce it, they will feel discouraged.

(T.Chi.INT2.translation/)

The perception of primary teachers' low level of competence is emphasised in both educational and public spheres which see English language teachers being the sole agents of change and view reform outcomes as dependent on their skills and knowledge, or lack of. There have been numerous headlines in both the English and Vietnamese press reflecting this perception which have not gone unnoticed by the teachers (see Chapter 2). This view of a deficit in teacher capacity is also expressed by some of the teachers' principals and one school principal has no qualms about telling me her English language teachers were not effective in the classroom.

My two kids learnt English from the teachers here and frankly, the teachers were not good...their teaching methods are out-dated. I have four teachers of English but I am only slightly satisfied with one for her pronunciation...

(School Principal District A. Translated/22.4.14)

During a visit to Chau's school I observed similar views in interactions with a maths teacher which I recorded in my Research Journal:

When I arrived at the school, I was met by a maths teacher who showed me into the staffroom where I waited for Chau. She had good English and seemed proud to show off her language skills. When Chau came into the room she seemed a bit intimidated by this teacher and she avoided speaking English by giving one word answers or commenting in Vietnamese. This was not normal behaviour for Chau. These feelings I had were confirmed at the end of the day when I asked why the same maths teacher was sitting in her Grade 3 class. Chau replied that it was because the maths teacher's daughter was in that class and she often sits in to check. I asked how she felt about that but she didn't answer I think there was more she wanted to say, but she felt uncomfortable.

(RJ/3.12.13)

This account suggests that the maths teachers' lack of confidence in Chau's teaching ability reinforces Chau's own self-conceptions of her low language ability, creating an environment where she is unlikely to take risks. So, despite having B2 certificates, the teachers appear to have an uphill struggle in gaining credibility as English language teachers in the eyes of others. This seems to be partly influenced by their general low status as primary school English teachers, since *"if someone is good they will not teach at primary schools"* ((School Principal District A. Translated/22.4.14)

Despite the teachers' own perceptions of the significance of their role in the NFLP 2020, the increased importance of English appears to have done little to change the

status of primary English language teachers, particularly since English has yet to be officially ratified as a compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum and so does not constitute part of the national exit exams needed at the end of primary education. As Lien comments below, echoing many of the other teachers, school colleagues continue to view her role as inferior and less important than the core curriculum subject teachers' role.

I hope that after 2020 our life will be more comfortable ... the viewpoint from other colleagues, from basic teachers, and I hope that especially the principal, because the principal now say that the English is not as important as Maths and Vietnamese so they haven't invested a lot for English and I hope that after this project they will have other viewpoint... many teachers say that English is just a short break for children to relax after Maths and Vietnamese. So they think that the English teacher is not as important or have important roles as other teachers. I feel rather sad about it because we are all teachers. We receive the salary, we have the same salary, but why? Why they look down at us? I don't like it.

(T.Lien.INT1/5.11.13)

Lien's words express her unhappiness about the way others appear to regard her as having no real standing in her school. The communicative approach outlined in the new curriculum has done little to alter colleagues' perceptions of the primary teachers, particularly since "*English classes are a bit noisier than those of other curricular subjects*" (T.Chau.INT2.Translation/16.12.13), suggesting less serious fun and games rather than a more traditional approach used in the majority of Maths and Vietnamese classes where the class teacher "*teach[es] in a different way where the students only sit and they don't need to talk like in an English class*" (T.Bao.INT2/14.11.13). This creates tension for the teachers as they have to deal with frequent complaints about noise from the other teachers and often their school principals, highlighting the inconsistency across the system whereby there is no apparent attempt to raise awareness of what the new curriculum is asking English teachers to do. Lien, for example, comments that:

It's difficult for English class and sometimes I myself have the complaints from the principal 'Why is your classes so noisy?' 'Why children go out of their seat?'

(T.Lien. INT1/5.11.13)

The low status afforded the teachers and their own conceptions of their ability, reinforced by others' perceptions, do little to foster an environment where the teachers are likely to take risks and go against what is expected of them, because, as Nias (1989, pp. 202-203) points out

...it matters to teachers themselves...who and what they are. Their self-image is more important to them as practitioners than is the case in occupations where the person can easily be separated from the craft.

This is confirmed in the data by one of the university teachers who comments that

...they [primary teachers] are not really brave enough to introduce more like different ways and ideas... they do not dare to or they feel that maybe they do not have enough authority to sort of decide the way they teach.

(UT.Phuong.INT2)

5.4.2 Issues of time

Within the implementation environment, the “tight temporal constraints” (Alexander, 2000, p.411) the teachers are working under seem to play an important role in the pedagogical decisions teachers make about what they do in the classroom.

5.4.2.1 Time and a centralized curriculum and syllabus

For the teachers in my study, worries about time relate to both the number of students in their classes and the amount of content they needed to cover in the set syllabus. As Mai notes:

I don't have much time to organise group activities because very difficult because the number of students are crowded and we can't move the table and chair yes and ... I teach one lesson [from the textbook] in one period but if I want to use my ideas, I have many ideas, to help students, some more activities, but I don't have enough time, because there are many, many things I have to do. What about 'talk'? I only have some minutes for talk, [for students] to make dialogues.

(T. Mai.O3/11.4.14)

Here Mai shows a desire to include extra activities into her lessons which would give the students an opportunity for more communicative practice yet in 35-minutes there is little time to deal with the classroom management involved in organising games and freer oral activities with a class of 65 students. This situation can be seen in her lesson extract in Figure 5.2 in the previous section.

All the teachers' lessons are 35-minutes long and they have two periods a week. The time-frame for the syllabus is determined at the provincial level following the syllabus guidelines set out by MOET and so within such a rigid framework there is little opportunity for negotiation by individual teachers as to how best to manage the time and activities within and across lessons. Nhung remarks that:

...we have to follow the curriculum for each lesson. We cannot pass one lesson. We cannot, yeah we have to follow all the curriculum.

(T.Nhung.O3/11/4/14)

The uncertainty regarding the rigidity of time and what the teachers should be doing in the classroom threatens their sense of professional self. The extracts below show the frustration and guilt Mai and Nhung felt at being unable to meet the needs of their students due to a lack of time.

I think the number of nervous [weak] students is very big and I want to concern a lot for every student, but I can't because I don't have enough time in each class. If there are only 20 or 30 [students] I think I can help all the students. I want to spend a lot of time to help especially the not good students but I don't have enough time to do this.

(T.Mai.INT1/4.11.13)

Sometimes I feel sorry for my students. I really to want to teach them but sometimes no time... and yes sometimes, sometimes I feel tired of teaching because the number of students are very big, so it's difficult for me to teach English so, yeah, sometimes I feel tired, tired.

(T.Nhung.INT1/5.12.13)

Similarly, Bao places importance on being seen as a 'good' primary teacher in control of her class and providing sufficient language input and correction, something she feels she is unable to do when following the requirements of the new curriculum.

When I call students to read new words or practise the new structures I only have time to call some pair or some students, not all the students and I cannot correct the mistake.

(T.Bao.INT2/14.11.13)

The new curriculum lends itself to a form of teaching that is much more time-consuming and unpredictable in terms of classroom learning events and outcomes. This creates a dilemma for the teachers in that they have to follow the new curriculum which requires a slower pace of teaching to provide the necessary communicative practice, yet they also need to fulfil the administrative requirements of the teaching time-frame. (This relates to the 'rushing' pace described in section 5.3.3.6.). These time constraints seemed to create a lot of emotional burden mediating the pedagogical decisions the teachers made in their classrooms. Nhung remarks:

I feel stressed because it's too difficult, too difficult and ...little time so we feel confused how to teach so that student can understand and have something [extra activity] in your mind, in your head, yes so really stressed. When I meet a lesson I feel worried, how can I follow to finish the first

semester? It's nearly the end of first semester but we haven't finished 10 lessons so we worry.

(T.Nhung.INT2/10.12.13)

The need to complete all the lessons in the textbook, as Nhung expresses above, is bound up in both the requirements of the DOET and also the need for their students to cover the set content for the test (see section 5.4.3.3 for more about the tests). Maintaining existing behaviours and practices in the classroom allows teachers to control the pace of teaching and ensure the required coverage of the syllabus, since “to be predictable is to be secure” (Alexander, 2000, p.415). Sticking to old ways of teaching also seems to be a pragmatic choice for the teachers in relation to temporal constraints.

I am stressed, worried very worried because ...if we don't teach carefully the other teacher say that yeah ...when for example I teach Grade 4 next year another teacher will teach Grade 5. If they don't study carefully in Grade 4, so it's difficult to study Grade 5.

(T.Nhung. INT2/10.12.13)

Nhung's words in the extract above show that the new curriculum brings with it the potential to be blamed by others for failing to cover the syllabus within the set time-frame. This is echoed by a school vice-principal who states that:

...it is really hard for teachers to do new things without violating the MOET framework. If they want to change, the school will need to wait for decisions from the District office, from the DOET, and from MOET.

(Vice-principal District C, translated /22.4.14)

The vice-principal's words hint at the extent to which what teachers do in the classroom is controlled by others in a chain of accountability. This suggests there is little opportunity for teachers to make their own judgements about what to cover and the time that that might take based on the needs of their own group of learners. The example illustrates the incoherence between curriculum assumptions about teacher behaviour and the existing expectations of and beliefs in the capacity and agency of teachers.

The teachers' fear of blame is compounded by the reality of having to teach unfinished units over the summer holidays in organised “*summer study in July before coming to the new school year*” (T.Nhung, INT2 /10.12.13). My data seem to corroborate Wang's (2011, p.7) findings from a study of primary teachers in China, that teachers

...continue with whole-class lecturing and rote learning not because they disagree with the ideals of the reform, but for self-protection, as it is easier to hold teachers accountable for failure to complete the textbook than for poor student learning outcomes.

5.4.2.2 Time and ad hoc planning policy

Issues of time appear to have also been exacerbated by ad hoc policy planning. Feelings of confusion arose amongst all the teachers in relation to curriculum policy, as Mai articulates below:

...as I know, the new curriculum and the new textbooks were published for students to learn four periods each week, but in our district the manager of our DOET give the timetable for each school only two periods, but in fact I wonder a lot because it's only two periods. It's not enough time for students and for teacher to teach all the contents of the textbooks.

(T.Mai. INT1/4.11.13)

The pilot programme for the implementation of the new curriculum required that schools provided four periods a week for English. This meant that the three pilot teachers in my study, Mai, Lien and Thanh, all taught four periods a week from 2010-2013. However from September 2013, all the pilot schools had reverted back to the former two periods of English a week, yet still followed the new curriculum and textbooks. The other non-pilot teachers did not have the opportunity to experience four periods and when they started using the new textbooks, they had to fit the content into the 2-period a week time-frame. For Mai and Lien this seems to have added to their frustration and sense of uncertainty as to what they should be doing in the classroom.

...when we teach four periods we have a chance to decide many activities for our children, for example, sing, chant, drawing or something like that, games. But when we do two periods per week children seems to have no chance to sing, have no chance for games. Ok so it's difficult.

(T.Lien. INT1/5.11.13)

As Lien's words above imply, this policy change appears to have quashed any attempts that teachers might have started to make towards new ways of teaching and perhaps explains a pragmatic preference for maintaining familiar teaching practices. Indeed the omission of communicative activities in favour of language content in order to cover the syllabus was officially suggested by MOET in a syllabus document which all the teachers refer to and follow, as Lien and Bao note:

MOET said that when we teach only two periods with this book, two periods a week, we can pass some 'soft' part. For example in this lesson this is soft part, you can put it away, but in four periods a week you can do it.

(T.Lien.INT1/5.11.13)

Um ...in fact we have a document to instruct us about using this textbook. They said that we must do this part [language] but we can do it or not this part [freer practice]. So this is just extra activities, if we don't have enough time we can pass this one.

(T.Bao.O1/28.11.13)

Temporal dissonance appears to be compounded by ad hoc mandates which seem to be in conflict with the demands of the curriculum and the new teaching approach the teachers are expected to implement.

...[now] the curriculum is shorter, we don't have time to do that [communicative activities] and of course my teaching has changed, have to change to fit the district comments because we mustn't leave out any unit in the textbook. We mustn't pass any part of the unit, we have to follow all of them. So we have a short time and our teaching is not as effective as four periods.

(T.Lien INT1/5.11.13)

Here Lien talks with a sense of resignation about having to be flexible in her teaching approach to suit the change in time allocation and the expectations of others, feeling that her very sense of professionalism is being undermined by having to revert back to previous ways of teaching.

Externally imposed temporal constraints would seem to have a significant influence on what teachers are able and willing to do in the classroom and link closely with the curriculum materials themselves.

5.4.3 The curriculum materials

In this section I refer to curriculum materials as the new Tieng Anh series of textbooks for Grade 3-5, the teacher's book for each level, the audio and supplementary resources provided with the textbooks and the assessment tests used by the teachers.

The teachers expressed concerns about the curriculum materials which seem to exacerbate their feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about the change process. This is in contrast to views of the textbook acting as an agent in curriculum reform (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994; Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1996) whereby curriculum materials can support teachers in implementation through guidance and structure,

creating a sense of security and enabling teachers to take on the challenge of change in their classrooms. This role of the textbooks would seem to be particularly crucial in the context of the teachers in this study who have limited classroom resources and rely heavily on the set books. Indeed, for many of the teachers, the textbooks are their sole information about the NFLP 2020, and as such they represent the 'picture' of what the curriculum reform is. As Chau notes:

I only know that this is the new book that I need to teach, but about the project, I don't catch much information.

(T.Chau.INT2. Translated/16.12.13)

5.4.3.1 Congruence with curriculum aims

While the teachers acknowledge that the new textbooks do have more of a focus on speaking and listening than the previous ones, they feel confused as to how they can foster a more communicative approach using the set tasks and activities. As Nhung ponders:

I think really difficult because for example students learn about 'where are you from?', they only know this, but next time they learn another model and they forget and so it's difficult to make it logical so they remember everything...I think they are like a machine...like robots...they learn by heart the model and they [the textbooks] cannot give it a real situation for them.

(T.Nhung.INT2/10.12.13)

Nhung goes on to admit that "*I don't feel any confident with this book*" (T.Nhung.INT2/10.12.13). Here Nhung suggests that the textbook still focuses on discrete language items with little meaningful context or practise and the tasks are structured in a way which reflects the prevailing ways of teaching and learning through iterative practice. "*Like a machine ...like robots...they learn by heart*" tends to be what happens in other subject classes and is the norm in most schools in Vietnam. Although Nhung, like the other teachers, enacted this approach in her lessons, she is aware of the idea of 'communicativeness' (as was illustrated in section 5.3.2) and feels confused and uncertain as to what is expected of her. This view is echoed by Chau who feels the textbooks do not give her students the opportunity to practise freely in personalised situations.

I think with the lesson you see ...many lesson it is the same picture, the same activity...They [the students] don't like it. They want to say their answer not look at this. I think they can speak what they like...because my children are like me , they think that this is the same [activity] and they see

this picture they don't want to say this, they want to talk about themselves, for example their name or their hobby ...but if they look at here, it is the same, not about them.

(T.Chau.INT1/29.11.13)

The extract below in Figure 5.13 from Tieng Anh 4 exemplifies the dilemma Chau feels, where the activities in 'Look and Say' and 'Talk' require repetition of predetermined language items and as Chau points out, do not allow students freer and more meaningful practice. This is true of activities throughout the lessons in the unit and typical of the structure of the Tieng Anh series.

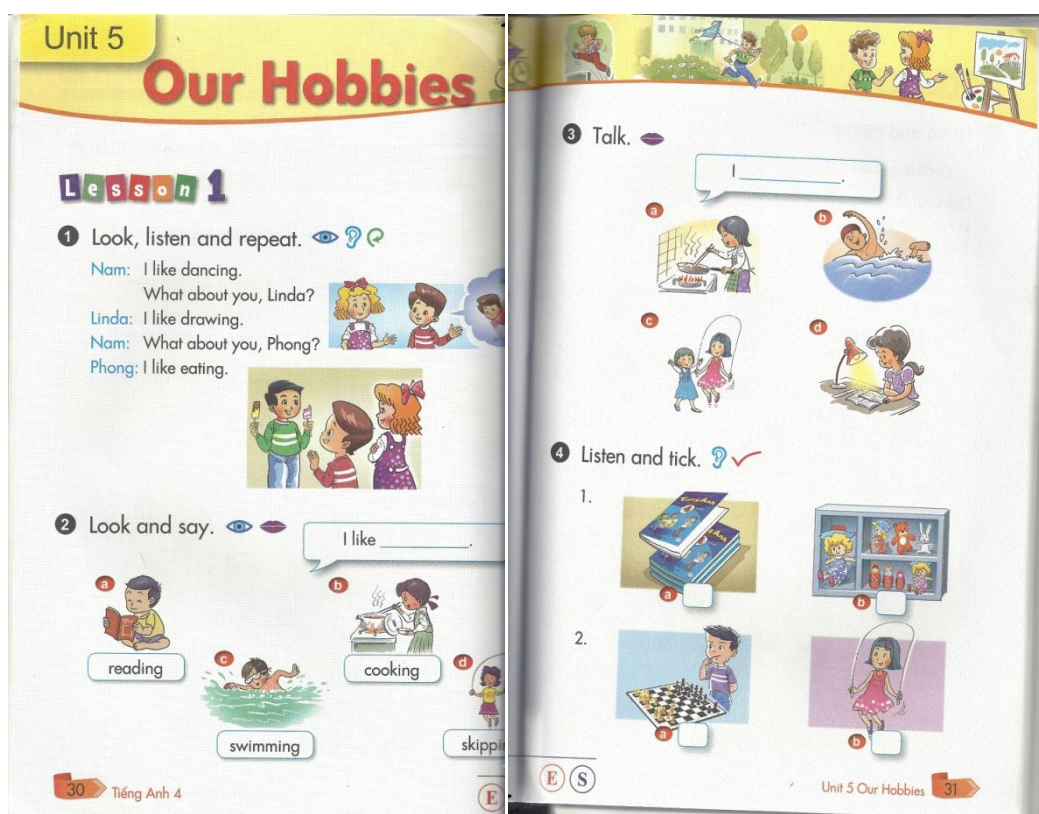


Figure 5.13 Extract from Tieng Anh 4, Unit 5 Lesson 1, pages 30 and 31

In section 5.3.3.1 the data highlighted how the teachers followed the structure of each unit in the textbook, and so this mismatch between the teaching approach the curriculum espouses and the approach implicit in the tasks set out in the textbook seems to influence what pedagogical decisions the teachers make in the classroom.

Related to the textbooks, four of the teachers also express worries about the incoherence surrounding the transition between grades. As was mentioned in section 5.4.1, teachers are concerned about who they are and what they do and have a strong sense of professionalism. Teachers desire to help their students is challenged by the ad hoc policy planning in the transition from Grade 5 in primary to Grade 6 in lower secondary level. Lien remarks that

some good students feel very disappointed and at [secondary]school they say they do nothing because everything they know and just sing and chant together and with the old book the activities are not different, I mean the tradition teaching method, so students feel very bored. Boring, it's boring lesson so they just chatting together...so it's a pity, it's a pity because after three years they have accessed a lot from the textbook but now they come to the start.

(T.Lien.TGP/18/4/14)

For many of the teachers, knowing that their students will have to start from the beginning and have limited communicative language practice when they move to Grade 6 and follow the old curriculum and textbook is perhaps a demotivating factor considering the effort required on their part to implement the new curriculum at primary level.

5.4.3.2 Student assessment

These worries and anxieties are further compounded by the new assessment test. In line with the new curriculum the test format includes speaking and listening components which the previous test did not have. However, as Chi explains below, the teachers are unable to include any kind of oral assessment of their students due to class size and the temporal constraints highlighted in the previous section.

The Project, or more precisely, the textbook, aims to teach students listening and speaking skills, but the test demands that they write. Out of 68 or 70 class hours in a school year, there is no room for oral tests. The goal is to make students listen and speak, but students' listening and speaking skills are not tested.

(T.Chi.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

This is echoed by Bao:

In an academic year, we have two mid-term tests and final tests, one class hour each, and given dozens of students in the class, the teacher has no time for oral tests.

(T.Bao. TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

As has already been mentioned, due to time constraints, the teachers feel compelled to omit many of the speaking activities in the textbook and concentrate on controlled language practice, and their treatment of the test is very much the same. Chau notes that

Actually most speaking parts are skipped. How can we have time for testing?

(T.Chau.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

It is not only the lack of time to carry out oral assessment that worries teachers. Some teachers also comment on the fact that it is only discrete language items that are tested and not language used in situational contexts. This is expressed by Chi in the extract below.

What is more, contexts are not set for listening questions; students just listen sentence by sentence.

(T.Chi, TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

Although MOET has provided a framework for the test, it is the responsibility of each school to produce their own tests following this framework. This means that it is the teachers who set and mark their own tests throughout the school year. Despite this relative freedom, the tests written by the teachers in this study focus very much on accuracy of language form; what the teachers are all familiar with.

As was discussed in section 5.4.1, the teachers' conceptions of who they are and what they do are important. In the midst of the disruptive and threatening process of curriculum change the desire for security is strong, whether this be continuity in the classroom or meeting the expectations of others. Although English is not officially compulsory and is not a required subject to enter secondary school, the test is still seen as important and "*indicates a good teacher and a good school*" (DOET official. 25.4.14). With the emphasis in the test still very much on the learning of discrete language items, it is likely that this is what the teachers will also focus on in terms of teaching content and approach.



5.4.3.3 Support materials

In times of curriculum reform, a textbook has the benefit of providing teachers with guidance about how to implement changes and saving them time in planning lessons (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). However comments from most teachers suggest that this does not seem to be the case with Tieng Anh, as Bao notes with regard to the Teacher's Book:


...the teacher's book is the guidelines for the teacher, but models in that book are not good, rarely applicable.

(T. Bao.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

The Teachers' Book provides procedural support for each of the tasks and activities and reflects very much the way the teachers conducted their classes in the lessons I observed. There is no evidence of more conceptual support with the 'why' or 'how' of particular activities or alternative, supplementary activities that could be added. This can be seen in the example from Tieng Anh 3 Teachers' Book in Figure 5.14 below.

  **2. Look and say.**

- Tell pupils that they are going to practise asking and answering about activities at break time. Give the meanings of the phrases in the pictures a, b, and d. Have pupils repeat these phrases a few times. Then point to Picture a and tell pupils to pretend to be the children in the picture and ask what they should say to answer the question *What do you do at break time?* Fill the speech bubbles with the phrase prompted by the pupils. Then have the whole class repeat the question and the answer a few times. Repeat the step with one or two pictures more. Then have pupils repeat all the questions and answers a few times.
- Pairwork. Pupils practise asking and answering in pairs. Monitor the activity and offer help. Correct pronunciation error(s) (stress, assimilation of sounds, intonation) when necessary.
- Call on a pair to demonstrate at the front of the class. The rest of the class observe and comment.
- Ask a few questions to check pupils' comprehension of the language.
- Have the whole class repeat all the questions and answers to reinforce their pronunciation.

 **3. Talk.**

- Have pupils look at the pictures on Page 67 of the Student Book. Tell them to identify the activities in these pictures. Point to Picture a and ask pupils to guess what they should ask one of the children about his/her activity at break time and what they should answer if they are asked the same question. Fill the speech bubbles with the phrases prompted by the pupils. Then have the whole class repeat both the question and the answer a few times. Repeat the step with one or two pictures more before letting the pupils practise freely with the pictures in their books or do some research with interviews.
- Call on some pairs to perform the task at the front of the class. The rest of the class observe and comment.
- Ask a few questions to check pupils' comprehension of the language.
- Have the whole class repeat all the questions and answers to reinforce their pronunciation.

Figure 5.14 Extract from Tieng Anh 3 Teachers' Book Unit 10, p.86

This extract also shows how many of the steps described in 'Look and Say' mirror the procedures in the next activity, hardly providing variety and motivation to a young learner classroom. The recommended procedures also confirm Chau's concerns,

mentioned in section 5.4.3.1, that many of the activities on the textbooks do not allow room for students to create language themselves.

As was highlighted in section 5.3.1, the teachers are in favour of the new curriculum and appear to want to do their best to implement changes in their teaching. In keeping with this view, the majority of them say they are reluctant to blindly follow the guidelines in the Teachers' Book, since as Nhung remarks:

If we strictly follow the steps in the lesson plans, it is very boring. So we have to be creative.

(T.Nhung.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

This is echoed by Chi:

I really want to follow the intentions of the textbook's authors. However, in some parts, I set up my own ideas to carry out the teaching more smoothly.

(T.Chi.INT2.Translated/13.11.13)

Here Nhung and Chi suggest that they need to adapt and supplement the textbooks with more creative ideas. From the lessons I observed this seems to be reflected in the teachers' use of games and songs not include in the textbook or Teachers' Book. However, whether this creativity is a reality is questionable, since they also face the challenge of temporal constraints, and as much as they might want to 'do their own thing', the pressure for continuity rather than change is great. Considering also the effort and time required to create extra ideas and materials and the low status afforded teachers, it is hardly surprising that many of them felt as Lien does:

...sometimes I feel stress because you know many activities have to create for the class and each week ...you have to prepare the lesson very well. Ok sometimes I feel 'oh why we teach this book? Why don't we teach another book?' because it's easier. If I taught another book I could play with my friends, I would have time for my family, so sometimes stress and I feel all of that.

(T.Lien.INT2/7.11.13)

It is interesting that Thanh was the only teacher who felt that the Teachers' Book did provide him with adequate support and his observed lessons showed that he stuck closely to the suggested procedures.

Teacher's book is very good because it's written in English and it gives how to teach and the suitable method for each part. From this book you know how to ask students to work in pairs, in groups and I can know the stages of teaching.

(T.Thanh.INT1/29.11.13)

However both he and the other teachers felt strongly about the lack of supplementary materials to help them with activities.

In this book, when we teach this book we don't have some materials to support us. I have to do by myself. For example when I teach Grade 4 here, I have to make myself about the flag...

(T.Nhung.INT2/10.12.13)

The pedagogical choices that the teachers' make in the classroom as presented in section 5.3.3, seems to be shaped to some extent by the curriculum materials. If the teachers are using a new textbook that is endorsed by MOET and states that the content reflects the aim of the new curriculum, then teachers will no doubt presume that by following the tasks and activities, they are implementing the curriculum. Where there appears to be an explicit mismatch between the desired outcomes and the prescribed materials, the teachers feel anxiety and confusion, compounded by the temporal constraints mentioned earlier. Added to this are the many contradictions in the 'messages they receive' from the implementation environment around them, which I go on to discuss.

5.4.4 Support for teachers

What comes across strongly in the teachers' talk about their perceptions of the support they received is the insufficiency of the training they got and its lack of relevance to the reality of their working contexts. As has already been mentioned in previous sections, the curriculum constitutes a significant change in classroom behaviours and practices for the teachers, which many of the teachers recognise and are struggling to cope with. Indeed at the start of the implementation process, the teachers recall initial feelings of stress and anxiety about using the new textbooks. Lien and Chau's feelings typify those of the other teachers.

...so first at the pilot programme I feel very worried. I worry about the curriculum, it is new. I worry about the textbook because it's different from what I used to teach, so very worried.

(T.Lien.INT/7.11.13)

...the books are new. Sometimes I don't feel confident that I can teach a lesson well.

(T.Chau.INT2.Translation/16.12.13)

Support for teachers at the start of any change process would seem to be crucial in influencing how teachers perceive and understand the changes they are required to undertake and ultimately the extent to which they are then able to make those changes. My data in this section relates to teachers' perceptions of the textbook training workshops organised by MOET at the start of implementation, the longer three-month language and methodology courses organised by the local universities that most teachers attended and other ad hoc workshops organised by DOET during the initial implementation period.

5.4.4.1 Amount of support

The initial support provision for the teachers differed depending on whether the teachers were part of the pilot programme or not. The pilot teachers Mai, Lien and Thanh attended a one-week workshop in the summer of 2010 which introduced them to the new curriculum and Tieng Anh 3. The following summer they participated in a shorter two-day workshop for Tieng Anh 4. However there was no workshop in the summer of 2012 in preparation for the introduction of Tieng Anh 5. In contrast, Bao, Nhung, Chi and Chau had less support. As Bao recalls:

We didn't have much training. For Tieng Anh 3 there was one workshop. The workshop was to launch the book...For Tieng Anh 4, the book was just given to us with no introduction. This was the same for English 5, so actually there was no training at all.

(T.Bao.TNPG.translated/17.4.14)

The teachers' concerns and uncertainties about the new textbooks appear to be more acute in relation to Grade 5. All teachers comment that this is the book they find the most difficult to teach, because there is more content to cover and the language introduced is challenging for the students. Tieng Anh 5 also contains short reading passages, and from the classroom observations it is clear that the teachers feel uncomfortable as to how best to approach them, usually ending up using them as choral repetition exercises. None of the teachers have received official support for Grade 5.

All the teachers attended the three-month language and methodology course organised by the universities as part of the teacher capacity building plan under the NFLP 2020 with the exception of Chau. She passed the B2 test on first attempt and so did not need to attend the language improvement course and for reasons unknown to her, at the time of this research she had not been asked to attend the methodology part of the course. Her sense of frustration and resentment is evident in the exchange below:

Chau: You were fortunate to have training. As for me, I received no training at all.

Nhung: We enjoyed the training. Our knowledge was broadened through training.

Chau: I sat and passed the test and then I was excluded from training.

Nhung: We learn the methods through training.

Chi: Very interesting methods

Nhung: Yes very interesting and improved our knowledge.

Chau: I mean you have opportunities of being trained, for me I don't!

(TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

As was mentioned in section 5.4.1, Chau has little confidence in her teaching ability and missing opportunities for support with the new curriculum have not helped. Her words above also suggest a sense of isolation from her peers which, as I go on to discuss in section 5.4.4.3, is exacerbated by the organisational structure of her school. The conversation extract above also shows that for some of the teachers, the support they received, particularly through the university INSET courses was useful and enjoyable. These feelings were less readily expressed in relation to the textbook workshops.

5.4.4.2 Relevance of support

Although some of the teachers' initial fears and anxieties about how to teach the new curriculum may have been alleviated to some extent through the initial support they received, uncertainty and concerns still remained.

...There were hundreds of attendants in one session, one to two hours for introducing the book, the author and format, no official training...

(T.Bao.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

Bao's extract above refers to the large numbers of participants all the teachers experienced in the textbook training workshops, meaning that there was little opportunity for discussion or reflection. In the workshops "*we don't have much time to practise*" (T.Mai.TPG/18.4.14) and "*most of us just look and hear, we cannot do*" (T.Nhung,INT1/5.12.13). This suggests an inconsistency between the 'spirit' of the textbook training and the notion of 'learning through doing' as the spirit of the communicative approach in the new curriculum. This incoherence is of concern to the teachers because it is the pedagogical unfamiliarity of the curriculum that they feel they need support with, rather than a focus on procedural knowledge which these workshops seemed to concentrate on. Lien articulates this concern below:

I agree, I confirm that the [textbook] workshop does not meet our needs. I must say so. For example we go to the workshop, not only for the step of the lesson. We have already, we can find it in the Teacher's Book, we can find when we study at the college. But when we go to the workshop they just tell us the steps for the lesson. We know already! What we desire is that the way they introduce task, the way! That means the 'how'! How we get to the purpose, not the step. Just for example new words, just present words, practise new words, we know already, but we want to consider how, how to introduce them to the student. It is difficult.

(T.Lien.TPG/18.4.14)

This was echoed by the others who felt that this training only provided them with factual information about the textbooks rather than support with implementing new methodology. The nature of the textbook workshops suggests that perhaps the approach used is what the trainers themselves feel confident about doing, and seems to mirror what the teachers also feel confident about doing in their classrooms: providing factual information about language for their learners.

This lack of support meant that to some extent the teachers were left to get on with the task of changing their teaching practices and behaviours themselves, creating a sense of isolation which I discuss further in the next section.

It means we create and we teach on our own with our knowledge of pedagogy. We read books and try and figure out how to teach.

(T.Chi.TNPG.Translation/17.4.14)

Chi's words in the extract above suggest that without support in pedagogical change, the teachers are trying to make sense of the new curriculum within the parameters of their existing knowledge, and so perhaps in such circumstances it seems likely that what teachers do in the classroom will resemble what is already known and familiar to them.

Section 5.4.1 highlighted the pressures on the teachers to pass the B2 certificate and attend the language improvement course organized by the local universities. While many of the teachers enjoyed the course itself because it "*improved my English*" (T.Bao.INT2/14.11.13), it is interesting that all the teachers commented that a B2 level of language proficiency was not something they needed to teach their classes on a daily basis. This contradiction seems to cause a certain amount of worry for many of the teachers because they seem to be confused as to what new skills are required to teach the new curriculum. The policy emphasis on language proficiency as a requirement for implementing the new curriculum seems to be at odds with the challenges and difficulties that the teachers face in actual implementation. On one hand the teachers are being asked to adopt a more communicative approach, yet on

the other, what is officially viewed as important is language proficiency and knowledge rather than the pedagogic knowledge and skills required to develop young learners' communicative competence.

I myself think is this B2 good or not good? Or important or not important? Because teaching for young learner we don't need a lot of English knowledge...in the past some specialist in MOET said that if teacher can't get B2, they can't teach anymore. But the thing is, it is not necessary because I think B2 is knowledge, but for primary teachers I think the more important thing is teaching methodologies, especially teaching children. I think it's more important...You know many teachers who have been teaching for 20 years, that means they got the knowledge with the old teaching method. I think the traditional teachers 'say' and the students 'listen and repeat' what teacher said but now it's [the new methodology] not that.

(T.Mai.TGP/18.4.14)

Here Mai questions the level of importance placed on the B2 requirement in relation to her actual working context where the language she uses on a daily basis with her primary-aged students in the classroom is “*simple English*” (T.Mai.INT1/4.11.13). She feels that knowledge and skills in how to teach young learners has more practical use, particularly because this is an area where they did not have any initial training in. This view is echoed by others:

...it's hard to teach children, young learners. Some teachers they don't have B2 [certificate] but they teach very well, perfectly. They have some more experience. I think it's [methodology] important.

(T.Thanh. INT1/29.11.13)

...our English is good enough to teach the primary students and the methodology is very important, yeah. Some teachers they come from the university and they cannot teach primary students.

(T.Bao. INT2/14.11.13)

It is interesting that in these accounts above, the teachers do not appear to see a connection between having ‘good’ language proficiency and being confident enough to allow freer language use in the classroom, again suggesting an inconsistency in what they believe good language learning and teaching is and the kind of behaviours and practices implicit in the new curriculum.

The B2 course run by the universities appears to have been designed around an amalgamation of IELTS and TOEFL tests and so perhaps it is the nature of this emphasis on uncontextualised language items and structure that is at odds with the more practical language use needed by primary teachers.

Similar feelings of confusion surrounded the relevance of some of the topics and ideas in the methodology training. As Chau comments:

I have attended some workshops, but to be honest they didn't help me much...they introduce me to things that I think we cannot achieve, for example how to use the IWB and of course my school will not buy that kind of board...the workshops often last about one or two days, but I think it is a waste of time to sit listening to something that isn't applicable to my teaching.

(T.Chau.INT2.Translated/16.12.13)

Teachers express frustration about the relevance of much of the initial support provided for them, yet there is also a sense of resignation about the inevitability of it since they have no choice in whether they attend or not. This sense of compulsion is discussed further in Chapter 6, section 6.5.1 in relation to the perceived roles of those involved in implementation. Chau expresses this frustration well below.

I'd stay at home if I knew that the workshop involved something like the IWB, but of course, I don't have the right to choose whether to attend or not as my name is listed in the list of teachers sent to the workshop.

(T.Chau.INT2.Translated/16.12.13)

This compulsion adds to their anxieties surrounding time discussed in section 5.4.2, since time spent in DOET training workshops means missed classes and missed syllabus content, again highlighting little thought in the planning process about what effect various decisions might have on both the emotional and day-to-day working life of teachers.

It would seem from the data that teachers' worries about the new teaching approach in the curriculum and the materials have at best only been partially alleviated by the initial support they have received. Chapter 6 explores this support for teachers further in relation to how the trainers and others perceive it. Teachers have been left to muddle through on their own and this is a significant mediating influence on what happens in their classrooms, with teachers seeking comfort and confidence in their existing teaching practices and behaviours.

5.4.4.3 A sense of isolation

Linked closely with perceptions of support is the sense of isolation teachers feel. The organizational context of the schools means that the teachers are very much working alone. While professional independence is often viewed as a good thing in education, my data shows that the teachers' isolation is not a choice and indeed limits their opportunities to reflect on and consider the new teaching practices and behaviours

that the new curriculum demands. The teachers' sense of isolation creates feelings of uncertainty and appears to be one of the mediating influences on what pedagogical decisions teachers make or do not make in the classroom.

There is generally only one permanent contract English language teacher in each school to teach the new curriculum from Grade 3 to Grade 5 with perhaps one or two hourly-paid teachers who are usually responsible for lower grades. These hourly-paid teachers teach in many different schools and so are very rarely available after their lessons. The exception is Nhung's school where there are five permanent teachers of English. However this did not lessen her sense of isolation, since as she puts it:

...rarely we have a chance to meet each other. Yeah five teachers but each of us will teach one grade! So it's difficult to share. I work individually most of the time. I have to work individually, but it's difficult. I don't have a colleague to share, yes so difficult thing.

(Nhung.INT2/10.12.13)

This seems to fit Lortie's (1975) notion of schools having an "egg-carton" structure where teachers work in isolation and with little interaction with colleagues. The situation contrasts with secondary schools, where there are usually two or three permanent English teachers employed. The teachers' isolation appeared to increase their uncertainties about their work at the start of the curriculum implementation process and seemed to be counterproductive to any of the initial support initiatives teachers received. This was particularly acute for the pilot teachers, Mai, Lien and Thanh, who, at the start of the pilot programme, were the only teachers in their district using the new textbooks, as Lien notes below:

Sometimes I feel isolated from our colleagues because all of them teach one kind of book. Only me the person who teach the other materials [Tieng Anh textbooks] ...so we feel isolation when we have a meeting in the district. You know our district have a monthly meeting with the English teachers so at the meeting we can share our experience, we can share our difficulties ... so that the colleagues can help. But I myself have one materials and I feel isolation. Everything I say they [the other teachers] say 'Oh I don't know, I don't know about that. I don't teach that book, I don't know', so I feel ...

(T.Lien.INT2/7.11.13)

As well as the isolation created by policy and organisational structures, the teachers also commented on the 'communicative' isolation they felt in relation to the limited opportunities they had to use and practise their English.

As a teacher, I have to improve my skills, but it is quite constrained without a communicative environment. In my training course for the B2 test, we were very active during the lessons and our skills were improved. But after the class ended, we came back to our normal teaching, just me and my students, and my English skills did not seem to be as good as before, in the absence of communicative situations. So it is difficult for professional development if we are just on our own, without a favourable environment.

(T.Chi.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

Here Chi associates this isolation with the relevance and effectiveness of both the initial support she received and possible on-going development. The teachers' sense of isolation is compounded by the lack of support available from others within their schools. Chi's comment above that "*we are just on our own*" seems to refer to both the logistical fact that she is working alone in her school as the only English teacher, and also the isolation she feels with other colleagues. With little opportunity to seek help from peers, it would seem natural for the teachers to turn to their principal or vice-principal. However in all the research schools "*the principal or the vice principal and the other teachers in the school they don't know English*" (T.Bao.INT2/14.11.13) and were unable to support the teachers in adopting new teaching approaches or using the textbooks. This seems to matter to the teachers because they feel left out and left on their own to muddle through, as Bao articulates below:

It does matter because teachers in Maths and Vietnamese frequently have many opportunities for professional development. It could be the case the vice-principal specialises in Maths and Vietnamese, so he or she can give lots of support to teachers in these subjects. For English ...class visits and observation by senior mentors are rare, and professional development is only occasional.

(T.Bao.TGNP.Translation/17.4.14)

In the face of this professional isolation, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the teachers seem to value the opportunities for peer collaboration provided through the training workshops and courses (mentioned in section 5.4.4) more than the actual predetermined content of these courses. As Bao notes:

Generally speaking, opportunities to have discussions with colleagues in the same field are precious...it offers us chances to meet other colleagues and to learn from each other.

(T.Bao.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

My data reveals that the opportunities for teachers to work with peers seems to be significant in shaping teachers' confidence and expanding the kinds of pedagogical

choices they have to draw on in their classrooms. I discuss this further in the next chapter.

While the teachers express a sense of isolation within their school, they are able to turn to their DS, who is responsible for English language teaching and learning in their district, for help. However for teachers working in Districts A and C, this added layer of support did not seem to reduce their sense of isolation. Bao shows embarrassment when she admits that her DS only visits her school once a year, suggesting that:

Specialists in English have to manage primary and secondary schools, and many of them give priority to the secondary level above the primary one.

(T.Bao.TGNP.Translated/17.4.14)

However this contrasts with the experiences of Lien and Chi in District B, who are able to compensate for the isolation they feel at school with strong support and guidance from their district specialist.

That's not the case with my specialist. She manages weekly group meetings. There could be more meetings in case of emerging problems. We can discuss difficulties, testing, and so on. It's a good forum for professional exchange. Thanks to my specialist, I can share my experience and learn from other colleagues. It's a good example in my district, I think.

(T.Chi.TGNP.Translation/17.4.14)

And the DS help me a lot in teaching, especially the teaching method. We learnt a lot from her. Sometimes she visits our class and we always communicate, we always exchange and share. I share her what I feel difficult to teach, I feel difficult to explain to children and she is willing to help me, by phone or even the mail. Sometimes I can meet her and share my difficulties and she helps me with my teaching.

(T.Lien. INT1/5.11.13)

These extracts highlight not just the frequency and type of support Lien and Chi receive, but the nature of their relationship with the DS. This caring and supportive relationship seems to be unique to District B and appears to shape the extent to which Lien and Chi are able to make some of the required changes in their teaching, evident in the data presented in section 5.3.3. The nature and influence of district-level relationships is something I examine in greater depth in the following chapter.

So, within their schools, the teachers seem to be working behind 'closed doors' (Cuban, 2013; Cahn and Barnard, 2009) in isolated spaces. Lien and Chi's sense of isolation in District B seems to be lessened by the greater support from their DS. For the majority of the teachers, their professional and 'communicative' isolation does little to allay the uncertainties and anxieties they have about what and how they should be

teaching and suggests a situation more likely to encourage continuity rather than change.

5.5 Chapter summary

My findings in this chapter have shown that the teachers have found the process of curriculum change hard going. I have shown through the data how their experiences so far have been largely that of anxiety and uncertainty about what they should be doing in the classroom as a result of inconsistent messages they have received from across the system; messages which reflect a lack of coherence of structures and relationships within the implementation environment. This has been shown through the data by:

- The perceived status and capacity of primary English language teachers which conflicts with the importance placed on their role in the change process
- The dilemmas surrounding how to fulfil the desired outcomes of the new curriculum within the temporal demands of a highly centralized teaching and learning schedule.
- Curriculum materials which do not reflect the learner-centred approach in the new curriculum.
- Ad hoc curriculum policy planning which has not taken into account a smooth transition between grades.
- Limited initial support which the teachers feel was often incongruent with what they needed help with.
- A training approach in the support workshops which reflects existing conceptions of teaching and learning
- Less support provided for non-pilot teachers, although they are still expected to implement the same curriculum and make the same changes.
- The structural organisation of the teachers' working contexts which influences the possible interaction they have with others and possible spaces where they can begin to reflect on and try out new ideas.

These inconsistencies have resulted in teachers understandably feeling anxious and uncertain about what they should be doing in their classrooms; emotions that are compounded by their perceptions of the benefits of change and therefore their desire to take on board new ideas. Within this landscape of uncertainty the teachers seem to be being steered towards continuity, where previous teaching practices and

behaviours appear to be less risky and less likely to go against the expectations of those in authority.

The data in this chapter has shown how the relationships between the teachers and the wider implementation environment are important. The next chapter will explore these relational influences across layers of the system in more detail, through an analysis of how other key implementers, DSs and UTs, also make sense of the new curriculum implementation process.

Chapter 6 District specialists and university trainers making sense of change

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings that emerged from the data in response to the following research question:

How do other key implementers (district specialists and university INSET trainers) involved in supporting these teachers, make sense of the change?

- What are their perceptions and interpretations of the new curriculum?
- What appears to influence the sense they make of the new curriculum?

In this chapter, the findings are presented by theme rather than by stakeholder group (i.e. DSs and UTs). This chapter structure allows me to set out both individual cases as well as a cross-case analysis of the data to illuminate the multi-dimensionality of the larger case; that of the sense-making of curriculum change in three districts.

The chapter begins by highlighting what sense the DSs and UTs make of the new curriculum and change process. The section that follows examines what appears to influence this sense-making and how the DSs' and UTs' perceptions and understandings influence the nature of support they provide for teachers. The data are arranged in the following way:

- Understandings of the new curriculum
- Perceptions of change
- Influences on sense-making:
 - Curriculum policy and materials
 - Support for district specialists and trainers
 - Perceptions of roles of implementers
 - The nature of support for teachers
 - Relationships and communication

While these themes are presented in distinct sections, the interconnectedness of the influences on sense-making across different layers of the education system that the findings reveal in this chapter means that throughout the chapter the reader will

encounter both forward and back referencing to issues, tensions and participant talk across themes.

I begin the chapter by introducing seven new actors into the curriculum change narrative; namely three DSs and four UTs who are responsible for supporting teachers (including the seven participant teachers) in curriculum implementation. References are also made in the analysis of the data to other peripheral participants described in Chapter 4, section 4.7.1.4. In chapter 5, Figure 5.1 showed the district clusters of teacher participants in the case.

Figure 6.1 below attempts to show the interconnected professional world of these teachers involving other key players in different roles in the implementation process across multiple layers of the education system.

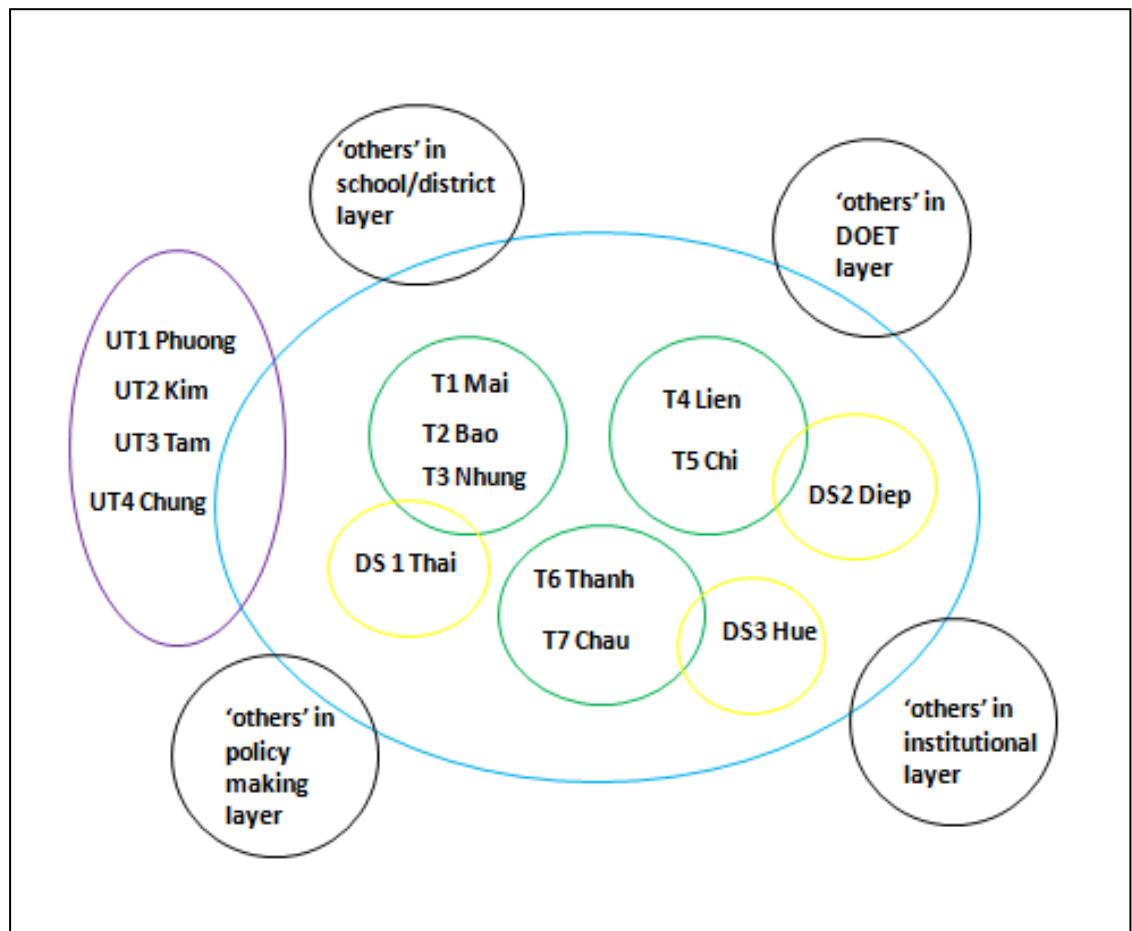


Figure 6.1 The interconnected case participants across different layers of the system

6.2 District specialist and trainer profiles

6.2.1 The district specialists

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Thai District A | Thai has been working as an English language specialist in this district since 2010. He is young and ambitious and sees his new appointment from high school teacher to district specialist as a stepping stone towards becoming a school principal. He is proud of his promotion which he perceives as recognition of his teaching skills and experience. Thai trained to be a high school English language teacher. His work covers responsibilities for English language teaching and learning in primary, lower secondary schools and kindergartens. |
| Diep District B | Diep has been an English language specialist for more than 10 years. She started her career working as an English teacher in a lower secondary school for seven years. She became a district specialist because she wanted to work with teachers and to give them support. Diep has been involved in a number of projects with international organisations which have helped her to gain more understanding and awareness of primary English language teaching and learning. Her work covers responsibilities for English language teaching and learning in primary, lower secondary schools and kindergartens. |
| Hue District C | Hue was a lower secondary teacher for 15 years. Prior to that she was a class teacher in a primary school while she was studying at university. She has been an English language specialist for five years and has worked in District C for three years. Many of the parents in District C are able to pay for schools to collaborate with international organisations to provide young native speaker teachers or classroom assistants. Hue's job also involves monitoring these foreign teachers as well as the Vietnamese English language teachers in primary, lower secondary and kindergarten levels. |

Table 6.1 Profile of the district specialists

6.2.2 The university INSET trainers

| | |
|--------|--|
| Phuong | Phuong graduated in 2009 and immediately started work as a lecturer in the same university teaching English. Her university specialises in translation and interpretation studies. In 2010 Phuong embarked on a MA TESOL programme in Australia and when she returned to Vietnam in 2011 she started as a trainer on the 2020 project in-service courses for primary teachers. In 2012 she attended a train the trainer course to support her in delivering the in-service courses for primary teachers. Phuong has no classroom teaching experience in state schools, although she has taught English to primary students in a private language centre and also conducts private lessons with small groups of children. |
| Kim | Kim has been working as a lecturer in English for more than 10 years. Kim's university specialises in foreign languages and the majority of students are training to be high school English language teachers. Her university is also regarded as a key partner in the 2020 project and has responsibility for researching and planning the testing and assessment of English language under the NFLP. In 2012 Kim was chosen to participate in the same trainer training programme as Phuong to enable her to deliver in-service courses to primary |

| | |
|-------|---|
| | English language teachers. Since then she has also taken on the role of training and mentoring novice trainers to expand the number of university teachers involved in the in-service training programmes. Kim started as a trainer on these courses in 2011 and was also involved in developing materials for some of the modules based on the curriculum approved by MOET. |
| Tam | Tam is a young teacher and works at the same university as Kim. She became a university teacher straight after graduation. She teaches English for Specific Purposes modules. She started delivering some of the methodology and language proficiency courses for primary teachers as part of the NFLP in-service training programme at the end of 2011. Prior to that that she attended the one-week course organised by MOET to learn how to train primary English language teachers. Tam has no classroom teaching experience at primary level. |
| Chung | Chung has been a university teacher for 12 years and she teaches English major students. She has no classroom teaching experience in schools as she became a university teacher immediately after her graduation. However she runs private classes for primary students at her home and also teaches IELTS and TOEFL preparation classes. Chung attended a seven-day course in 2011 organised by MOET to prepare her to be a trainer on the primary in-service courses. Later she also participated in the longer train the trainer course that Kim and Phoung were part of. Chung began delivering language proficiency and methodology courses for in-service primary teachers in 2011. |

Table 6.2 Profile of the university trainers

The names of the district specialists and trainers have been changed. Throughout this chapter I include extracts from interviews which I have coded to show the particular participant, data source and date. So for example:

(DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13) refers to Interview 1 with (district specialist) Thai on 21 November 2013.

(UT.Chung.INT3/14.4.14) refers to Interview 3 with (university trainer) Chung on 14 April 2014.

I also refer to data gathered from meetings with significant others involved in the implementation process and observations of model lessons and training workshops, which I recorded in notes. (For a list of these significant others see Chapter 4, section 4.5.4). I code these in the following way:

(DOET official. Meeting notes/12.12.13) – an extract from my notes of a meeting with an official from the provincial department of DOET on 12 December 2013.

I indicate in the extract codes where the data has been translated.

6.3 Making sense of the new curriculum

6.3.1 Perceptions of change

Like the teachers, the DSs and UTs are supporters of the new curriculum reform. They perceive the larger NFLP 2020 as a positive initiative to improve English language skills reflecting the growing importance of English. While the teachers' data in the previous chapter suggested a relationship between improved English language skills and better educational and career prospects for their students, the DSs expressed a more macro-level view of a need for not just language competence but also a sharing and understanding of different cultures for the development of Vietnam in the wake of globalisation. Thai and Hue articulate this well:

... if you want to open your gate to the whole world you cannot lack knowledge of a foreign language... we have to develop. We have to open our policy to connect with friends from other countries. We have to cooperate to make Vietnam go ahead... we are global citizens.

(DS.Thai.INT2/25.11.13).

I think [the 2020 project] is a very proper orientation of the government because nowadays life is worldwide. We live not only in Vietnam but go to other countries and there must be relations about culture ...economy, technology and a lot of things ...we have to exchange ideas and to help each other to make progress, yes I think we must know English.

(DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

Change is perceived as positive by the UTs, not only because it is a chance for people in society to improve their English language skills and proficiency, but also because it brings with it the personal benefit of professional development in terms of both new pedagogical knowledge about young learners and the enthusiasm that comes from doing something different. These perceptions can be seen in the extracts below.

...it is in terms of my awareness...the awareness can be enhanced into a kind of get more practical use, for example from the teachers take part in the training courses, lecturers like us get other training courses as well, we attend conferences and seminars related to the new curriculum and national 2020 project ...

(UT.Kim.INT1/6.10.13)

...so it's kind of like something different and something fresh so make us not feel bored you know doing the same thing all the time yeah...

(UT.Phuong.INT1/19.11.13)

Change then, is viewed by the DSs and UTs as something positive and their motivation to support the implementation process is strong regardless of whether this comes from a desire to help national development or to gain personal professional development.

6.3.2 Understandings of ‘communicativeness’

The DSs and UTs see the emphasis on speaking and listening skills in the new curriculum as a positive step in developing communication skills. When asked what they understand by ‘communicativeness’, the DSs talked about meaningful communication situated in real contexts relevant for outside the classroom. They view learning as an active process, with the teacher providing plenty of opportunities for students to practise and produce language. This is exemplified by Thai and Hue.

To me I think that communicative means that our students must have, must feel free and they ... must be very active in communicating. They can listen, they can speak and can express their idea. Maybe they may lack new words or vocabulary but they can try their best to express freely. I think it's very communicative.

(DS.Thai.INT3/2.4.14)

I think the objective of learning English is to communicate ...and I think the new curriculum have a new orientation. It is to help students communicate in real contexts so there are a lot of activities for students to take part in.

(DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

The UTs express similar interpretations of the curriculum, as the extracts from Kim and Phuong below illustrate.

Communicative teaching means for me... first it is the real chance for communication to take place not only inside the classroom, but also outside...

(UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14)

...so communicative teaching is as I understand it, like you create a lot of communicative contexts so that students can communicate, use the language in real contexts.

(UT.Phuong.INT2/14.4.14)

While these extracts show a general familiarity with the curriculum discourse in much the same way as the teachers demonstrated in section 5.3.2 in the previous chapter, the DSs’ and UTs’ understandings of the curriculum are also expressed in terms of what a good primary teacher should do in the classroom. In practical terms the DSs see the communicative aim of the new curriculum as an inherent feature of classroom

activities like games and songs. A good teacher is a creative teacher who is sensitive to the needs of young learners and uses these kinds of activities.

...in their lessons they have to think of many techniques or many games or something like this because you know child-friendly ...they have to think about the material they use in the lesson, if this is appropriate for children or not.

(DS. Diep. INT3/15.4.14)

The role of the teacher is also seen as being that of a motivator to inspire the learners and create a desire for learning, as reflected in Hue's comment below:

...important is teachers' creativity, yes. I think that teachers can attract students by their manners ...but also by the way they organise the activities.

(DS. Hue. INT3/27.11.13)

Here Hue's suggestion of 'manners' implies more than technical know-how of communicative methodology, relating perhaps to the ideas of shifting roles and relationships within the classroom. The changing roles of the teacher and learner were perceived by all the DSs and UTs as a crucial feature of the new curriculum and seen as something that a good primary teacher should now be doing in their classrooms to "create a good learning atmosphere ... between the student and the teacher" (DS.Thai. INT3/2.4.14).

The UTs express this view in terms of an interactive relationship between the teacher and students, in contrast to what are regarded as traditional classroom practices.

...they [teachers] give more chance like for their interaction with them and their students so ask questions and give answers you know between like them as a teacher and student...

(UT. Phuong. INT2/28.11.13)

...the role of the teacher is the guider, the supporter, the facilitator and the students become the centre of the class...It means that the association of the students get involved in the study is more than in traditional teaching and then how to say the class activities involve all the communications between the teacher and the students and students themselves...

(UT. Tam. INT3/21.4.14)

The data also suggests that several of the DSs and UTs believe that a good primary teacher needs to inspire their students in order to encourage learning. Thai comments that there should be a friendly relationship between the teacher and the

students, "...because when your students love you they will concentrate in the lesson more absolutely" (DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13).

The need for a behavioural change is suggested in some of the participants' descriptions of the ideal primary teacher as being inspiring, devoted and flexible. Chung states that a good primary teacher needs to be totally devoted to teaching and learning to achieve the desired communicative outcomes of the new curriculum.

If you like your students to become some kind of more proficiency in English in the future you just devote yourself. If you don't like, you just want to be the 'good' primary teacher in the primary school, you just teach the grammar, it's up to you...they [teachers] need some kind of devotion. They do not afraid to work tirelessly hours and hours for the children. They think money later not in the first place. They need some kind of sacrifice.

(UT.Chung.INT2/28.11.13)

Here the words *devotion*, *not afraid*, *tirelessly*, *money later* and *sacrifice* suggest an idealistic view of a classroom teacher; a view further evident in the words of the principal working in one teacher's (Nhung) school in district A, who comments that:

The new policies from MOET require teaching English to be more open...I think knowledge is only one part. It is the art of teaching that makes a good teacher...I think a good English teacher is one that is confident in communication. They should have skills and be open-minded. Only then can they inspire their students to do the same.

(School principal District A/22.4.14.translated)

I interpret the principal's notion of 'open' and 'open-minded' as being synonymous with the creativity and flexibility required of teachers in the new curriculum and indeed in her interview she goes on to mention that a good teacher needs to encourage learning though the use of films, songs and stories.

The picture of the new curriculum and the concomitant new teaching practices and behaviours the data from the DSs and UTs has painted in this section, depicts a scene of teaching and learning which embeds notions of the unpredictability of language, changing teacher-student relationships and a flexible, open approach to curriculum content and classroom activities. This landscape is quite different to the, until recently, normally accepted ways of teaching and learning, which Hue describes below with reference to how she taught English:

Before ...I taught grammar only, like my teacher did with us, yes, write English first. We write a list of English words in a column and a list of Vietnamese meanings of the next one, yes, that's all! And the model sentences were given, 'this means this' and that one means this', yes, that's all! And make sentences. There's no situation, no context so we

don't know how to use the language in context and we couldn't remember all the words we learnt because we only read sometimes that's all.

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

The older DSs and UTs also learnt Russian at school through a heavily grammar-focused approach, very similar to Hue's description of how she learnt English, where success was achieved through knowledge of grammar and structures. As I will go on to show throughout this chapter, these norms and values about language learning and teaching are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural educational context and seem to be resilient in the face of change, as Chung remarks.

...Russian focus a lot on grammar. That is the reason why English now is taught focusing a lot on grammar and focus a lot on structures, so the parents they are old, they have old thinking like this and they want their children to have very, very good grammar and they do not be aware of that even though they have a lot of grammar they do not speak, cannot speak Russian themselves, but they do want their children to learn the same because it is what they were taught in the past and the expectation of the children is to follow their parents' ideas and the expectation of success like this...

(UT.Chung.INT3/14.4.14)

While most of the DSs' and UTs' perceptions of the 'communicativeness' of the new curriculum are centred around methodological changes, they also comment on the importance of primary teachers achieving the required B2 English language proficiency level. They perceive language improvement as being as much a part of the new curriculum and what it means to be a good teacher as the new behaviours and practices of a communicative approach, since teachers' English language skills are reported to be weak. The extracts from Hue and Phuong below exemplify the views of all the DS and UTs.

...sometimes I was very sad when observing teachers, some teachers, some not good teachers, because they can't use English comments in class.

(DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

I still think it's very necessary, it's a must for the teacher to sort of improve their proficiency level because it's like when I talk to some of the teachers from the primary schools they teach English but some of them can't even speak you know one sentence in English properly.

(UT.Phuong.INT1/4.10.13)

Although the data in Chapter 5 showed that many of the primary teachers view B2 as an unnecessarily high level, all the DSs and UTs feel that it is a useful requirement.

...I don't think it [B2 level] is too high. I think it is necessary for them to teach students because when we know 10 we can teach only 1.

(DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

Here Hue seems to be suggesting that teachers need to know as much as possible in order to have the confidence to begin to 'let go' and perhaps deal with and encourage unpredictable discourse in the classroom. For many students the classroom and teacher are the only opportunities they have to interact in English and for one of trainers, Kim, the need for improved language proficiency of teachers in such contexts is crucial.

I still believe that the competency of the teachers is very important not just the teaching method, because again I mean especially in Vietnam, like if we were in a very developed country which has a lot of facilities like a lot of sources we can learn from the internet and stuff, it's a different story, but in Vietnam really it's another case.

(UT.Kim.INT2/15.11.13)

However, despite the DSs' and UTs' perception of the benefits of the new curriculum and their apparent understanding of what the new pedagogical demands are, they appear to have little understanding of what this change actually means for teachers and the difficulties they are likely to face in making them.

6.3.3 Perception of the effort that change requires

Hue, Diep and Thai show some degree of empathy towards their teachers and the challenges they face in terms of temporal constraints, heavy workloads, limited resources and the lack of opportunities outside the classroom to practise English, as Thai illustrates:

I think that it's very difficult for them to apply some communicative method because I mean about the atmosphere, the environment for speaking every day they don't have.

(DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13)

This focus on 'visible' or tangible difficulties is also evident in other layers of the system, which seems to take attention away from the actual curriculum itself and how people experience it. A noticeable example of this is found in the "Evaluation Report of the Pilot English Curriculum and Textbooks for Grades 3,4,5" (DOET report/21.11.13. translation) which mainly lists the challenges of the pilot programme as small details

related to the text books and equipment. The report states that “...*the biggest difficulty the pilot English program is encountering is the lack of teachers to carry out teaching four periods/week*” (DOET report/21.11.13/translation), and links these tensions of time and teacher shortage to difficulties in administering the test, rather than the concomitant difficulties for teachers in applying a communicative approach.

The UTs, however, do seem to recognise the difficulties implicit in changing teaching practices and behaviours and the shift in normative beliefs and values required of teachers. Phuong’s words in the extract below, typical of all the UTs, suggest that she is aware of the enormity of what teachers need to be able to do.

I think still the biggest challenge is to ...their teaching style, I mean the teaching methods, so I guess that changing the ways of thinking ...it’s very hard in terms of, you know, the awareness about, you know, like the role of the teacher and the role of the student in class and in terms of the way to teach. For example encourage students to think, to develop their critical thinking rather than, you know, telling the students what to do. So those kinds of things in terms of the teaching methods can be actually very hard.

(UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13)

Yet, as I go on to show in the next sub-section, despite some recognition of the difficulties teachers face in enacting change, the actual reality of the support provided for teachers does not appear to reflect an understanding of these difficulties. Indeed, there seems to be a sense in other layers of the system that there has been little change in teachers’ practices and behaviours since the start of implementation. A MOET official involved in curriculum design commented that “...*teachers are not any better even though they have the B2 certificate and methodology training*” (NIES official. Meeting notes/18.4.14). Corroborating this view, a senior official involved in the NFL 2020 project commented that: “*There have been many changes already, new curriculum , textbooks and so on, but they seem to have made little difference*” (Senior official NFL2020 project. Meeting notes/9.10.13). These views expressed by stakeholders highlight the lack of recognition of the bigger challenge of the paradigm shift of the curriculum itself.

For DSs, the lack of teacher change is expressed in deficit terms, suggesting that the fault of no visible change lies with the teachers themselves and their inability to enact new teaching practices and behaviours.

They don’t create a lot. They only try to carry out what they think necessary for the lesson yes ...so I think creativity is not much...I think because their methodology is not really good and sometimes maybe I think maybe they don’t prepare very carefully because they have to teach long hours a day.

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

Here Hue appears to be suggesting that teachers do not necessarily lack the capacity for change, but that they are simply lazy and so their lessons are devoid of the creativity she mentions in section 6.3.2 because they are unwilling to put in the extra effort this entails. Diep comments that she has witnessed no observable changes in some of her teachers' behaviours or practices, not because of any conscious resistance, but because teachers lack the ability to change.

I think maybe it's because of themselves. I think some of them want to, but some of them they cannot, they cannot ...maybe they really want but they cannot, they cannot.

(DS.Diep.INT3/15.4.14)

Her frustration at this situation, highlighted in the extract below, shows little understanding of the time and effort change requires of teachers. Her perception of change seems to be that participation in training programmes alone will ensure desired teacher change.

We observe them and we ask them to do like this or we give them feedback... and they say 'yes, yes' but when we come back again and observe again still no change. So I just wonder and sometimes, I tell you, sometimes I feel a bit angry at the teachers because they already get methodology and also I myself in my district sometimes I organise some workshop, every year I organise workshop and to give opportunities for them to share experiences in teaching, but some of them cannot change...when I observe them again and again and again they still there.

(DS.Diep.INT3/15.4.14)

The UTs, Chung and Phuong, also suggest that a lack of visible change in the classroom is the fault of the teachers. Chung's belief that teachers need to be *devoted* and *inspiring* (see section 6.3.2) implies that this is something a teacher can either decide to do or not. Whether they choose to inspire their students through the new curriculum and methodology depends on how much they want to be a good teacher, because "*if the teacher believes they can do it, so they can do it!*" (UT.Chung.INT1/19.11.13). However this view assumes a lot about teachers' pedagogical choices and what informs those choices, without any real understanding of the challenges of change within the context in which teachers work. When Chung was asked if expecting teachers to be able to take risks like this was realistic, her response confirms her limited awareness and understanding of the context in which teachers are implementing change.

So that I say that it depend on you because ...if you like your children, your students to become some kind of more proficiency in English in the future you just devote yourself like that. If you don't like, you just want to be the good teacher in the primary school, you just teach the grammar, it's up to you.

(UT.Chung.INT1/19.11.13)

Phuong's words in the extract below echo Chung's view that the problem lies with the teachers and it is their resistance in adopting new approaches that is the matter at hand, rather than perhaps her own training approach and how *she* might be able to support teachers in this shift. This seems to contradict her previous words earlier in this section where she does seem to be aware of the difficulties teachers face in pedagogical change, perhaps illustrating that equally as important as support for the teachers is support for *her* in *her role* as a trainer, an influencing factor I will discuss in section 6.4.4.3.

When I train the primary teachers I tell them to do something and they don't just question and I really want them to question. I really want them to discuss about the things I give them but most of the time they do exactly the thing that I ask them to do, they don't question.

(UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13)

Although the UTs seem to be more aware of the 'invisible' challenges of the new curriculum in terms of changing ways of thinking than the DSs, the data suggests that both the DSs and UTs underestimate the challenge and effort required for teachers to change.

6.3.4 Supporting teachers

Both the DSs and UTs are involved in supporting teachers in implementing the new curriculum. This section examines what sense the DSs and UTs make of the new curriculum through the nature of the support they (and others) provide for teachers and their perceptions of it. I discuss five types of support that teachers identified in the conversations as influential in how they are able to carry out new teaching practices in their classrooms, namely; textbook training workshops, model lessons, competitions and the university in-service programmes.

6.3.4.1 Textbook training workshops

The DSs and UTs were not directly involved in delivering the textbook training workshops to teachers. However the DSs took part in the training along with the teachers and their perceptions of the nature of this training are a reflection of the

confusion in their sense-making between their perceived notions of communicativeness and their recognition of what change means for the teachers.

Diep and Hue express concerns about the training provided by MOET to help teachers use the new curriculum and textbooks, which corroborates comments made by the teachers in Chapter 5. They feel that this training only provided factual information rather than helping teachers understand how to change their practices. Diep illustrates this below with a comment from her own observations of a training workshop she attended:

Yeah actually I took part in this training and the training only introduce the textbook yeah sojust only how many units in this textbook? How many parts in this unit in the lesson? and how to teach yeah this part of the lesson...Actually in this training just only introduce the programme not how to teach.

(DS.Diep.INT1/12.11.13)

This suggests that the textbook training did little to take account of the paradigm shift implicit in the new curriculum and what that may mean for teachers. Although to some extent Diep seems to recognise this incongruence, in her interview conversations with me she does not appear to relate it with the difficulties her teachers are experiencing in enacting the new curriculum, which she mentioned in section 6.3.3.

The textbook training workshops also appear to be transmission based, likely to perpetuate old models of teaching and learning.

They can imitate some activities they did only, yes but they don't have the overview of all the things they have to do yes. For me I think ...in training course they give some model activities only, but if teachers don't have a good methodology they can only imitate. They did the same every time, they don't know how to create it.

(DS.Hue.INT2/1.11.13)

Here Hue talks about teachers simply 'imitating' what they have seen in the workshops which suggests a belief of teaching as a craft (Wright, 2010) where training consists of learning a repertoire of practical skills and techniques. It is interesting that Hue recognises the limitations of imitation as a model for teacher development, yet as the data show in section 6.3.4.2, follows a similar approach in the model lessons she organises. A model of training which is based on imitation and procedural knowledge is inconsistent with a curriculum that seeks to develop teachers who are adaptive to their students' needs and the many unpredictable learning situations that arise in a language classroom. In many ways, this style of teacher education reflects a perception of teachers as technicians following curriculum policy rather than viewing

them as the desired “creative, adaptive professionals” mentioned in policy documents (MOET Competency Framework for English Language Teachers, 2013). (The influence of the perceived role of the teacher is discussed further in section 6.4.1.1)

Hue and Diep comment that the transmission style of the textbook training organised by MOET likely reflects the capacity of the trainers.

I think it's [textbook training] not good for teachers...and not good for our occupation in general. Yes but because the MOET appoint them [the trainers] to do that, so they do that. Maybe they are not very good at it.

(DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

The trainers are mainly the textbook authors, yet perhaps surprisingly, they do not have experience of teaching young learners. This seems to be a concern expressed across layers of the system. For example Hue states that “*the people [trainers] haven't taught any real lessons in the classroom*” (DS.Hue.INT2/1.11.13). This view is corroborated by a member of staff working in the Education Publishing House who is also worried about the quality of the textbook training because the trainers have no background in teaching English to young learners and do not know how to show the teachers how to use the ideas in the textbook beyond just going through the structure of each unit (EPH official .Meeting notes/8.10.13). These findings suggest that there is little thought in the planning process as to who the trainers of teachers are or will be. Yet effective support for teachers in times of change also requires an understanding of the challenge of that change and what is at stake for teachers. Trainers themselves need to be aware of this to be able to support the teachers through a potentially difficult paradigm shift. This concern about trainers also extends to the university courses, which I discuss in section 6.3.4.5. These issues surrounding trainers also have implications for the kind of support provided for trainers and district specialists (see section 6.4.4).

6.3.4.2 Model lessons

The focus on repetition of techniques and activities as a way of teacher learning is also evident in the model lessons organised at district level by the DSs. These involve a group of around 30 teachers and vice principals observing a class, with time afterwards for discussion and feedback. I observed a model lesson on 13 December 2013 in District C. This lesson was typical of the ones described in Chapter 5, with the focus on language presentation and controlled practice. The feedback discussion concentrated on correction of both pronunciation and grammar, rather than the broader rationale and principles of activities. Interestingly, the vice principals

commented that the model lesson was one that their teachers could copy, which reiterates the view of teaching as a craft. It should be noted here that the vice principals could not speak English and so perhaps for them the model lesson was a way of seeing a 'blueprint' for what they should also expect to see in their teachers' lessons. Seeing their teachers doing similar activities would possibly assure them that their teaching was 'correct'.

6.3.4.3 Focus on oral accuracy

My observation of another model lesson highlighted how communication and language learning appear to be viewed as synonymous with correct pronunciation, with the onus on primary teachers to 'get it right'. I observed feedback conducted by Diep after a model lesson (13.11.13) carried out in a Grade 4 class by a teacher in her district. In my Research Journal (RJ/13.11.13), I noted that after this lesson, the group of teachers who had observed were encouraged to make comments which focused on the teacher's pronunciation and small procedural mistakes related to task instructions. The emphasis in both the model lessons seemed to be on procedural knowledge and oral accuracy in the talk of both the teacher and students. The importance placed on oral accuracy and pronunciation was evident in many of the conversations with the DSs, as Thai and Diep exemplify.

I think when you learn a foreign language the perfect and correct pronunciation is key aspect to develop your knowledge in foreign language...I mean that pronunciation is very important, very, very important, [pause] and it should be applied for the students as soon as possible.

(DS.Thai.INT3/2.4.14)

Actually pronunciation is very important...so if the teachers pronounce the words correctly and of course the student follow them and they can pronounce correctly also, but if the teachers not, they [students] cannot...so I think it is very important for teachers to train how to pronounce correctly.

(DS.Diep.INT3/15.4.14)

This view is also evident in other layers in the system, with the onus for 'correct' pronunciation very firmly in the hands of the teacher. For example a DOET official suggested that if primary teachers teach their students how to pronounce a word incorrectly, it is then embedded in their learning and by the time they get to high school it is too late to change (DOET official. Meeting notes/4.4.14).

It is not only in model lessons that the focus on accurate pronunciation is apparent. When observing teachers, Thai reported that he highlighted teachers' incorrect pronunciation and told me that this is because:

...our kids in primary level, they need very, very pure, pure source of knowledge. I mean for example they want to say about a very short sentence, 'thank you', it must be 'thank you' not 'tank you'. I mean it must be very accurate...

(DS.Thai.INT2/25.11.13)

The focus on accuracy of oral production as a means of supporting teachers in enacting a more communicative curriculum, suggests that the DSs are trying to interpret the new curriculum in ways that are familiar to them; notions of openness and creativity are unfamiliar and far removed from the norm and so perhaps subconsciously, the DSs focus on what they know and are comfortable with, maintaining a 'correct way' of language learning through accurate pronunciation and oral language. This is consistent with the observed teaching practices described in Chapter 5, section 5.3.3, highlighting the resilience of existing conceptions of teaching and learning across the system.

6.3.4.4 Competitions

Competitions are an important part of the school system in Vietnam. These are organised at school, district and provincial level for the best students and teachers of English. The student Olympic English competitions form an integral part of teachers' work and winning adds to the status of both the teacher and school since "*the parents will be more confident in the teachers*" (T.Bao.INT2/14.11.13). While enhancing school and teacher status is deemed important by the DSs, they also see competitions as a way of developing teachers by motivating teaching and learning. Hue expresses this below.

I think teachers can get benefit from the competitions because if they want to get the good result in the exam [competition] they have to try a lot from the beginning of the school year to the time they take part ...to improve the learning the teaching and learning quality...If there's no exam maybe they don't try because they have to work a lot hours and one more reason is salary is still low too low and ...when there is exam all of them have to try to do a lot yes not only to review themselves but also the result of the exam effect not only their fame but also the way they earn money later, yes when they have good fame a lot of parents will invite them to teach their children.

(DS. Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

However rather than encouraging the kind of communicative competence implicit in the new curriculum, these competitions appear to reflect existing conceptions of teaching and learning and tend to be based on written tests. Some key urban schools and districts do include speaking and listening components into the final rounds, but generally the basis of the competition format is on knowing discrete language items with a strong focus on grammar.

Of course normally often it's multiple choice, sometimes sentence building, some exercise like this or rewrite a sentence giving the cues.

(DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13)

This has implications for the kinds of pedagogical choices teachers make with few perhaps risking the loss of face that a poor showing in the Olympic Test would possibly mean if they ignored teaching grammatical knowledge. As Chung puts it:

I don't think it quite works well with the children because it focuses a lot on grammar and it's quite like a competition and I see a lot of children who actually did well in the test but they still cannot speak...it puts a lot of pressure on the teacher because if they focus all on speaking and listening it means that they have no time to develop grammar and this is the thing that is shown up in the test, yeah and then if it is the case it mean that they are worse than the other teachers, yeah, so it is the thing that makes them resist the change maybe.

(UT.Chung.INT3/14.4.14)

As well as student Olympic competitions, 'Best Teacher' competitions are held every year, which require the teachers to deliver 'good' lessons. These are judged by the DSs, officials from DOET and university teachers. However perceptions of a 'good' lesson do not seem to match the curriculum discourse described in section 6.3.2 and as Kim points out, the teacher contests, like the student competitions, seem to encourage continuity of existing classroom practices.

...one of the primary teachers who still keeps in contact with me told me that in her best teacher competition...she did some kind of storytelling and the observers and the panel of judges did not appreciate her teaching. They thought that it was fun but it was meaningless in teaching the children and it was noisy, so in that way she thought that it was unfair.

(UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14)

However, interestingly, Kim then goes on to comment later in the same conversation that teacher competitions are also one of the few opportunities teachers have to experiment with new ideas and methodology because they are not under the same constraints of time or expectations to follow the set syllabus.

...we can see some new innovation in the teaching competition but not in their daily teaching routines...one of my friends who is also a primary teacher said that she gets overloaded with her work so with communicative language teaching she does not have enough time for preparation and secondly when it comes to the examination, the time for evaluation, or when it comes to some kind of observation from the principal or other people in charge, she can be blamed for those innovations...

(UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14)

Perhaps then, some of the lessons I observed in Phase 1 were perceived by the teachers to be like 'teacher competition' lessons where they were able to incorporate some games and activities without fear of repercussions.

6.3.4.5 University INSET courses

- The language proficiency component

All the UTs felt the university INSET courses were beneficial to the primary teachers in terms of the opportunity for professional development, as Tam exemplifies below.

I think somehow it [the university in-service courses] works because the primary teachers have chance to refresh their working environment. I mean they change atmosphere. The second benefit is also the chance to improve their teaching in general and their approaching the student, more method in teaching young learners in particular. The third one is to improve their language because they do not have chance to practise English every day. They use the grammar translation method in teaching young learners so they have no chance to practise English and I think the course satisfy their needs.

(UT.Tam.INT1/14.11.13)

However when probed further, their conversations revealed inconsistencies between the espoused curriculum aims and the nature of the university courses, which many of them felt frustrated about. These inconsistencies, which include a lack of opportunity for the participants to practice speaking in the lessons and a focus on uncontextualised grammar, appear to contradict much of what Tam expresses above.

My observation of three classes as part of one language improvement course (or 'B2' course) held at one of the local universities highlighted a style of teaching which had very little participant engagement and involved the participants completing language tasks from a book. My notes from my Research Journal (RJ/19.10.13) indicate that even in what was described by one of the university teachers as a 'speaking lesson', the majority of oral communication was done by the teacher. In two of the three lessons, there was little evidence of pair work or group work or meaningful tasks that would require a need for real communication. This style of teaching seems to some extent to reflect the content and material of the B2 courses. In section 6.3.2, mention

was made of the importance of gaining a B2 level of English language proficiency so teachers will be more confident in their use of English in the classroom and be better able to extend interaction to language contexts beyond the textbook. However as discussed in Chapter 5, the B2 course is mainly based on TOEFL and IELTS exams with the curriculum focused on language practice exercises and test preparation. Kim points out that the universities had to develop a test quickly for MOET and so they based it on what they already knew without really thinking through the relevance and implications.

I think that at the initial part they [universities] were struggling so they maybe resort to some similar features in this one [published test], some similar features in that one, but later I hope that they themselves, after investigation, some further training...they can themselves build up a framework...but maybe at that time maybe they were not well prepared.

(UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14)

This ad hoc planning seems to reflect limited recognition of the needs of the teachers and what kind of language knowledge would best suit the curriculum aims and their classroom teaching contexts. Indeed, Tam's previous assertion that the university courses are beneficial for the primary teachers is contradicted by two of the university trainers I observed.

...they [the primary teachers] all agree that the course will not be of any use for their teaching...

(B2 course trainer 1/RJ/)

...they are not used to composing academic papers...after teaching they won't use the academic English they learnt ...so, in the long run, all of what they got from the course will vanish.

(B2 course trainer 2/RJ/).

This incongruence with the kind of language needed by primary teachers and the opportunity for experiential learning through a more communicative teaching approach is felt strongly by Chung and Kim. They express frustration that by placing emphasis on the test, they feel a sense of compulsion to modify their teaching approach to allow for test-taking strategies and the teaching of discrete language items.

...I also believe that something in the test is quite unrealistic. It needs a lot of learning and maybe some kind of mechanic learning that means they only remember the rule so they can pass the test. So a lot of grammar in TOEFL, you see, and structure so it also something kind of contradicting.

(UT.Chung.INT3/14.4.14)

These comments highlight the resilience of old ways of thinking about teaching and learning embedded in the university INSET courses and a lack of understanding of what kind of language knowledge and skills primary teachers need to be able to open up opportunities for creative and unpredictable interaction in their lessons. It is hardly surprising then that the primary teachers in this study feel some anxiety about the B2 courses and question their relevance (see chapter 5 section 5.4.1). Yet while some of the UTs feel uncomfortable with the teaching approach they are obliged to adopt in the language improvement component of the in-service courses, Phuong seems to suggest that, ‘the fault’ lies with the teachers and their (in)capacity to grasp the bigger picture of the aims of language improvement (corroborating the perceptions of the challenge of change presented in section 6.3.3).

...so I guess that B2 means they focus more on the format of the test [laughs] and that's very ironic because when they don't even know what they are going for, what they need to achieve, they just care about how many questions, what kind of test it is and what mark they need to get in order to pass B2 and that's all and they don't even know what is meant by B2 and what they should achieve and stuff.

(UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13)

This view is also echoed by the Manager of In-Service Training at one of the universities.

The problem is that teachers tend to see the course as a means to pass the B2 test. They don't see it as longer term professional development.

(Manager of In-Service Training, University B. Meeting notes/15.10.13)

- The methodology component

Hue and Diep express worries about an overly heavy focus on theoretical knowledge in the methodology component of the university courses which they see as a result of a lack of understanding by the UTs of the primary teaching context. Hue comments that

...they was trained is quite different from methodology suitable to primary level. Yes because trainers at university often teach students, so the methodology is quite different, yes it's suitable more to secondary or upper students, not very suitable to primary ones.

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

This is corroborated by an official responsible for curriculum and textbook design.

Teachers think that the university trainers only give theory, nothing practical because they don't know the context.

(VNIES official. Meeting notes/18.4.14)

For a few of the UTs, delivering theoretical knowledge is a crucial part of their role as trainers because they feel that the teachers are only familiar with procedural knowledge. Tam sums this up below.

Actually we do not have any experience in teaching young learners, we just have the theory...they do not know why they have that activity, they do not know from the background knowledge, they do it kind of their habits, their routine ...they do not understand which belongs to what kind of theory...

(UT.Tam.INT1/14.11.13)

At the same time, some of the UTs also recognise the importance of practical relevance so that the theory is situated in a real context. Chung comments on the benefits of making her training sessions as practical as possible.

I think it's easy to talk about the theory. Everything is easy when you talk about that, but it's just like the rain go over some kind of surface and then fall down, nothing left on there. I think we need some kind of more practical so the teacher thinks 'ok it's useful for me so I want to learn it'.

(Chung.INT2/28.11.13)

However this practical element seems to be a struggle for many of the trainers, not only because of their lack of knowledge and experience of primary English language teaching, but also because the training curriculum has limited practical relevance to the primary teachers' real teaching contexts and the textbooks they use.

When we teach the methodology course basically we just teach how the teacher can teach something, like how the teacher can teach reading, how to teach writing, how to teach grammar, so it's about the way to teach, but it's sort of very limited, like little relation with actual course that the teachers do, like that's the problem. It's the biggest problem, like we teach them how to teach, you know in a theoretical way, but we don't actually use that textbook [Tieng Anh]...I think that it's not really very helpful...maybe the teachers should be taught how to apply and how to adapt different ways of using their textbook...

(UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13)

Phuong seems to recognise the incoherence between the set curriculum and the needs of the teachers, yet nowhere in her conversations does she suggest that she herself could adapt her own training sessions to make them more relevant. This perhaps reflects the extent to which trainers are also acting as sub-contractors of policy and that they too have to strictly follow set syllabus guidelines. It may also reflect the degree of confidence Phuong has to be able to deviate from a set programme, which has implications for the nature of support trainers have had in preparing them for their new role.

The limited links of the methodology courses to teachers' working contexts is also evident in the practical teaching element, which consists of primary teachers conducting micro-teaching sessions with other colleagues rather than delivering practice lessons in real classrooms. In courses where there is no in-school follow up, opportunities to experience real practice situations would seem to be essential for teachers to be able to try out and experiment with new pedagogy and activities. The first INSET course in 2011 did provide such opportunities. However planners in the NFLP 2020 felt that five months for both the language proficiency and methodology was too costly in terms of time and finance and so subsequent courses were reduced to three months which meant that the school practice component was cut (Manager of In-Service Training, University B. Meeting notes/15.10.13). This policy decision highlights the lack of awareness of the time and effort teachers need to be able to make the necessary pedagogical changes in their teaching practices.

Yet interestingly, recent developments in Phuong's university *have* led to the micro-teaching sessions being replaced with real school classroom practice, which Phuong perceives as having considerable benefits for the teachers.

...we realised that it [micro-teaching] is actually not really practical ...so they go to a primary school and teach real students...and we realise that it's actually very practical and much beneficial to them 'cos basically that's real students and they have some real experience like first-hand experience , so it's not just theory...

(UT.Phuong.INT3/21.4.14)

Providing contextualised practice for the teachers also appears to be a form of professional development for Phuong, as she has the opportunity to experience real-time teaching and the kind of dilemmas a classroom of children can throw up along with the concomitant on-the-spot decisions a teacher has to make.

...if it's like micro-teaching with their colleagues then the reaction will not real, but then if they work with the real students then you know everything like reactions, the response and everything in class, they sometimes ask

questions which is very sort of out of plan and that actually give us some chance to see how they actually grow ...the teachers actually change from the training room to the real classroom so basically it's very interesting...

(UT.Phuong.INT3/21.4.14)

It seems then that the methodology courses are more challenging for the UTs than the B2 component in terms of the need for situated practical knowledge of primary English language teaching, which has implications for the kind of support they are likely to need (see section 6.4.4.3). In addition, the nature of the courses described in this section suggests that what teachers can apply to their own teaching contexts is likely to be limited, as the data in Chapter 5 has shown. Indeed, Chung remarks that:

I think there must be something wrong in the mechanism for applying ideas as it does not change many teachers as it intended to...

(UT.Chung.INT2/28.11.13)

6.3.5 Section summary

This main section (6.3) has shown how, like the teachers, the DSs and UTs are positive about the new curriculum and are able to some extent to talk about what communicative pedagogy is. However the data have also shown that while the DSs and UTs recognise that the new curriculum requires changes in teachers' classroom behaviours and practices, they show little concomitant recognition of the challenge that this poses for the teachers and the enormity of the pedagogical shift the new curriculum implies. The findings in this section have highlighted the resilience of traditional norms and values regarding education as manifested in the predominantly grammar focus of the B2 course and student competitions and the transmission-style of training. In a similar way to the teachers, the DSs and UTs seem to be making sense of the new curriculum through what they are already familiar with and appear to be sticking closely to familiar behaviours and practices. This incoherence between the support that the DSs and UTs provide and the requirements of the new curriculum seems to fit with the confusion and anxiety expressed by the teachers in Chapter 5 regarding their own perceptions of the inconsistencies in initial support they received. The next section examines what, from the data, appears to influence the DSs' and UTs' perceptions, understandings and enactment of the new curriculum which in turn mediates what sense the teachers make of the new curriculum.

6.4 Influences on sense-making

6.4.1 Perceptions of roles in the change process

A key finding that emerged from the data was the prevailing perceptions of the roles of implementers in the change process and the influence this seems to have had on the professional practices and behaviours of the DSs and UTs and also the teachers.

6.4.1.1 The role of teachers

The DSs perceive the teachers to be the key agent in the success of the NFL 2020 project. Dieps' words below are also reflective of the views expressed by the other two DSs.

...the teachers play the most important role in the process...I imagine that the teachers are like the foundations of a house, the firmer the foundation is, the more stable the house stands... it is the teachers that contribute to the success of the programme.

(DS.Diep.INT2.translation/13.11.13)

Similar perceptions of the role of the teacher in change were reported in other layers of the systems.

The 2020 project is about the teachers. They are the most important and so training is for them.

(DOET official.Meeting notes/4.4.14)

Change is multidimensional, but it is the teacher that is key...

(NFL2020 Project official. Meeting notes/9.10.13)

However although the teacher in the change process is seen as crucial for the success of the project, their role seems to be perceived as that of a technician following policy directives. This was most noticeable in Thai's comments, which suggest that implementation involves simply telling the teachers what to do and change will happen.

Do you know that some teachers they are not eager to improve themselves and when we have policy about this I think it's very useful... we have to make them change , not let them change.

(DS.Thai.INT3/2.4.14)

Thai's words show little understanding of what change entails and the challenges his teachers are likely to face in the process, consistent with the data presented in section 6.3.3. In line with the notion that change can be mandated are Thai's comments, "...it's

my duty to check if it [teaching] is correct or not" (DS.Thai.INT2/25.11.13), which reflect a rational and technical view of his own role in making sure that teachers follow a 'correct' way in what they do in the classroom. This is inconsistent with concepts of openness and flexibility evident in DSs talk presented in section 6.3.2.

The lack of trust and autonomy afforded teachers can also be seen in the forced attendance of teachers at in-service workshops organised by DOET regardless of their relevance, as Chau described in Chapter 5. Similarly, a training session (part of a whole day event I attended in December 2014) which aimed to raise teachers' awareness about the B2 test, was attended by 45 primary English language teachers and about 90% of those teachers had already taken the B2 test and gained their certificate (evident from the feedback given to the trainer during my observation). Lien, Chi and Chau attended this training day and commented on the irrelevance, but stated that they were not in a position to refuse. Chau expresses this below:

The ... parts which are advice for IELTS or B2 are unnecessary for because I've already got B2 certificate, so I think they should send other to attend the workshop instead of me...but they sent me out so I came, but that wasted a day.

(T.Chau.INT2.translation/16.12.13)

This view that teachers need to be forced to change through compulsory training is also evident among some of the trainers (UT.Chung.INT1/19.11.13; UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13) For example, Chung's words below suggest that in order to get the teachers to make the effort to learn, she needs to stress the compulsory nature of the course and the likely repercussions if they are not successful.

...most of them don't want to do the course. When they forced to do that, they have to do that so ...we have to say that you have to pass the exam that mean you have to learn. If you don't learn you fail and you have the risk of facing with your headmaster or the one from the ministry so because of that kind of affair they have to learn.

(UT.Chung.INT1/19/11/13)

Although Chung's comments appear to show a very rational and technical view of learning and the teachers' role in this learning process, other trainers express more empathy towards teachers and recognise the emotional burden teachers face with having to attend training courses(UT.Tam.INT1/14.11.13; UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13). Tam comments on the difficulties she has in dealing with teachers who feel obliged to attend training and the effect this seems to have on the teachers' "...*personal emotion*

and feelings of eagerness and enthusiasm” (UT.Tam.INT2/18.11.13). As she goes on to say:

They [the teachers] feel negative and then passive to the change because they seem to be forced to attend the training course in new curriculum.

(UT.Tam.INT2/18.11.13)

In many ways the view of teachers as passive followers of policy directives is at odds with the very nature of a more communicative and learner-centred approach to language teaching and learning.

6.4.1.2 The role of the district specialists

The DSs are involved in supporting primary English language teachers through annual or biannual observations of teachers, organising teacher workshops at district level, and liaising with schools and DOET in providing provincial teacher development workshops and training. Diep remarks:

... the specialist's role, it's like a coordinator who sends the teachers to take part in the course based on requirement of the DOET, for instance, to send how many teachers to participate in the course, informing them about the involved time and to ask the principals of the schools to facilitate for their teachers' participation in the course.

(DS.Diep.INT1/12/11/13)

The DSs also perceive their role to include ensuring teachers implement the new curriculum as intended, often liaising directly with the English teachers because, as Diep comments:

The specialist will directly steer the implementation as the principals do not know English, I mean they cannot help us manage in the schools. So, the specialist will have to help the teachers to carry out the project. If the teachers do not understand the matter or cannot stick to the direction, the task cannot be done and the project will fail.

(DS. Diep.INT2/13.11.13./translation)

Thai sees his role as monitor and assessor, in keeping with his sense of duty to fulfil policy requirements. As was mentioned in the previous section, he sees that the aim of his school visits is to ensure that the correct teaching and learning are taking place.

... to me, as my duty, as my position my target purpose is the knowledge of our students and I mean if they were to get perfect knowledge, the teacher is the most important person...I have to help to make the quality to get better.

(DS. Thai.INT1/21.11.13)

Thai's words also suggest a particular view of teaching and learning which is about achieving 'perfect knowledge', consistent with existing beliefs and values of education discussed in section 6.3.2, yet inconsistent with the kind of discourse he used to describe the aims of the curriculum and his notions of a good primary teacher.

The majority of the DSs' support for teachers seems to be through classroom observations, which the teachers in Districts A and C feel are not that useful because of this emphasis on 'a right way' of teaching and learning.

The district specialist observes the lesson and observes how to teach and if there is something not good they have to give the remarks how to do. I think it's only a little bit useful.

(Thanh.INT2.translation/9.12.13)

...every term the district specialist comes to visit our school and ask for all my lesson plans and they see every words ... all the many, many mistakes.

(T.Mai.TGP/18.4.14)

Diep and Hue allocate more time to supporting primary teachers than Thai, as Hue expresses below:

As usual we go to the schools twice a year, all the DOET go to each school twice a year, yes at the beginning and at the end, but I myself go to school once a week. I try to spend my time observing the teachers in my district because I am very fascinated about the methodology, yes so I like to observe their lessons to share ideas with them.

(DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

Whether or not Hue actually visits all schools every week is not clear and indeed, this seems to contradict the experiences of Chau and Thanh, possibly suggesting that Hue may have been conscious of saying 'the right thing' in front of me. However this does not invalidate strong interest and desire to help teachers that is evident in both Hue and Diep's accounts. Diep is willing to go beyond what is normally expected of a DS (twice yearly school visits) to support her teachers.

...you know that I actually really want to deliver the workshop or something like this or maybe I can teach for the teachers and they can observe me, yes something like this.

(DS.Diep.INT3/15.4.14)

6.4.1.3 The role of the university trainers

The UTs are involved in delivering both the language improvement courses (B2) and the methodology courses which constitute the three-month INSET courses for primary English language teachers under the NFL 2020 project. As was shown in section 6.3.1, the UTs have a positive view of their training role in supporting teacher change, which seems to be influenced by the benefits that the trainers feel their new role brings to them in terms of learning and developing. The UTs are also rewarded with extra payments for the INSET work they do. However while they seem to have benefitted from their new role, their conversations also reveal the frustration they feel that others working above them in the system seem to perceive their role in similar ways to the district specialists; as subcontractors of curriculum policy. The UTs feel stressed about the demands made of them to comply with directives; directives that suggest ad hoc planning and little recognition of the difficulties that the trainers themselves face in taking on a new role. This is exemplified by Kim and Phuong.

When they need me as a trainer they just ask me to take part in the courses and deliver the courses. They seem to forget that I'm still a lecturer at my university ...that way they over exploit me.

(UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13)

...the thing I'm not very happy with is ... everything is all of a sudden, like we as teachers don't know the plan, you know like we want to at least sort of have one week notice before happens, but sometimes it like just pops up and like ok you've got to go to this place, you've got to go to that place, so it's kind of very passive for us as a teacher... you can't really say no because it's one of the work duties, so it's kind of hard.

(UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13)

For Phuong, the frustration of not being able to have more say in what she does had led to reduced motivation in her role as trainer. As she puts it:

Sometimes the stress can actually reduce my enthusiasm...and like when you feel like, when your body or when your mind resists something you are about to do, then of course you can't really do it like you know best condition.

(UT.Phuong.INT2/28.11.13)

The data in these sub-sections highlights how across different layers of the system, implementer roles are not readily seen as supportive mediators of curriculum policy but rather as technicians following directives. This has implications for the extent to which the roles of DSs and UTs can provide sustained support for teacher change.

6.4.2 Issues of time

6.4.2.1 Time and roles

Consistent with the teachers' data in Chapter 5, the DSs also express uncertainty and frustration with temporal constraints related to their role as DS. The DSs are responsible for the teaching and learning of English in primary and lower secondary schools and kindergartens. They all comment on the pressures they are under to cover these three areas and their difficulty ensuring support for all schools and teachers. Thai describes his job as “*very busy, busy. And I think it's difficult*” (DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13). Similarly, Hue comments on her workload and suggests that she would prefer to be giving more direct support to teachers.

I like to spend much more time on professional work, yes more time to work with teachers, more time to have workshop, more time to go to observe the lessons ...but it depends on a lot of things, it depends on a lot of things and people.

(DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

It is inevitable that under tight time pressures the DSs have to prioritize tasks, and for Thai this appears to mean that his energies are more focused on lower secondary English education since this is an ‘official’ compulsory subject. Indeed, the teachers in District A comment that school visits by Thai were rare. Bao notes that:

Specialists in English have to manage primary and secondary schools, and many of them give priorities to the secondary level than the primary one.

(T.Bao.TGNP.translation/17.4.14)

Issues of time are linked closely with a shortage of teachers on permanent contracts assigned to each school; a concern all the DSs express and exemplified by Thai.

... we need more teachers, we need more teachers, for example we need maybe 4 or 5 or 6 maybe but now in general we have about 2, maybe one.

(DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13)

The funding for teacher recruitment rests outside the responsibility of MOET and since English is yet to be given final official compulsory status in primary schools, the funding bodies within the district level People's Committees are not compelled to recruit more teachers on permanent contracts (see Chapter 2, section 2.3 for a reminder about the role of the People's Committee). As a result, the onus is put on schools to employ and find their own funding for hourly paid teachers and as Thai points out “*...because there are not many teachers you have to get different organisations to help*” (DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13). Collaborating with these different

organisations and monitoring their work takes up a considerable amount of the DSs' time, particularly for Thai and Hue.

6.4.2.2 Time and a shortage of teachers

The shift from schools providing four periods of English a week under the pilot scheme, to two periods a week evident now across the seven research schools, is a concern for all the DSs. They recognise the learning benefits of having more exposure to English and also the pedagogical benefits for the teachers in that with more time they are able to include more activities in their lessons, as Thai comments below:

... if you want to learn a language you have to have more time to practise and if you have only two periods, it's not enough, but the curriculum is that, you have to obey and the number of teachers, we only have one or two so we cannot apply four periods a week...If we can have 4 periods a week maybe ...it means that the teachers will have more time to prepare. I think maybe they can use more PowerPoint, they can use the teaching aids something like that to teach more carefully...

(DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13)

The frustration Thai feels about this dilemma can be sensed in his words "*but the curriculum is that, you have to obey*" and reiterated by Hue when she says "*I have no right to solve it. I can give suggestions for schools only*" (DS.Hue.INT1/31.10.13). This implies the sense of powerlessness they feel in being an intermediary of policy between MOET and the schools. The DSs have a responsibility to ensure that the curriculum and syllabus are covered in the set amount of time, regardless of the dilemmas facing the teachers and which are acknowledged by the district specialists. This is confirmed by the UTs who emphasise teachers' fear of repercussions if they do not follow the set syllabus in the time required (UT.Chung.INT3/21.4.14; UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13 UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13). Thus, the sense of compulsion to ensure the 'correct' pace of learning and teaching across all the schools to comply with the MOET requirements is strong, as shown by Thai and Hue.

...when they have just two periods a week it means that the students, the kids have to hurry, have to hurry to make the ...whole curriculum because we have to face in May the end of the school year.

(DS.Thai.INT1/21.11.13)

...if teachers follow, teach two periods a week, they can't finish the first book of the first year, yes, and the second year they can't continue with the second book, so they have to try to teach all the things which are in the book...

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

Thai goes on to comment that *“the main aim of the curriculum is how to cover all the textbook in a period of time perfectly”* (DS.Thai.INT2/25.11.13). Thai and the others appear to take a technical approach to the curriculum which, in reducing it to the simplicity of a time frame, also reduces the complexity of teaching and the concomitant complexity of choices a teacher has to make in his or her practices and behaviours in order to follow the new curriculum. This fits with a perception of the teacher, like that of the DS, as a subcontractor of official policy necessarily devoid of the very creativity and adaptive skills the DSs described in section 6.3.2 as desired behaviours. This is corroborated further by the views of an official working in the National Institute for Educational Science involved in curriculum design.

Teachers feel that if there is more time for English then it is better, but they do not know how much time and can't really say what they can do in the extra time. This is because teachers don't need to think about this, as the teaching plan is from MOET, so no need for teachers to think about this.

(VNIES official. Meeting notes/18.4.14)

Teachers then, need to cover the syllabus and any notion of ‘freedom’ is very much in line with MOET’s guidelines about what can be omitted rather than a carte blanche for teachers to do what they want. As Diep acknowledges *“...we don't have to cover all the things in the book yeah because sometime we don't have time enough”* (DS.Diep.INT3/27.11.13). What is interesting is that there is no mention in her conversations, or those of the other DSs, that the parts that their teachers can leave out are often the more communicative activities and stages of the lesson. The school vice principal from District C who commented (see Chapter 5 section 5.4.2.1) that MOET needs to allow English teachers more temporal freedom to be creative, at the same time suggests that this is not what is expected in the compulsory subjects of the curriculum, since in Maths and Vietnamese, *“if we allow students to discuss freely we can exceed the time limit”* (Vice principal District C. translated/22.4.14). This shows the extent to which a centralised time frame and the concomitant teaching approach necessary to fit everything into a fixed time slot is the norm across the whole curriculum, suggesting that for English teaching to go against this tide requires a significant push away from the status quo.

6.4.2.3 Time and the challenge of change

Issues of time also extended to an awareness of the time needed to take on board new ways of thinking and doing. Hue and Diep feel that the training provided for their teachers is limited, as Hue expresses below.

I think that the teachers who have attended the training course they can understand some, I think so, but not all because the training is too short, it's too short.

(DS.Hue INT2/1.11.13)

In a later interview when asked how long change might take, Hue comments that: “*from my experience I think two months is enough for training teachers*” (DS.Hue. INT3/27.11.13). This contrasts with the UTs who have a longer term view of change and feel that the INSET courses they are involved in are too short because they do not allow teachers opportunities to reflect on what they have learnt or to practise. Kim expresses this below with reference to the B2 course.

...it is challenging for both [university] teachers and learners [primary teachers] because you know that it is an intensive course and normally to reach a level much higher than your starting point, it takes more time, more time for the learners to digest the knowledge, the language...not enough time for them to look back what they have learnt, to relocate the knowledge, to combine and then to practise so that they can use the language later on, so that's a problem.

(UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13)

This underestimation by planners of the time needed for teachers to take on board new learning has an emotional effect on not only the teachers but also on some of the UTs. Tam explains how not being able to provide the necessary support for the teachers concerns her in terms of her own capacity as a trainer and also because she is aware of the repercussions for teachers.

I feel stressed because students [the teachers] they are stressed, and I do not know how to solve their problems. The problem here is their language skills and how to solve the problem and in language skill. How in a very short time? [In] this limited amount of time they have to improve from B1 to B2 or from B2 to C1 and even from A2 to B1 so in a very short yeah short time so they feel stressed and we stressed too because if they are not qualified enough so they will fail the exam and then they cannot pass and then they have to retrain you know so a lot of time so cause them stress so yeah and frustration.

(UT.Tam.INT2/18.11.13)

This suggests that the choices Tam and the other UTs have in terms of how they can support the teachers are restricted by policy planners' lack of understanding of the very nature of change and the time and effort involved.

6.4.3 Curriculum materials

While the DSs feel that the Tieng Anh textbook fits the aims of the new curriculum better than the previous one, they still have reservations about it. Unlike other

international textbooks, the Tieng Anh series does not provide the same level of support through resources and supplementary materials.

the materials supplied for the textbook is not enough for teachers to carry out the lesson as they want...no flashcards, no wall chart, yes no i-tools, no multiROM, no tests, no photocopiable worksheets, so teachers have to do everything by themselves, yes, all have to teach long hours a day, a lot of periods a week so they can't do well, I think.

(DS. Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

This suggests that teachers have limited resources to be creative, a situation which Hue empathises with, particularly when the shortage of teachers means they have a heavy workload and motivation for designing additional materials is likely to be low. In this context Hue's frustration becomes resignation as can be seen when, responding to how she feels about the new textbook, she states:

I think we have to do what we have to do ...we can't avoid it. So the best thing we can do is only guide the teachers to use it well.

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

However the DSs' concern about limited resources raises the question of whether teachers would actually be able to use such supplementary aids and extra resources given the temporal constraints already presented. Indeed, Diep comments that what teachers are doing in her schools is what is required because "...the teacher follows the guidebook, the teachers' guidebook" (DS.Diep.INT2.translation/13.11.13), despite the feelings expressed by the teachers (Chapter 5, section 5.4.3) that the Teacher's Book provides them with little support in implementing a more communicative approach.

In chapter 5, section 5.4.3.2, the data highlighted the confusion and anxiety the teachers feel about the incongruence between the new test for primary English and the aims of the curriculum. The DSs recognise this incongruence, particularly in terms of the time available for the speaking component of the test. However their role in supporting teachers in implementing the test requirements within the limits of their working contexts seems to differ across districts. Hue and Thai regard it as the teachers' duty to design tests following the guidelines from MOET and neither mention any supportive role that they play in this.

Teachers have to do by themselves to design the test...the MOET gives some guides yeah some instructions for teachers to do, but I think that something is not very realistic...

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

In contrast, Diep takes a more active role in helping her teachers to design the tests, which helps to lessen their workload and the stress and worries related to time. This is appreciated by all the teachers. In the group conversation below with one of Diep's teachers, Chi, two teachers from other districts indicate that this kind of support is not provided by their DSs.

Chi: ... tests including CDs are designed and provided by our specialist, who is very careful. She does very well. Tests are sent to us.

Nhung: Such a privilege!

Chau: I'm very reluctant to design tests!

Chi: Before tests and exams, the specialist told us that she could send us the questions, or we could make our own questions, send them to her, she would help us to double-check and send final questions to all schools in the district.

(TGNP.translation/17.4.14)

The ad hoc provision of other resources is also a concern for Hue and Diep. Part of the implementation plan for each district is the installation of Smart boards in schools, which are regarded by the curriculum planners as a tool for helping teachers with a more interactive teaching approach (MOET, The primary Education English Language Curriculum, Decision 3321, 2010). Hue's district has not had this opportunity due to local funding decisions by the district leaders.

In other districts a lot of schools and a lot of classrooms were equipped with Smart board but in this district everything is very strict because smart board is bought from parents' funds but in my district they don't allow, the leaders don't allow the schools to take money from the students' parents to buy it.

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

In contrast, many schools in Diep's district have had Smart boards installed in specially designated language rooms. However Diep's frustration comes across strongly when she talks about the lack of official training provision for teachers to be able to use them and her inability to support the teachers in this area, as she comments below:

In some schools they use the Smart board as a slide screen for the projector. It is wasteful of expensive equipment ...with using the equipment I am helpless! I don't know how to fix the problem. Buying equipment is a must, but after buying it? I cannot help the teachers so it makes me sad and I worry about it. In terms of methodology I can help to some extent but about technical, I don't know how to use, so it's difficult...sometimes I want to support but I don't know how...

(DS.Diep.INT2.translation/13.11.13)

Here Diep illustrates her desire to support her teachers and her sense of frustration that she is hindered in doing so. It was noticeable that Thai expresses little concern about equipment for language learning and teaching and indeed appears to have few worries regarding the curriculum materials in general. This appears to be partly because he feels that there are many ‘good’ teachers in his district who “...*know how to apply every skill, how to mix every exercise, every skills in one lesson*” (DS.Thai.INT3/2.4.14) and so these teachers feel confident in using the new curriculum and textbooks. This is in contrast to the thoughts and feelings of teachers Mai, Bao and Nhung in his district (see Chapter 5).

Some of the UTs have little to say about the curriculum documents because they themselves seem to have little knowledge about them. This is particularly true for Phuong and Tam and in the extract below, Phuong appears embarrassed when telling me that she has little familiarity with the new materials the teachers use.

Well to be honest I'm not very sure about that [the new curriculum]. I just know that they have different series of books ... and before they used 'Let's Go' or something but now they've changed it, and also I know for one lesson of 35 minutes they have to cover two pages in the book, that's all I know...well yeah I'm not like very, very familiar with it...

(UT.Phuong.INT1/4.11.13)

Phuong's words here reconfirm the limited contextual knowledge and awareness that many of the trainers have of primary English language teaching and also hints at the extent of communication across different layers of the system, which I go on to discuss later in this section 6.4.5.

6.4.4 Support for district specialists and trainers

So far, the data in this chapter have been creating a picture of a change landscape entangled in existing conceptions of teaching and learning in which the shift to a more learner-centred approach in primary English language teaching is perceived as a relatively easy technical task requiring implementers to simply follow the set policy, regardless of how incoherent elements of that policy may be. This suggests implications for the kind of support DSs and UTs are likely to receive themselves in implementing the new curriculum.

6.4.4.1 Previous experience of primary English language teaching

None of the DSs or UTs were trained to be English teachers of young learners at primary level or have experience of teaching English in a primary school. Although the

DSs have been secondary teachers, their lack of primary training is something that many of the teachers express concern about. Thanh remarks that:

I think they need to support us. They need to be trained...because in fact now ...all district specialist is, they are teachers from secondary school not primary teachers. So I think they should attend the course.

(T.Thanh.TGP/18.4.14)

It is interesting that despite no previous training in primary English language teaching, the DSs do not express worries or uncertainties about their own capacity to help bring about change. While this may have something to do with their perception of the nature of change discussed in section 6.3.3, Hue's confidence seems to stem from her involvement in an education project more than 12 years ago which gave her insights into a more communicative approach to teaching.

I can see our students can be more active and when I have a good way to help them to learn, I feel it's easier for them to get knowledge naturally. And they can learn English in realistic contexts. One of the things I like best is the approach. It is realistic and communicative. Before ...I only taught grammar, vocab and grammar. It's very boring for students and boring for me too. But after learning [on this project] I myself changed a lot and my students like my lessons very much. Yes it was really a big change so I want to share with my colleagues ...and I want to share it with all the teachers ...

(DS. Hue.INT1/31.10.13)

Similarly, Diep has been involved in several education projects related to primary teaching and this perhaps also gives her confidence and enthusiasm in supporting primary teachers and being able to “...share a lot of things in teaching with children especially at primary school” (DS. Diep. INT1/12.11.13).

Most of the UTs have experience of teaching small groups of children and older students through private lessons, but unlike the DSs, they do not have actual state school classroom teaching experience in either primary or secondary school. Indeed, all the UTs made the transition to university teacher straight after graduation. This means that not only do they have the challenge of understanding young learner pedagogy and classroom contexts in order to carry out their new role as trainer, they also need to make the shift from teacher to trainer. This latter change has not been easy for them and Tam's initial anxiety, evident in the extract below, reflects the feelings of all the UTs.

Oh at first I was very worried when I entered to the classroom I just first very nervous because they are even older than me and they have more experience yeah and it was a little bit demanding for me.

(UT.Tam.INT2/18.11.13)

In an attempt to overcome their lack of TEYL knowledge and experience, Kim and Chung try out classroom activities and techniques with the students in their private classes, as Chung describes below:

...you know from theory to practice is a long way so I just try out with my little daughter or sometimes try out with my extra class to see whether it works.

(UT.Chung.INT1/19.11.13)

However while this would seem to be a good coping strategy, it also means that there is perhaps a mismatch between what seems to work in a small group setting with what is contextually appropriate for the primary teachers' larger classes and textbooks. For example, Kim talks about using her private classes to trial "*communicative skills through stories, poems and drama*" (UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13) which suggests a lack of awareness of the kind of syllabus constraints the teachers face.

6.4.4.2 Perceptions of the need for support

The lack of training and limited experience the DSs and UTs have in teaching English to young learners would suggest that some kind of professional development or training to enable people in these roles to support teachers in the change process is crucial. However, it is interesting that two of the DSs do not perceive that the new curriculum presents a change for themselves; that it requires of them new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and being able to support their teachers in being open, creative and flexible as they suggest in section 6.3.2. When asked if they felt that the new curriculum involved a change for *them*, not only the teachers, Thai and Diep expressed surprise, suggesting that in fact their role is no different now than it had been before the NFLP 2020. Diep articulates this well:

I do not receive any expertise support as this is my own task to do from A to Z with matter related to English subjects. So far, it has always been my work. Actually my role it not somehow changes, it's not different pilot or non-pilot because my job is the same everyday [laughs] every week ...whether the pilot programme or not, I have to organise the workshop for teachers ...

(DS.Diep.INT1/12.11.13)

On another occasion Diep comments that she does not find her role within the NFLP 2020 as any more challenging than before and that it is the teachers who need training. This echoes the prevailing belief across the system that the success of change is dependent primarily on the teacher and what the teacher is able to do.

Basically, from the viewpoint of a specialist, I don't find it difficult, but for the teachers, I think they need providing more training.

(DS.Diep.INT2/translation/13.11.13)

This perception seems to be true of other officials in the system, exemplified by one in DOET who, like the DSs, seemed slightly taken aback at being asked about changes in his role. As I noted in my Research Journal "...he seemed confused about this question as though it have never occurred to him that he might need to change his way of doing or that he might need training to support his understanding of the new curriculum" (RJ/4.4.14).

The DSs reported that they have had almost no specific training to prepare them for the introduction of the new curriculum other than opportunities to attend the same textbook training workshops as the teachers. Diep does mention below that at the beginning of the pilot programme funding was set aside for DSs to improve their language proficiency.

Some years ago, similar to the teachers now, the district specialists were encouraged to take a training course to meet the B2 requirement for language proficiency, but now, basically, there is no funding for us, I mean for the specialists.

(DS.Diep.INT2/translation/13.11.13)

However with limited financial resources, district specialists are no longer factored into the training plan, and indeed this would seem to fit the findings in section 6.4.1.1 regarding the perceived importance of the teacher above other roles in the change process. It seems also that those in charge of planning support and training feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. An official working in the provincial DOET comments that since many of the DSs in the province lack even basic proficiency in English language, training them to be able to support implementation is difficult.

The problem is that in many districts the English language specialist does not know English, maybe they were a Maths or Vietnamese teacher before, so where do you start with training?

(DOET official. Meeting notes/4.4.14)

It is only Hue who feels that training would be useful for her and identifies a need to be supported in her role as a trainer of teachers.

Hue: No we don't have any special course.

LG: Would you like some?

Hue: Yes I think it.

LG: What kind of things would be useful?

Hue: I think the first because we have to do paperwork very much so we should be trained with documents and the second we should be trained to be trainers.

LG: Why is that important?

Hue: Yes because we in the districts, we are the leaders in this subject and in order to do that well we have to be very good at this subject, yes good in everything especially in directing teachers to do carry out lessons. Yes, to make lesson plan, to organise activities in classroom, how to behave with students, and how to solve the problems in classrooms. We should master all the things.

(DS.Hue.INT4/3.4.14)

Her conversation above confirms her feelings expressed in section 6.3.3 that she would like to be able to support her teachers more in implementing the new curriculum.

It is interesting that learning and getting support from peers did not come up in conversations with the DSs and when asked, they commented that they rarely meet with other specialists. When they do, it is for administration meetings and not support in new learning related to the curriculum. This perhaps reflects the perception of the role of district specialists in the change process and the assumption that it is only teacher who need to learn and change (see section 6.4.1).

Most of the DSs and UTs recognise the role that others in other parts of the education system play in the implementation of the new curriculum. This is nicely summed up by Thai:

...you know that all of us make a very close curriculum. If we lack some small stages the whole change, the whole curriculum will be broken and it will not be a perfect one anymore. I mean that everyone, every person, every aspect, every people...also have the responsibility in doing something in common.

(DS.Thai.INT3/2.4.14)

However it is only the UTs who feel that these others involved in the planning and implementation of the new curriculum should attended some kind of training, as Phuong puts it below.

...if you want to have a long term change and it's sort of like a profound effect on the whole system then of course everyone that involved in the system need to change and to at least understand like follow the same new system ...so I mean if we only change the teacher and maybe the person who has some sort of decision making, if they don't change then of course you know everything will go back the previous stage.

(UT.Phuong.INT3/21.4.14)

Here Phuong seems to be suggesting that without clearer acknowledgement of the role of others in change implementation, the system is likely to be pulled towards continuity rather than transformation. Indeed, Kim provides a more specific example of this in relation to the tensions teachers face when they try to implement changes in their teaching practices and behaviours, highlighting the lack of “...*alignment between the teacher, the specialist and the policy makers*” (UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14).

I think with the national 2020 project the people in charge in DOET should take part in all the training. They should have the overview as well...for example the primary teachers they take part in the training and then they come back to their school and they implement some of the techniques they have learnt. However those from the above levels do not really understand those techniques and sometimes they misjudge the techniques or the tips and it may arise conflicts and I can see sometimes they ...do not favour the new in the way that they do not know clearly about that, so they avoid.

(UT.Kim.INT2/15.11.13)

It is something of a paradox that those involved in policy planning perceive the teachers to be key actors in the success of curriculum implementation; yet many of them do not seem to feel that the curriculum change is about them too and that they may have to change their behaviours and practices to be able to support the teachers and other implementing actors.

6.4.4.3 Support for trainers

In contrast to the DSs, the UTs have all attended a training course to help them in teaching primary English language teachers. For Chung, Phuong and Kim this was a 180-hour course run by an international organisation which focused on young learner pedagogy and trainer training. Tam attended a shorter one-week course which provided more theoretical input on teaching children. However this support came after the UTs had begun to design training modules and deliver INSET courses. This time lag created considerable feelings of anxiety and uncertainty in the first years of curriculum implementation. These feelings are expressed by Kim below:

...initially I felt confused because what we prepared seemed not to be relevant to the real teaching context yeah it means that we lecturers are more theoretical than expected...so at the beginning I felt confused and

worried because I didn't know what to do and I didn't know what the national 2020 project is and more importantly, I didn't know about my role, so that's why I was totally confused and worried. It is like a big challenge and I don't know where to start.

(UT.Kim.INT2/15.11.13)

Kim's words also highlight the lack of knowledge of both the context of primary English language teaching and the shift in role from a teacher to a trainer. As was shown in section 6.4.4.1, the UTs have no previous training in TEYL and they felt a significant fear of loss of face and lack of confidence when they began to deliver in-service methodology courses.

...at first I feel a little bit worried because for the first time I deal with them [primary teachers] and they are even older than me and they have more experience in teaching young learners and I suppose that if I teach them they say that I am just the kind of theory man and just I have no experience in teaching young learners and first I feel really worried.

(UT.Tam.INT2/18.11.13)

Following the support that UTs received in 2012 and 2013, they gained more confidence in their new role and view the training they received in a very positive light, as Kim comments below.

I love the courses so much because with the course not only can I learn about the primary English language teaching, but also we learn about course design, workshop design and about the procedure, the whole procedure of delivering a course or a workshop to the primary teachers... so now I am more confident in the field.

(UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13)

However the UTs still find working with primary English language teachers difficult due to their lack of experience and contextual knowledge of primary English language teaching. Phuong continues to be unsure about both the larger vision of the 2020 project and also the kind of pedagogical decisions she can make in the training room.

Confusion here is about what they [primary teachers] should achieve and what they have achieved, what we should do for them you know it's about the clearer plans. So sometimes I feel that I want to do more than just the content that I'm supposed to teach but I'm confused about what I should teach. I have a lot of things to tell them but I'm not sure, I don't want to sort of overload them with all this information and I'm just confused about is that what I'm supposed to say or to teach.

(UT.Phuong.INT2/28.11.13)

The challenge for the UTs in taking on their new role is considerable. Yet it would seem from the data that the extent of this challenge is not recognised by policy planners in terms of the time required for change to happen, which is consistent with the findings reported in section 6.4.2.3. The UTs have attended one course with no follow up and indeed there are no apparent plans for follow up. This is a source of frustration for all the UTs as they see continued development through a professional learning community as a useful way to learn from other trainers across universities.

...we did expect after we finished the course we did expect to have some kind of follow-up activities, you know that at least to connecting people in our network.

(UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14)

Some of the UTs (UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14; UT.Chung.INT3/14.4.14) also note that since 2013, the length of training for university teachers on the original 180-hour course has been reduced to two-weeks and no longer includes real training practice or school visits, again highlighting the lack of recognition of those in charge of policy planning of the difficult shift required of university teachers to be able to support curriculum implementation.

While Kim, Chung, Tam and Phuong have been given some initial support, the majority of university teachers involved in INSET courses have not attended any special training and as Kim notes, this means that they are not familiar with the needs and working contexts of primary teachers or how best to convey new learning to such an audience. Training therefore tends to be theory-based and delivered using a more transmission-approach that the 'untrained' trainers are more comfortable with, as Kim describes below.

they [the untrained trainers] can provide the primary teachers with theories in language teaching from bigger perspectives, a lot of research and studies in the related field but it takes the primary teachers hours to read without understanding thoroughly so it is impractical in this way and vice versa in terms of delivering the real training courses, they [the untrained trainers] seem to have trouble in demonstrations, in demonstrating. Our role as a lecturer requires us to be more formal, more serious, while the role as a trainer for primary teachers asks us to be more flexible, relaxed.

(UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13)

This fits with some of the concerns about the relevance of the in-service courses raised by Hue in section 6.3.4.5.

My findings in this sub-section about support for DSs and UTs show that the DSs, and others, can see and feel the change happening around them, yet they perceive their role as constant with little or no change. The fact that the UTs are more insightful may be because they *have* been involved in training to carry out their new implementation roles, so they are more aware of the need for new learning. The DSs have had no planned training or development to help them in supporting their teachers to enact change. This would seem to raise questions about the extent of DSs' own agency in the change process and the extent to which others in the system recognise that the DSs' role as change agent is important. In contrast the UTs have all attended some kind of specific training course, which although somewhat ad hoc in terms of time planning, has given the trainers some confidence and new learning to help them carrying out their new role. The recognition of new learning and who needs it links closely with the flow of communication and feedback throughout the system, a theme I discuss further in the next section.

6.4.5 Relationships and communication

6.4.5.1 Limited flow of information

In keeping with the hierarchical nature of the education system and the perception that implementers act as subcontractors of policy (section 6.4.1), curriculum policy information appears to flow down the system in one direction, from top to bottom. The relational maps drawn by the DSs in their second interview confirm this and I have included Hue's relational map as an example (Figure 6.2).

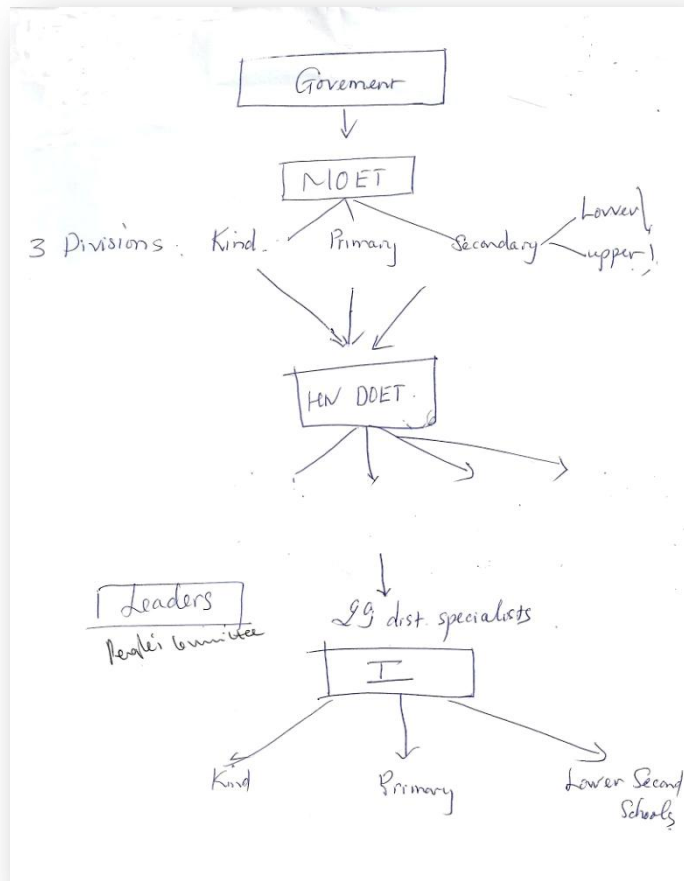


Figure 6.2 Hue's relational map showing the top-down flow of information
(DS.Hue.INT2/01.11.13)

Information provided appears to become more selective as it moves down the layers of the system. An example of this can be seen in the extract from a DOET official.

The teachers' duty is to teach and so they are not really interested in the details of the 2020 project, the curriculum and its aims.

(DOET official. Meeting notes/4.4.14)

Here the official suggests that teachers do not need to know the bigger picture of the reform and views their role as isolated within the change process, in the sense that teaching happens in the classroom and is separate from the world of policy and planning. The official's words also suggest Fullan's (2007) view that "perhaps deep down many leaders believe that teaching is not all that difficult" (p.268), consistent with my findings in section 6.3.3. Similarly, Diep mentions how the teachers are aware of the importance of English and therefore that the 2020 project is necessary, but that at

the same time “*they feel not ...excited enough about the project*” (DS.Diep.INT3/15.4.14) because they do not know details of the curriculum change policy and how it will affect them. This is further illustrated in the rest of her conversation below. Here Diep highlights the frustration teachers feel as a result of not having a clear picture of how the curriculum policy will affect them beyond attending workshops and what the visible project outcomes are.

...they [teachers] have to get B2 and how long before they have to get again? They don't know. So what about the one who already get B2 and what about the one who cannot get B2? They don't know. And what about compared to teachers of other subjects if they get B2 it means they have to learn a lot, they have to spend time ...they have to work very hard yes, so what they get after this? What about the salary, promotion or what about everything! ...so sometimes they feel 'oh very hard! Very hard working, very busy' so what they get? They don't know... so sometimes they get tired.

(DS.Diep.INT3/15.4.14)

This lack of shared information related to the change project is experienced by all the UTs. Kim comments that many of the trainers in her university do not know “*...clearly about the overview of the national 2020 project, the role of the teachers, the role of the lecturer, the trainer in the project and their connection with MOET*” (UT.Kim.INT2/15.11.13). Similarly Phuong comments that until just a few weeks before our interview she had not been aware of the exact outcomes of the NFL2020 project or the details of the curriculum and textbooks. Now that she has a better understanding of what she needs to do in her role as trainer to help achieve the overall curriculum outcomes, Phuong realises the importance of this shared information not just for herself, but for others in the system.

...until recently I did not know about it. I guess that it's all of the things that can actually influence, maybe not direct, but still you know indirectly influence the way we shape our teaching method and the way we understand and if I know that ok by the time the students graduate primary school they would need to achieve this, then maybe the teacher should know about it too, but I'm not sure the teacher knows.

(UT.Phuong.INT2/28.11.13)

6.4.5.2 Feedback loops

Learning within a complex system entails not only a flow of information, but also shared learning about the people and parts of the system within and across layers so

that changes that happen in one part or layer can be reflected and acted on by other parts and people as they continue to implement change (Wedell and Malderez, 2013). The findings do reveal opportunities for the participants to give upward feedback. However this feedback is still one-directional, simply upward, rather than constituting a loop, which suggests that the provision for shared learning is tokenistic. Hue alludes to this when she refers to meetings she has attended regarding the new textbooks and curriculum implementation.

Hue: We give a lot of ideas but the changes are often not a lot...We contribute a lot of ideas, but they (MOET) don't adjust after that.

LG: And how do you feel about that?

Hue: Of course disappointed but we still speak when we have a chance.

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

The pilot teachers have had more opportunities to give feedback on the new curriculum implementation than the other teachers, but as the extracts from conversations with Lien illustrate, they also express a feeling of resignation that no one is really listening to them.

...he (DOET official) always says 'please raise your hand, please say, but nothing will be changed'. He can't change anything and he always share with us 'ok maybe you can say, but nothing change'.

(Lien.O3/15.4.14)

...I would like them (policy planners) to know what is the fact so they can change...they just sit and receive report.

(Lien.INT2/7.11.13)

This feeling of not being heard is corroborated by the UTs. Most of them express a desire to be more involved in the whole change process and to know more about the stages of implementation and the affect that these might have on how they conduct their training. As Kim puts it:

...even from the macro level we should be more involved in the situation from the textbook evaluation, curriculum development. I would like us to be heard...because of the distance from our role to the other superior levels we are just a minor part.

(UT.Kim.INT3/4.4.14)

It was noticeable that Thai expressed almost none of these concerns regarding communication, perhaps related to the confidence he has in his teachers and in himself to deal with change. This may be because as a new DS, he feels it is important to be seen to be supportive of official policy when talking to me.

6.4.5.3 Shared learning

Communication across layers also suggests a process of learning and understanding of the contexts in which change is being implemented, in this case the districts, schools and classrooms. Hue comments that when DOET or MOET officials make recommendations at district level related to primary English language education it is not always useful because of their lack of contextual knowledge.

... some people from MOET or DOET haven't taught any lesson so they don't know how to deal with the problems in classroom and they don't know what is suitable to students in this age or this level, so maybe they give advice not very suitable to students and teachers in that school or this school.

(DS.Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

This is corroborated by many of the teachers and Nhung exemplifies these feelings well in relation to the textbook.

...they don't teach real like us so they don't know the difficulties in teaching this book. Yeah! Really don't understand! They don't teach the real class. They only write the book ...but we are teachers we understand clearly.

(T.Nhung.INT2/10.12.13)

Hue goes further to suggest that:

I think if they lead an education system, they must know the situation in all the level education. It's very important.

(Hue.INT3/27.11.13)

The lack of this kind of shared learning seems to influence the anxieties and worries reported by the teachers in Chapter 5. Chung describes a situation where a teacher on one of her training courses reports how she felt confused that her attempts to focus on the kind of listening and speaking activities required in the new curriculum were met with criticism by her school principal. Chung points out that there seems to be little recognition of the need for shared learning about the new curriculum across layers of the system.

...my student say that 'well my headmaster ask why do you have to take the radio cassette everyday to the class? You do not use your voice, you use the other voice! You do not teach! The radio teach for you!' So they don't understand the matter. It's so funny because they don't understand the mechanism of what teaching English is about. They just think it's like the other traditional subject and the teaching of it is like the traditional way only ...so I think the most important message here is that the MOET and the DOET tell the headmaster 'ok we are following this one and you must allow your teacher to do this one', but they don't.

(UT.Chung.INT1)

The need for greater awareness of the realities of the change context was also expressed by the UTs in relation to their own role and the roles of others. For example, Kim comments on the isolation she feels within the university environment evident through the minimal contact she has with teachers, schools and administration.

At the beginning it was challenging for me, for all of us, when we design and develop the curriculum for primary teachers because we did not have any close contact with the primary teachers even with the primary schools or DOETs...

(UT.Kim.INT2/15.11.13)

This sense of contextual isolation is true of all the UTs and is exemplified well in the relational map (Figure 6.3) Kim drew in her second interview, depicting her relationships with others involved in curriculum implementation.

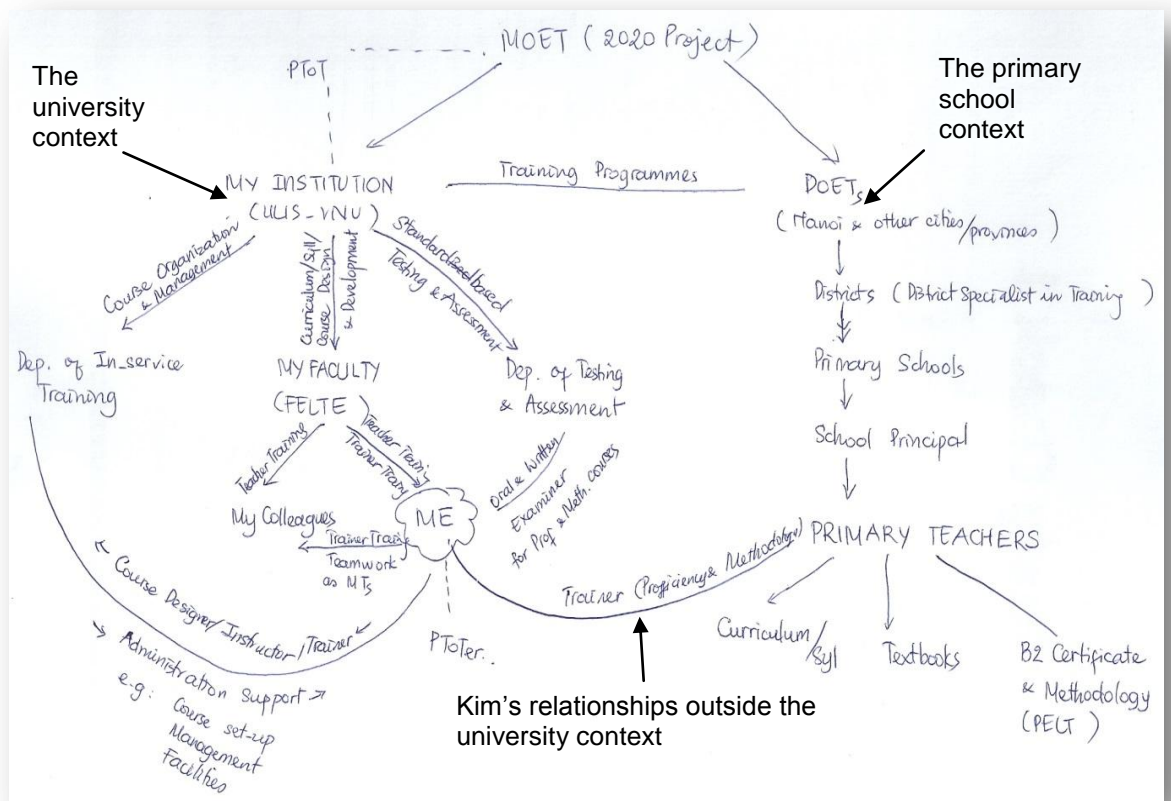


Figure 6.3 Relational map showing the interactional influences on Kim's role as a trainer

(UT.Kim.INT2/15.11.13)

Figure 6.3 shows the lack of interaction between those working within the university institution and the layers of the school sector on the right. Even where Kim does have relationships with the school system through her training, it is only at the teacher level and does not involve others working in the teachers' world. This is a situation that she finds frustrating and she feels that she would benefit professionally from greater opportunities to collaborate with schools and districts.

I'd like to receive more support from the DOET in a way that we can be allowed to have some kind of observation or analysis or research in different primary schools and we can make use of the resources that they have like the curriculum...

(UT.Kim.INT2/15.11.13)

This desire and the fact that these opportunities have not arisen (although see section 6.4.6) is all the more significant given Kim's (and the other UTs') training background and teaching experiences. Kim's relational map (Figure 6.3) also highlights her lack of connectedness with policy makers and planners, something she sees as a drawback to greater shared understanding of the change process (section 6.4.5.2).

However despite the limited relationships across layers that Kim's map depicts and the other relational tensions highlighted so far in this section, my findings also show that many of the participants are making efforts to create 'spaces of possibility', where social interactions have a positive influence on how they are able to make sense of and respond to the new curriculum. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

6.4.6 Spaces of possibility

For teachers, the opportunities to learn and share with other teachers are particularly pertinent given their isolation in their schools, as mentioned in chapter 5, section 5.4.4.3. Working alone in 'individual spaces' in schools while trying to grapple with the new curriculum, suggests that teachers are less likely to encounter different ideas and critical discussion, perhaps helping to maintain the status quo in how they behave and what they do in the classroom. What is noticeable in my findings is that the opportunities for collaborative spaces seem to be more abundant in District B, where the DS, Diep, organises regular teacher group meetings in school clusters. As Chi remarks:

She [the district specialist] manages weekly group meetings. We can discuss difficulties, testing and so on. I think it's a good forum for professional exchange. Thanks to the specialist I can share my experience and learn from the other teachers.

(T.Chi.TGNP.Translation/17.4.14)

These opportunities to learn and share from other teachers are regarded as important by all the teachers because they feel that their colleagues have a better understanding of the kind of constraints they face in their working conditions than others who are more removed from their context. As Lien puts it:

So other colleagues we discuss each other and the colleagues who teach at school and with the student so they will have the better way than the person who just sit and sometimes deliver.

(Lien.INT2/7.11.13)

While the teachers rely on organised spaces of peer collaboration, the UTs, as Kim suggests below, are able to set up informal meetings with other trainers within their own universities to reflect on and review their training sessions.

...with my colleagues I can listen to their advice and thanks to our mutual sharing and experience we can adjust the course to be more practical.

(UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13)

However it is the shared learning the UTs get from primary teachers that seems to be more significant for most of them, probably because gaining greater contextual knowledge is a large part of the new learning required of a trainer. Kim and Phuong regard the actual training sessions themselves as collaborative spaces for mutual learning. This is expressed by Kim in the extract below.

... when I have the training courses with the teachers, the real teachers, I mean the in-service teachers, I realised that most of what I have learnt about them seems to be theoretical and for example one of my contacts with a primary teacher, she told me a lot about her teaching context, the language, class size and her difficulties in managing the classroom and also her problems in methodology, the way to work with children. So it helped me to update my knowledge in the field and then back to my teaching I can have some kind of update and an appropriate style or method so that I can be more practical in real life.

(UT.Kim.INT1/6.11.13)

The initial support the UTs received provided little contextual knowledge and so they have had to develop their own strategies for learning. This also involved Kim, Tam and Chung creating their own follow up network with teachers as a way of providing support for teachers after the courses and continuing their own learning.

I think it is very influential ...because you can keep connection and respect them so they know how to develop and they know they are in good way or bad way and they want to change or not change, so I think it's good because you respect them you think their ideas are applicable in some way so they believe in themselves, so because we believe them they believe you, so it kind of foster much more the programme afterwards.

(UT.Chung.INT2/28.11.13)

In my second visit for data gathering, I learnt that Kim and Tam's university had started a project whereby the trainers were encouraged to visit local primary schools to observe teachers and talk to them about their teaching and working context. They then brought this information back to feedback workshops where they discussed what they had learnt from the visits and they have begun to adapt the training courses accordingly. Tam describes this new initiative below:

...we conduct a survey, we collect all the data and we analyse the needs of the primary teacher and the difficulties that they meet before or after and during the training course and what they need, yeah exactly need for the training course and then we have the further understanding about what the training course is, what a training room is and what we need to change from our perspective about the training course, and then when we have a clear view about the training course and what they need, and then we adapt and adjust some change to meet their demands.

(UT.Tam.INT3/21.4.14)

This suggests that Kim's relational map (Figure 6.3) is evolving and developing new cross-layer relationships. I see this as a glimmer of possibility where trainers have space to learn new ideas and reflect on their own training practices, foster conditions to support emergence in the kind of practices and behaviours they use to support teachers in pedagogical change.

6.4.7 Section summary

The data in this main section (6.4) have highlighted the tensions and inconsistencies within the implementation environment of the education system, which influence how the DSs and UTs make sense of the change process and thus how they are able to support teachers in change. Such influences relate to the expected roles of implementers, issues of time, curriculum materials and the nature of initial support provided for DSs and UTs. Support for all participants in carrying out their roles in the change process would seem to be crucial. Yet the data shows how the prevailing perception that change is 'easy' and only requires *the teacher* to change, influences how the DSs and UTs support teachers. A significant influence on the sense that DSs

and UTs make of the new curriculum are the social interactions they have (or do not have) with others across the education system, creating the conditions of both constraint and possibility. The data has shown how the sense that the DS and UTs make of the new curriculum in the light of these influences also affects how teachers understand, feel and respond to change.

6.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have explored the data of other implementing actors in the context of curriculum change relevant to this case study and in response to the following research question:

- How do other key implementers (district specialists and university trainers), involved in supporting the teachers, make sense of the curriculum change?

This chapter has presented data highlighting how the DSs and UTs, like the teachers in Chapter 5, are struggling to make sense of the new curriculum. Their attempts to fulfil their role of supporting teachers in the change process and to make changes in their own practices and behaviours, are constrained by their relationships and interactions with other parts and people in the system. Through the discussion of the data, I have highlighted the extent to which teachers' perceptions, understandings and enactment of the new primary English language curriculum reported in Chapter 5 are mediated by other actors' perceptions and understandings and their enactment of support for the teachers. What emerged from the data are the numerous tensions interwoven across and within social structures and relationships traversing different layers of the education system. These tensions can be linked to the resilience of the system and the pull towards the prevailing educational culture. However my findings have also shown that alongside conditions of constraint, spaces of possibility also exist in the change landscape. These spaces of possibility have implications for how a system might be able to steer the path of curriculum change towards the emergence of behaviours and practices of a more transformative kind.

In the following chapter I draw together and discuss my key findings in relation to concepts of complex educational change. In doing so, the data presented in this thesis and the subsequent discussion make a distinctive contribution to knowledge by providing insights into the achievement of curriculum change that look beyond individual teacher capacity towards an understanding of a complex contextual change landscape riddled with inconsistencies and tensions in its social structures and relationships, yet also dotted with glimmers of possibility.

Chapter 7 Understanding the complexity of curriculum change: A discussion

7.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study has been to explore the complexity of educational change using the case of primary English language curriculum change in Vietnam as a micro-level context of the more global macro-level phenomenon of TESOL curriculum change. As a means of uncovering layers of complexity, I investigated the case of primary English language curriculum reform in three districts situated in one province in Vietnam in relation to what sense teachers, DSs and UTs make of curriculum change. As discussed in Chapter 1, my inquiry began with a puzzle emanating from Fullan's (with Stiegelbauer, 1991, p.117) well-used quote (below) with its references to simple and complex notions of teachers and educational change.

Education change depends on what teachers think and do – it's as simple and as complex as that.

I wanted to explore what is 'complex' about curriculum change, moving away from only focusing on the 'identifiable' structural constituents of change reiterated in numerous studies on TESOL curriculum reform (e.g. materials, resources, training), towards an investigation which included the less tangible relational dimension of change. This meant exploring the influence that interactions and interrelationships across different layers of the education system might have on how, not only teachers, but others involved in implementing change, make sense of the new curriculum and how this shapes their emergent roles, practices and behaviours.

The findings and analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 addressed two of my research questions.

1. How do teachers make sense of primary English language curriculum change?

2. How do other key implementers (district specialists and university INSET trainers) involved in supporting these teachers, make sense of the change?

In this chapter I pull together the empirical findings in the case study and the literature in Chapter 3 in order to address the final research question:

3. What insights does this multi-layered sense-making reveal about the complexity of curriculum change?

My discussion in this chapter draws on the complexity thinking approach (Byrne, 1998; Cilliers, 1999; Mason, 2008) that weaves throughout my inquiry and which is the basis of the conceptual framework I set out in Chapter 3. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, within this approach I draw on the complexity theory concepts of connectedness, emergence and self-organisation and feedback, and I argue that what sense participants make of change (their understandings, feelings and responses) is reflected in their emergent practices and behaviours. I view emergence as the new practices and behaviours that emanate from the complex relationships among the different elements and agents of the education system (Mason, 2008). It is the richness of the connections and relationships of the different parts and people in the system which helps to promote or hinder the conditions for emergence. Part of this connectedness is the flow of information and feedback across layers of the system and the idea that a system undergoing a complex educational change is a learning system (Davis and Sumara, 2006). In Chapter 3, I pointed out that what seems to be missing from the TESOL change literature is an understanding of teachers' experiences of curriculum change situated in a dynamic of 'trans-level' (Davis and Sumara, 2006) interactions and interrelationships. I argued that emergent curriculum practices and behaviours are not wholly dependent on the extent of individual capacity to 'think and do' (or 'make sense'), but rather, that emergence is relational, in terms of the richness of connectivity between the different elements and agents and the extent of shared learning across layers in the system. By this I mean that it is possible for new knowledge and understandings to emerge in individuals, but in order to create a tipping point for the education system as a whole, there needs to be a wider, critical mass of individuals across layers. Viewing curriculum change through a complexity approach has helped me to put the relational dimension of change at the centre of my inquiry.

The case study findings in Chapters 5 and 6 show how interactions and interrelationships between teachers, their DSs and the UTs they come into contact with, influence the practices and behaviours that emerge as part of the curriculum change process. In Chapter 5, I reported on how teachers perceive curriculum change and the curriculum practices and behaviours which have emerged from this sense-making. I then identified issues and tensions which were influential in shaping the sense that teachers made of the new curriculum and the extent to which these tensions have mediated what teachers 'do and think'. Chapter 6 took the exploration further by looking at other layers of the education system, describing and examining the sense that DSs and UTs make of the new curriculum. The data showed that what sense these actors make of change seems to matter. That is, what DSs and UTs 'think, feel and do' in relation to the new curriculum also appears to influence what teachers think, feel and do.

In this chapter I explore the issues arising from how multiple actors make sense of the new curriculum within a complexity framework. I organise the discussion under five broad overlapping themes that I identified from the findings and which draw on the conceptual issues I discussed in chapter 3.

- Emergence: a paradigm shuffle
This first section examines how despite an initial trigger towards change, the participants' seem to settle into a state of status quo; a 'shuffle' rather than a significant shift in their behaviours and practices. This shuffle is shaped by a number of control parameters which act to buffer the 'system' (i.e. the practices and behaviours of the individual participants) towards a desired attractor state of status quo.
- Control parameters
These overlapping control parameters, which appeared to influence how the participants made sense of the curriculum change, are shown in Figure 7.1. Each control parameter is discussed in a separate section.

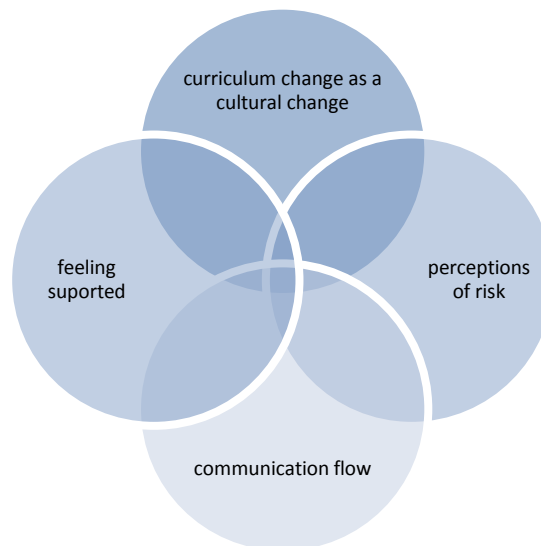


Figure 7.1 Overlapping control parameters influencing how participants make sense of curriculum change

7.2 Emergence: a paradigm shuffle

While the participants report that they view the new curriculum positively and consider it important for the development of English language in Vietnam, they have mixed feelings about the implementation process, as Clement (2014, p. 40) also found in her study of mandated curriculum change in Australia. She notes that “...often teachers are not opposed to the change itself, but their response to it is affected by the way the change is implemented”. The data in this study showed how the majority of those actors responsible for the implementation of the new primary English language curriculum (teachers, DSs and UTs) were struggling to make sense of the changes in the face of numerous systemic inconsistencies. This created tensions and ambiguities about the new curriculum and hence led to a ‘shuffle’ rather than a shift in participants’ ‘thinking and doing’. This section discusses this notion of a *‘paradigm shuffle’* further.

Similar positive perceptions of reform aims were found by Anh (2013) in her survey of 88 English language teachers in southern provinces in Vietnam, and by Canh and Chi (2012) and Nguyen (2012) in their inquiries into the initial implementation stages of the new curriculum. However the stated positive perceptions of the aims of the curriculum change in my study contradict those of recent research in Vietnam (Nguyen and Bui, 2016, p.93) where English language teachers in remote rural areas are reported to be “sceptical about the capacity of English language teaching”

to enable students in these areas to become “employable, mobile and linguistically competent citizens”. This difference in findings with my study may be because my participant teachers were located in fairly affluent and accessible areas of a key province (see section 8.4 in the final chapter for how this might be an area of further research). I am also conscious of my influence on reported perceptions and a possible need for the participants to be positive about national policy to an ‘outsider’ (see Chapter 4, section 4.13.3.1).

The curriculum was seen by the participant teachers in my research as benefitting learners’ communicative ability in English with the increased emphasis on speaking and listening skills, use of more interactive activities and opportunities for more creative language production (section 5.3). These are features that participants regarded as lacking in traditional education in Vietnam where there is a greater emphasis on learning grammatical form and uncontextualised language items. In addition, teachers viewed the communicative approach advocated in the new curriculum as a way of teaching and learning better suited to young learners since it implied active student participation through fun games and songs. The DSs and UTs, while seeing the positive gain for learners, also commented on the benefits at national level and the perception that enhanced English language skills were an important part of economic development and a reflection of Vietnam’s desire to open up to the rest of the world (see section 6.3.1). UTs were also keen to take up the opportunity of professional development that their new training role in the implementation process provided (see section 6.3.1).

What is interesting about the overall positive perception of curriculum goals in my study is that it provided the participants with a potential push towards change and away from existing practices and behaviours. As discussed in Chapter 3, this ‘trigger’ (Hiver, 2015) can be seen in complexity terms as a disturbance of the existing system in an attempt to destabilise it so that new practices and behaviours can emerge. In this study ‘the system’ was conceptualised as the participants’ behaviour and thinking (sense-making) and so a disturbance to the system implies a trigger for a different way of thinking and doing for the participants. However such a disturbance can take two paths; it can increase in strength and unsettle the status quo, or it can be reduced by existing constraints, a kind of ‘dampening down’ (Hiver, 2015, p.216), so that the initial disturbance, rather than a hurricane force becomes the gentlest of breezes making a barely visible ripple on the surface of the change

landscape. The disturbance initiated by the new curriculum in this case study seems to reflect this latter scenario of a ripple.

7.2.1 The teachers' shuffle

The teachers' data revealed that their initial steer towards change was counterbalanced by a pull towards the teaching practices and behaviours they were familiar with and had been using previously. As was shown in section 5.3, teachers continued to focus on language form and discrete items, used frequent repetition of set structures through choral drilling and maintained tight control on the language used and the pace of activities in the classroom, so that every student was on the same task at the same time. This restricted the kind of opportunities that the teacher and students had for dialogue and discussion, opportunities which are viewed as the very basis of a communication-orientated curriculum (Alexander, 2015) and limited the potential for creativity by discouraging deviation from the grammatical forms provided in the textbook. Similar findings were reported by Canh and Chi (2012) in their study of primary English teachers in a rural province in Vietnam, by Nguyen et al, (2015) in a recent study of English language teacher education in an urban district in Vietnam, and by Hardman and A-Rahman (2014) in Malaysia. In the majority of lessons, pair and group work was used to reinforce language accuracy and form and, as Viet et al (2015, p. 79) also found in their study of English language learners in Vietnam, "...while interaction could be observed...the interaction was merely mechanical manipulation of the target language item".

Carless and Harfitt (2013) and Schwiesfurth (2013) stress the dangers of stereotyping and oversimplifying what teachers in non-Western contexts do in their classrooms and describing their actions and behaviours in "culturally deterministic statements" (Carless and Harfitt, 2013, p.183). I was mindful of this in my analysis and noticed that while much of what the teachers did in the classroom appeared to be a continuation of previous practices and behaviours, there was also some evidence of 'communicativeness'. For example, the teachers were keen to focus on speaking and listening skills and showed that they could engage learners in fun, learning activities. Chi's cut and paste activity (see section 5.3.3.7) showed an example of a creative, child-appropriate task which was situated within a tightly-controlled lesson full of the features described in the previous paragraph. The fact that evidence of a degree of pedagogical shift was visible some of the time suggests a realignment of existing conceptions of teaching and learning in the form of an adaptation of the curriculum rather than a complete rejection or full-scale adoption.

Other authors have referred to this as, for example, 'the middle path' (Wang, 2007), 'contingent models' (Vavrus, 2009), and a 'contextualised pedagogy' (Sriprakash, 2010) (see Chapter 3, section 3.3.2). However I use the term *paradigm shuffle* which I believe gives a more vivid picture of teachers grappling with new ideas and practices and making pragmatic choices within the constraints of their working contexts. This shuffle is an attempt by the teachers to make sense of the 'disturbance' of the new curriculum to their existing world and to create stability and 'safety' amid the tensions, ambiguities and inconsistencies they face. I provide further discussion of how the data relates to the concept of turbulence in section 7.4.

As was mentioned in Chapter 3, Kuhn's (1962) concept of a paradigm shift can be seen in complexity terms as a 'phase shift' where there is a complete systemic change in the way of thinking brought about by the new curriculum. Thus a *paradigm shuffle* describes a destabilization of the system, but not yet a settling of the system into a new state. Similar patterns of emergence are reported in studies of curriculum reform involving pedagogical change, in TESOL (e.g. Yan, 2012; Kirkgoz, 2008; Dello-Lacovo, 2009; Sakui, 2004; Song, 2015) and in other curricular subjects (e.g. Spillane et al, 2002; Spillane and Zeuli, 1999; Altinyelken, 2010), as previously discussed in Chapter 3.

The notion of a paradigm shuffle in relation to teachers in curriculum change contexts is therefore nothing new. However the data in this research showed that a paradigm shuffle characterised emergent practices and behaviours of *other implementers*, and, as I go on to argue in this chapter, that this multi-level shuffle matters. Teachers are unlikely to be able to make a full paradigm shift in their implementation of a new curriculum as desired by policy makers, if those who are supposed to be supporting them are also 'shuffling' or perhaps not shuffling at all.

7.2.2 The trainers' shuffle

Despite their strong support for the NFLP 2020 and the new primary English language curriculum, much of the UTs' delivery of INSET appeared to be following existing transmission-based methods with an emphasis on theoretical knowledge. They appeared to be grappling with the tensions and ambiguities that their dual role as primary INSET trainer and university lecturer seemed to create. This fits with the picture Vu and Pham (2014) also paint of UTs in Vietnam. The UTs' lack of knowledge and understanding of young learner English language pedagogy and the contextual experiences of primary teachers was a source of worry for them, as was

an INSET curriculum (both language and methodology) that appeared to reflect existing conceptions of teaching and learning. The UTs' reports of the INSET courses indicated that they were trying out new ways of approaching training relevant to a young learner approach. However the majority of the UTs did not feel confident about the methodology required in the new curriculum or how to best convey this to the primary teachers. This lack of confidence concomitant with a potential loss of face, particularly threatening to their lecturer status, meant that the UTs resorted to the kind of knowledge and training approach they were most familiar with. In a similar way to the teachers, this appeared to be a pragmatic approach to a confusing and anxiety-laden change implementation context and what emerged from the trainers' sense-making was a paradigm shuffle. Few TESOL change studies mention the struggles faced by INSET trainers, however the emergence of a paradigm shuffle appears to fit Wedell's (2009) account of in-service teacher trainers in China.

7.2.3 The district specialists' shuffle

McLaughlin (1987) asserts that while educational administrators might have the desire and conviction to carry out a change policy as intended, they may not have sufficient understanding of it to be able to provide the necessary support to other implementers. Indeed, with the exception of Thai, the DSs also appeared to be making a shuffle of sorts. Like the other participants groups, they too were grappling with anxieties and uncertainties surrounding inconsistencies in curriculum policy and the messages they received from different stakeholders. While Diep and Hue were keen to encourage their teachers to implement a more communicative pedagogy, the kind of support they provided very much reflected existing beliefs and values about teaching and learning. Compared to the teachers and UTs, their role had undergone little change, despite the fact that the challenges of TEYL initiatives meant that they would also need to adjust their professional ways of thinking and doing if they were to fulfil their roles appropriately. For Thai, the implementation process appeared to be happening around him and he continued in carrying out his role as he had been doing before. In contrast, Hue and Diep were trying to provide support through model lessons and classroom observations, yet they were very much left on their own to get on with it, within a system of accountability and blame. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they continued to focus on measurable, language-based criteria for both teacher evaluation and feedback. A similar situation was reported by Wang (2010) of middle-managers in an English language change initiative in China,

and by Spillane (2000) in his study of mathematics curriculum reform in the United States. In my study, what emerged from the DSs' sense making was the smallest of paradigm shuffles in their 'thinking and doing'.

A key finding from the case study is how the sense that the three groups of participants made of the new curriculum and their role in it led to varying degrees of a paradigm shuffle rather than a complete paradigm shift. The following sections focus on what the data revealed as the influences on this emergent shuffle. At a surface level, chapters 5 and 6 identified curriculum policy, textbooks and other materials, assessment, issues of time and training support as significant structural elements hindering the participants' attempts to fully implement change. This reflects much of the TESOL change literature over the past two decades (see Chapter 3 section 3.3 and 3.3.4). However the significance of my research lies in how the data indicate that it is the *relational dimension* inherent in these structures that appears to influence emergence by dampening the initial turbulence brought about by curriculum change implementation, rather than any scarcity of resources. What the data highlight are the relationships across layers of the system which are interwoven within and between the more structural and technical parts of change implementation. The following sections discuss these relational influences on emergent curriculum practices and behaviours.

7.3 Control parameter 1: Curriculum change as a cultural change

I start with a discussion of the extent of cultural resonance the new curriculum has with the existing norms and values surrounding education. The data showed how socio-cultural influences permeate through layers of the system and lie at the heart of the relationships and interactions between the different stakeholders and constituent parts in the case study. Socio-cultural influences are also at the centre of the forces of complexity reduction which, as I go on to discuss, act to maintain the status quo of the educational culture and influence the nature of emergent curriculum practices and behaviours.

The participants' descriptions of the new curriculum discourse highlighted in sections 5.3.2 and 6.3.2 illustrate the extent of pedagogical shift that the teachers are required to make in order to implement the curriculum as intended. In many ways, the communicative approach advocated in the new curriculum and the more traditional didactic approach are not only 'pedagogical paradigms' (Tabulawa, 2013), but also cultural paradigms. They stem from very different beliefs, norms and

values about education and as such a shift from one to the other is no easy matter. Phan (2004) identifies this cultural shift in her study of university teachers in Vietnam who are coming to terms with competing pedagogical paradigms and concludes that the English language teachers participating in her study “demonstrated a harmonious combination of global and local practices” (p.52). However, as Pham (2005b, p.336) has counter argued, the study showed little recognition of the dilemmas and tensions involved in taking on board new classroom methodologies and behaviours, in particular the embedded teacher-student relationship which lies at the heart of pedagogical practices in Vietnam. She points out that adopting the kind of roles and practices implicit in a communicative curriculum challenges Vietnamese cultural and educational values. In this sense, the paradigm shuffle evident in my data is not so much a harmonious coupling of old and new practices, but, as Pham (2005b) suggests, a realignment of existing practices in an attempt by the participants to balance expectations and offset the tensions and dilemmas they have to grapple with within the structures and relationships of the change process.

Such tensions were evident in participants’ reported perceptions of a good English language teacher and good teaching which reflected the new curriculum discourse (section 5.3.2), and the more deeply rooted expectations and perceptions of teaching and learning for Vietnamese teachers in general. So for example, the teachers in my study were surrounded by perceptions of classroom practice which fit Hu’s (2002) description of ‘good teaching’ in China. At the same time they were tasked with implementing a curriculum which challenged these traditional assumptions about teaching and learning, the roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners and the kinds of qualities valued in teachers and students (Hu, 2002). Those responsible for supporting teachers’ implementation showed resilience in the face of change with regard to traditional norms and beliefs. For example, DSs expressed the importance of pronunciation as a way of ensuring control of oral language (section 5.3). The model lesson workshops encouraged teachers to conform to the traditional model of teaching and highlighted assumptions about the roles of teachers and learners contrary to those espoused in the curriculum (section 6.3.4). The emphasis on student tests and the nature of these tests (section 5.4.3.2 and 6.4.3) suggests a prevailing culture of rewarding qualities which for students involves memorising knowledge in the form of discrete language items and being able to produce predictable, accurate and usually uncontextualised utterances.

While the UTs showed more awareness of the difficulties teachers might face in implementing the new curriculum, their delivery of training workshops reflected norms and expectations of 'good teaching' and reinforced for the teachers what is also expected of them as 'good teachers' (section 5.5.2). This fits with Curdt-Christiansen and Silver's (2012) report of 'cultural clashes' in English language curriculum reforms in Singapore and their argument for more recognition of the embeddedness of educational change in social and cultural contexts. It also matches Liyanage et al's (2015, p.7) study on ELT innovation in Inner Mongolia where they describe "a collision between traditional views of learning and achievement". Yet despite the proliferation of research over the years, there seems to be little current evidence in the literature that the challenges a cultural change brings to the implementation process have been factored into change planning. Indeed, what emerges from my data is the extent of the *lack* of recognition of curriculum change as a cultural change.

The teachers' worries and concerns (presented in the second part of chapter 5) about the new curriculum suggested that to some extent they recognised that the pedagogical change they are required to make is not an easy process. In contrast, the conversations with the DSs and UTs, school principals and other actors in the education system highlighted that they perceived curriculum change to be relatively unproblematic; that the new teaching practices and behaviours advocated in the new curriculum are not radically different to what teachers had previously been doing and that it is just a case of teachers needing to make the effort to adjust their views. For example, section 6.3.3 reported how the DSs and UTs witnessed little visible change in teaching practices or behaviours, and this was perceived to be down to the teachers themselves; their laziness and unwillingness to put energy into creating communicative lessons (Hue, section 6.3.3) and their lack of ability to change (Diep, section 6.3.3). What is also significant about the findings is that while there was limited recognition of the difficulties teachers were likely to face in trying to enact the new curriculum, there seemed to be a concomitant lack of recognition in higher layers of the system that such a change might also involve others having to change their professional ways of thinking and working and that this might also be a challenge.

A lack of recognition of the challenge of change also seemed to be linked to an underestimation of the time that such a cultural change is likely to take. Indeed, as Levin and Fullan (2008, p. 300) point out, such a cultural change "requires hard,

patient, unrelenting effort over a period of years". The pilot implementation project ran for three years (2010-2013) with the assumption that this was enough time for teachers and other implementers to change their practices in line with the new curriculum and that at the end of the project the desired outcomes in terms of student learning would be evident. The frustrations felt by DSs, UTs and also officials at higher levels in DOET and MOET that after three years of implementation there was little evidence of change, suggests that the considerable time needed for the pedagogical shift implicit in the new curriculum to become an established part of the existing language education culture has not been fully appreciated.

While some of the participants did comment that more time was needed to enact change in the classroom, this was still expressed in the short term and often in terms of quantity of training workshops teachers should attend. The teachers reported worries about the amount of INSET they had received (see section 5.4.4.1), something the DSs Hue and Diep also commented on (section 6.3.4). The textbook training organised by MOET was only for a few days a year and not all the teachers in the study were given the opportunity to attend even these short workshops. After three years, this training appeared to stop with the assumption from those operating above the teachers that this was sufficient support for the teachers to be able to apply the new syllabus and textbooks (and pedagogy) into their teaching practices.

Similar concerns were raised about the lack of time given for teachers to develop their language proficiency skills and methodology in the university INSET courses. Issues of time regarding INSET provision were also perceived to be a source of concern by English language teachers in China (Yan and He, 2015). Indeed, the need to support teachers over time is well documented in the literature (e.g. Lamb, 1995; Ingvarson et al, 2005); Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009) and this is particularly important in contexts such as this case study where teachers' previous training had little relevance to their current working contexts. The literature also provides numerous examples of change contexts where there is limited training (e.g. Nguyen, 2012; Cahn and Chi, 2012; Park and Sung, 2013) with the assumption that further funding and resources to provide more training would bring about the desired changes in classrooms. This was also the perception reported by the teachers who seemed to partly equate their struggles with the speed of change and with a concomitant need for more time for training. However more one-off courses are unlikely to encourage the kind of paradigm shift required of teachers. In a recent

review of education policy in 34 countries around the world, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2015) identified that if new pedagogical practices are to be sustained over time, it requires in-depth professional development of all teachers over many years.

The haste of the initial implementation of the pilot project and the technical changes of new textbooks, assessment, and INSET provision in the context of this case study, has, as Goodson (1993, p. 13) argues, to some extent obscured some of the deeper, more invisible continuities which linger in the background, and what they might mean in the change process.

Recognising the new primary English language curriculum change as a cultural change *matters* because the prevailing norms and values of the existing educational culture lie at the heart of the structures and relationships in the change process. This fits with Waters (2014) call for more focus on culture in TESOL educational change research mentioned in Chapter 3. The data in this study showed how understanding the complexity of change involves understanding how and the extent to which prevailing educational norms and values are intertwined with both the tangible, structural aspects of the change process and also the less visible relationships and interactions in the implementation process. Indeed, Goodson (2003) points out that the enduring flaw in much of the educational change research is the disconnection with individuals and the seeming avoidance of looking at relationships.

7.4 Control parameter 2: Perceptions of risk

The cultural shift implicit in the new curriculum seemed to influence teachers' confusion and anxiety about what was expected of them. They were being asked to abandon their familiar classroom world for a world which is unknown and seems to threaten their self-perceptions and their professional relationships with others, or their key meanings (Blackler and Shinmin, 1984). The findings support Hargreaves' (2004, p.287) notion that "change and emotion are inseparable", particularly since in this inquiry and in many other contexts, curriculum change requires a cultural change in terms of the new pedagogical practices and concomitant behaviours advocated.

The educational culture is rooted in the past and mediates much of what happens in the current implementation process and so the teachers' beliefs about teaching and

learning were grounded in previous experiences as learners and teachers of English and members of the wider social community, experiences which reflected the prevailing educational culture. The tension between these previous professional expectations and the new roles, practices and behaviours required in the communicative curriculum was a source of worry to the teachers. In attempting to adopt classroom activities and a style of classroom management which encouraged interaction and noise, the teachers became open to criticism from their school principals who were unaware of the kind of change the new curriculum demanded and how this might look (and sound) in a classroom setting. In this sense the school principals were (unconsciously) acting to maintain the prevailing technical approach to pedagogy. For teachers this pull towards the status quo emanating from those who had a supportive or authoritative role in their world was confusing particularly since a different curriculum discourse seemed to be coming from the same people, but outside the situation of classroom observations. This could be seen in the teachers' dilemma of trying to cover the syllabus within the set time frame (as required and expected by those in authority and the wider social community) and at the same time trying to employ more interactive activities, which by their very nature tend to be more time-consuming. Similar concerns regarding time were found in Le Fevre's (2014) study of teachers in the United States who were experiencing a pedagogical curriculum change and in Wang's (2011) study in China. The data in my study showed that the DSs did little to support teachers in this dilemma. They themselves were also constrained by fears of accountability from higher up in the system if expected learning outcomes related to high exam scores were not achieved. Thus it is the risk that change poses to highly valued existing practices that appears to act as a control parameter.

The teachers were in a vulnerable position since their status as a good teacher was based on 'getting students through' the Olympic competitions, the next grade, and the entrance exams for good lower secondary schools. This was not just about personal integrity in being a good teacher, but reflected the wider pressure to be 'the best' teacher or school and to be popular among students and parents (Altinyelken, 2013).

Perceptions of risk and the fear of losing face or professional standing were also evident in the conversations with the trainers. Their anxieties were based around their lack of practical knowledge of young learner pedagogy and in many instances

they reverted to what they knew best; a transmission approach to delivering theoretical knowledge of adult-oriented TESOL.

Taking professional risks often means experiencing vulnerability (Lasky, 2005; Zembylas, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2005; Gao, 2008). For teachers the risks in fully adopting the new pedagogy in the curriculum were considerable given that those supporting them were also struggling with the cultural shift implicit in the curriculum and therefore were unable to support and reassure the teachers. These findings support the view of Doyle and Ponder (1977) and Kennedy (1988) that teachers' pedagogical decision making is heavily based on evaluations of risk and a weighing up of the costs and benefits. So the paradigm shuffle that emerged was a way of dealing with the risks and maintaining a stable and secure professional environment. Indeed, the participants in my study in many ways reflect the 'drifter followers' identified by Lee and Yin (2011) in their research into teachers' emotions during national curriculum change in China. These 'drifter followers' were positive about the change at the beginning of the implementation process. However as they began to face tensions and experience professional vulnerability, they showed indifference, rather than any overt resistance, because they felt duty bound to follow the national policy (Lee and Yin, 2011, p.36). This pattern of risk avoidance has also been reported in other studies (e.g. Le Fevre, 2014; Hiver, 2015). Hiver (2015), in his study of Korean English language teachers, describes the way teachers deal with turbulence during their teaching careers as a kind of 'teacher immunity' (p.225), a protection against instability that might threaten their key meanings. Evidence of teacher immunity in my study can be seen in the paradigm shuffle that emerges from the adaptations and realignments teachers undertake in their teaching practices and behaviours to ensure some 'cultural continuity' (Holliday, 2001) in a culturally novel pedagogy. A paradigm shuffle and the related notion of teacher immunity also suggest a kind of inertia where teachers and others have fallen into a fixed state. Unless there is some major turbulence, the status quo prevails since it is easier and requires less effort.

7.5 Control parameter 3: Feeling supported

If, as I have argued in the previous section, curriculum change is a cultural change, then support for those who have the task of implementing it is crucial. The teachers were struggling with enacting the new curriculum and (with the exception of Chi and Lien which I go on to discuss in section 7.6.4) did not feel that those around them,

their school principals, DSs, UTs were fully supporting them, or that the curriculum materials such as the textbooks and supplementary resources helped to overcome their worries and anxieties and the new pedagogy they were required to become familiar with. This was despite the fact that the findings showed that the majority of support provided for implementation was centred on teachers and the need to develop suitably qualified teachers who were proficient in English language and communicative teaching methods appropriate for young learners. Indeed support for teachers was the biggest area of concern for all the participants in my study, which mirrors the findings in much of the literature from around the world (e.g. Nguyen, 2012; Park and Song, 2013; de Segovia and Hardison, 2009; Kirgöz, 2008, Yan, 2012).

While the teachers reported worries about the amount of INSET they had received, what came across in the data was that it is not so much the quantity of training provision that appeared to influence how teachers made sense of the new curriculum and their concomitant emergent practices and behaviours, but the extent to which they *felt* supported and the extent to which others above them were supportive and understanding of the kind of changes they had to make. Feeling supported therefore seemed to refer to an underlying ethos related to the wider community understanding the challenges of change for the different implementers and being both sympathetic and supportive of those difficulties. Canh and Minh (2012) come to similar conclusions in their study of TESOL in Vietnam where they suggest that a 'culture of support' within the schools is more effective in encouraging teacher learning than more formal forms of support. Such a view is also supported in the work of Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), who highlight the importance of professional learning communities based on layers of relationships of trust, responsibility and collaboration as a way of both achieving and sustaining reform (what they call *The Fourth Way*).

The desired ethos of empathy and support is embedded in all the other control parameters since understanding the risks involved, understanding that change is cultural and understanding the importance of communication and feedback (see section 7.6) all work to mediate the feeling of being supported. This fits with Davis et al's (2012) view that the ethos of a school district community can be interpreted as the "engagement, interaction and shared work" (p.378) within that community which makes it coherent.

Wedell (2009, p.117) suggests that for teachers to be able to feel adequately supported,

educational - change planners need to become far more aware of all the others who require 'change education'; not only teachers, but also those who affect their view of themselves and of the work they do.

The interactions and interrelationships bound up in the notion of support for implementers that are evident in the data suggest that isolating one factor or variable in the change process, such as the quantity of training provision for teachers, will not bring about desired outcomes of a shift in existing practices and behaviours. What is needed is a recognition of who needs support in effecting change, the kind of support they actually need, when they might need it and for how long they will continue to need it (Wedell, 2003).

Support provision in this study acted as a significant control parameter guiding the participants towards a desired attractor state of status quo. The teachers reported feeling unsupported in a number of ways.

7.5.1 Textbooks

The fact that the textbook training workshops tended to take a transmission-based approach with a focus on teacher-proof recipes for classroom activities, rather than developing teachers' understanding of the underlying principles behind the new textbook and how this fitted with the goals of the new curriculum, suggested a lack of awareness of what the new curriculum entails by the MOET trainers. It also highlighted just how deeply rooted the existing educational culture is not just at the teacher level, but higher up the system too, acting as a control parameter on the change process. This was also evident in the inconsistencies between the textbook content and the desired communicative approach (identified in section 5.4.3) and MOET advice to omit the more communicative activities in each unit in order to be able to complete the required syllabus content within the school year. Similar inconsistencies are reported by Anh (2013) in her study of primary English language teaching in five provinces in the south of Vietnam. Since the majority of the teachers did not have access to the official curriculum documents, the textbook is in effect *the change*, and mediates how teachers make sense of the new pedagogical approaches they are required to make, which fits with Canh and Chi's (2012) findings about the importance of the textbook in Vietnam. If the messages the teachers were receiving from educational authorities, the textbook itself and the

textbook training workshops seemed to encourage a continuation of old ways of teaching, it is doubtful that teachers had sufficient support or guidance to be able to implement the desired pedagogical changes. The mismatch between the textbook, and related support in using it, and the stated pedagogy of the curriculum suggests a limited understanding of what the change actually requires. It also suggests what Waters and Vilches (2008) refer to as 'intercultural tensions' between policy-makers and other layers of implementation. By this I mean that those tasked with designing and preparing curriculum materials were operating in isolation from the reality of the teachers' classroom world, often with little or no primary English teaching experience or understanding of the cultural shift implicit in the new curriculum. This is in line with Viet's (2009, p.233) research of general education reform in lower secondary education in Vietnam in which he found that the majority of the textbook writing team were chosen not for their knowledge or experience of teaching in schools, but for their seniority in educational institutions and their influence in MOET circles. Arnold and Rixon (2008) point out that this anomaly between the experience and knowledge of textbook writers and the materials they are asked to design, is particularly relevant in TEYL contexts where young learner pedagogy is still a relatively new phenomenon and curriculum change is rushed.

7.5.2 Assessment

Similar 'intercultural tensions' could be seen in the new tests. Although the teachers were able to design the tests used for assessment themselves, the guiding framework provided by MOET suggested test items which emphasised knowledge of discrete language items with little opportunity for students to display creative communicative language use. The fact that English is not a subject included in the exit exam for primary students, would suggest an opportunity for teachers to have more freedom in what they taught and how they test the students. However the data reveal that this is not the case due to the influences of existing educational norms and values, as discussed in section 7.3, and the pressure of compliance I go on to mention in section 7.6. The official assessment guidelines seemed to be reinforcing the status quo rather than supporting teachers in enacting change; a mismatch of assessment and curriculum aims which is well-documented in the literature (e.g. Yan, 2012; Orafi and Borg, 2009). The findings showed how many of the teachers felt confused and frustrated about the speaking component of the tests which, given the contexts in which the teachers worked, were almost impossible to administer. It seemed that this speaking part of the test was just paying lip-service to the new

curriculum since even a senior MOET official recognised that teachers were unlikely to be able to carry it out.

7.5.3 INSET

The language proficiency 'B2' courses provided by the universities reflected the prevailing ethos of grammar-focused, test-oriented, didactic teaching, evident in both the course syllabus and teaching approach of the majority of trainers. This did little to provide teachers with the kind of language skills they would need in enacting the new curriculum in their primary classrooms or a model of 'good teaching' that reflected the rhetoric in the new curriculum. The influence of existing cognitions about teaching and learning was also evident in teachers' accounts of the methodology INSET courses delivered by the UTs where many of the trainers appeared to take a transmission-based approach to training with a focus on an adult-oriented pedagogy. Similar issues around lack of relevant practical content of INSET were also expressed by English teachers in China (Yan and He, 2015).

The approach taken by the UTs was synonymous with their previous university teaching experiences and the kind of language learning they themselves had. Therefore much of the support the trainers were able to provide for the teachers reflected the status quo. Schweisfurth's (2013) findings from studies in Africa and China were similar and she remarks that most teacher development and education programmes are themselves rarely learner-centred and so prevailing beliefs and values of education are perpetuated. The mass teaching of English to young learners at primary level is a relatively new phenomenon in Vietnam, and in many other countries (Nunan, 2003; Johnston, 2009; Hamid, 2010a) and for university INSET trainers it is not only the need to shift to more communicative training approaches and content that is the challenge, but also the need for knowledge and experience of young learner pedagogy. Recent accounts of primary English language teacher education in Indonesia, highlighting the lack of quality of teacher educators and their limited exposure to real primary classroom practice (Zein, 2014; 2015), paint a similar picture to the data in my study. However generally there has been scant recognition of this teacher educator dilemma in the TESOL literature despite the fact that INSET is repeatedly reported as one of the key conditions for effective teacher change. This again confirms the tendency for educational change literature to focus on isolated, technical aspects of change with little acknowledgement of the dynamic nature of the different parts of the implementation

process, the different people involved and the kind of support they might need in order to support teachers.

Although the teachers in this study were strong supporters of the new curriculum, many of them also felt frustrated that there was no visible reward for their effort and stress of trying to implement the new curriculum, attend INSET and gain a B2 certificate. Feeling supported would also seem to imply, as Wedell (2009) suggests, that teachers need to feel that what they are being asked to do is personally beneficial in terms of gains and losses.

These findings of how the teachers feel unsupported raise the argument that if the new curriculum constitutes new learning for teachers, then surely it would be reasonable to assume that *others across all layers* are learners too and “need the same support, scaffolding, attention and respect” (Schweisfurth, 2013, p.71). This would seem to be particularly pertinent in contexts such as this case study, where curriculum change represents a cultural change and requires considerable effort and time to be achieved and for any achievement to be sustained. This study, along with some of the educational change literature (e.g. Ouyang, 2000; Wedell, 2009; Fullan, 2007), points to a lack of awareness of the need for a multi-layered approach to supporting implementation. This may be partly explained by the discussion in section 7.3 which highlighted that understanding the part others play in supporting implementers is no easy matter when there seems to be a fundamental lack of recognition of what curriculum change means for teachers, let alone anyone else, and therefore what is at stake for the different groups.

7.5.4 Support for district specialists

Chapter 6 showed how it was not only teachers who were grappling with confusions and ambiguities in trying to make sense of the changes brought about by the new curriculum and with the feeling that they were very much left on their own to get on with it. Yin et al (2014, p.302) report of a similar dilemma faced by school leaders during educational reform in China where the uncertainty they faced with implementation procedures

put them in a terrible conflicting situation about which they could do little because the contradictions were beyond their control.

This was the experience of the DSs. Diep’s clearly expressed anxiety and frustration at not being given adequate support to make use of the interactive whiteboards in

her district showed how feelings of lack of support permeate all levels of implementation and create situations where implementers often reluctantly resort to previous practices and behaviours. The DSs also felt unsupported in relation to the shortage of suitably qualified primary English language teachers. This meant that they had to ask schools to return to the former allocation of two periods of English a week rather than the four periods set out in curriculum policy. The dilemma of not having an adequate supply of primary English language teachers and the unforeseen consequences is supported by findings in other research studies in Vietnam (e.g. Moon, 2009; Canh and Chi, 2012; Nguyen, 2012) and in other contexts (e.g. Hamid, 2010a; Copland et al, 2014; Garton, 2014) and highlights the rush to implement policy without a clear understanding of its complexity. Yet, like many of the other 'change factors' already discussed, even if there was an adequate supply of suitably trained primary English language teachers, the data in this study suggests that this in itself would not be enough to steer a path beyond a paradigm shuffle, since the whole relational dimension of support for implementers is greater than the sum of all the individual parts.

While the DSs felt unsupported in terms of administrative issues, they felt no concerns about the lack of specific training for them in relation to the new curriculum and their role in helping teachers through evaluation, classroom observations and model lessons (section 6.4.4). This perception was evident in higher levels of the system and adds to the argument that rather than a complex process, curriculum change is viewed as something technical with the focus and responsibility purely on the teacher.

7.5.5 Support for trainers

In contrast to the DSs, the UTs had attended special trainer training programmes to help them in INSET provision. However there was little evidence of a role change from university lecturer to primary English INSET trainer, nor a recognition of the challenge of the new curriculum for primary teachers in their actual training practices. These findings are supported by Vu and Pham (2014) whose study of a PTOT course in Vietnam revealed that "the programs ... seem to view their participants as learners rather than future trainers" (p.104). The UTs were struggling to provide the kind of contextualised support that the teachers needed to help them implement the new curriculum, a struggle many of them recognised themselves and felt powerless to overcome (although see section 7.6.4 for a discussion on where the trainers appeared to be self-organising in spaces of emergence). Like the

training provision for teachers, the initial support for UTs was a one-off course (ranging from 180 hours to 30 hours) with no longer term follow-up and so was probably not enough to enable them to make the kind of complex change that was required. This is supported by Wedell's (2009) account of in-service trainers in China, many of whom found their experience of delivering INSET extremely difficult since they had to adopt an approach to training which was very different to the way they were used to teaching. This was particularly true in this study given the fact that all the UTs had minimal, if any, TEYL experience in the kinds of contexts where the primary teachers were working. Fullan (1993, p.12) views the teacher educator as someone with the potential to be a powerful change agent "in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo". However, without an understanding of 'where the teachers are at', nor an understanding of the challenges that the teachers face with the new curriculum, it is unlikely that the UTs will be able to create the necessary conditions for teachers to move beyond a shuffle.

The findings have highlighted the tendency for curriculum change efforts to be viewed as single initiatives focused on teachers such as textbooks and INSET training. However the data has also revealed how these change 'tools' *on their own* are unlikely to bring about the desired changes in classroom practices and behaviours without a recognition of the relationships and interconnections that are involved across all layers of the system. A complexity thinking perspective illuminates the relational dimension missing in much of the educational change literature and draws attention to the fact that if teachers are to be supported and feel supported, those involved in providing such support themselves also need to feel and be suitably supported. This links with the notion of an educational system as a learning system, which I discuss in the next section, where everyone at every level is involved in some kind of new learning regarding their role in the change process (Wedell and Malderez, 2013).

7.6 Control parameter 4: Communication flow

The discussion of the findings so far points to limited support and understanding of the new curriculum across different layers of the education system and the influence this seems to have had on the teachers' emergent classroom practices and behaviours. The data revealed that most of the focus on learning and support has been in relation to the teacher, who is perceived to be the key implementer of curriculum change. As was discussed in Chapter 3, one of the main features of a

complex system is that it is a nested learning system dependent on the flow of information or learning between and within layers (O' Day, 2002; Davis and Sumara, 2006). This kind of learning system emphasises the 'connectedness' of the various parts and people as one of the conditions necessary to promote the emergence of new learning. Therefore for the emergence of new curriculum practices to occur in educational systems undergoing complex change, learning needs to involve more than simply the teacher.

The data in my study has shown that with little support or new learning for the DSs and UTs and others involved in implementation, teachers have struggled to move beyond a shuffle in their classroom practices and behaviours. Wedell and Malderez (2013) point out that learning needs to be congruent across all layers of the system and includes learning new behaviours and practices, getting sufficient information about the nature of the change, gaining a greater understanding of the contexts in which different implementers operate, as well as sharing learning throughout the change process through feedback loops. Yet what the findings revealed was the lack of coherent learning within and across layers of the system. Thus learning can be viewed as a control parameter where the presence or absence of shared learning can lead the system, which is in an initial state of turbulence, towards a state of status quo or transformation.

7.6.1 Shared learning

A good example of the limited extent of shared learning could be seen in the reported behaviour of some of the teachers' school principals. Their criticism and lack of understanding of the teachers' new classroom practices exacerbated the feelings of powerlessness and frustration the teachers felt in enacting change. Similarly, the prevalence of transmission style approaches to INSET, particularly in the B2 courses and textbook training workshops, suggested that while teachers and their students were expected to take on new roles, practices and behaviours to deal with the unpredictable and creative elements of more communicative language education, there was less awareness that those responsible for educating and supporting teachers in curriculum practices would need to learn new ways of thinking and doing too. These examples from my study are concomitant with the findings of Liyanage et al's (2015) study of ELT policies in Inner Mongolia. They found that although teachers were able to make decisions about what extra activities or materials to include in their lessons, in reality the often contradictory messages the teachers were receiving from those responsible for supporting them

meant that even this limited agency teachers had was a source of tension and conflict.

Learning is also about communication and Hue's relational map of people and levels involved in curriculum change (Figure 6.2) highlighted the centralized and hierarchical nature of relationships within the system. Communication and information flow seemed to be about compliance, rather than learning, suggesting a technicist view of change implementation and the role of change participants. For example, the DOET official's perception that information about the project aims and curriculum was superfluous for teachers because their "[...] duty is to teach" (chapter 6, section 6.4.1) suggests what Hoban (2002) refers to as a simplistic conception of teaching which involves following a set of lesson plans and skills. The role of those supporting the teachers then becomes one of ensuring that teachers follow these guidelines (district specialists) or one of transmitting the required repertoire of skills and techniques (trainers). This could be seen in the case of two teachers, Thanh and Mai, who felt frustrated and disappointed that the main kind of 'support' they received from their district specialist was evaluative monitoring and observation.

The role of the DSs and UTs is crucial in the teachers' sense-making process, particularly since in a hierarchical and centralized system, like the context of this study, the teachers are a long way from the policy initiators and the bigger picture of the change project. As Wedell and Alshumaimeri (2014) found in their study of supervisors of primary English language teachers in Saudi Arabia, ideally the role of the district specialists and trainers is that of intermediary. As intermediary they provide a bridge between the worlds of policy makers and policy implementers and provide appropriate support to those change participants inhabiting the latter world. However the findings in this study showed that the extent to which district specialists and trainers were able to fulfil their intermediary role was limited due to the lack of open communication across all layers of the education system. This issue was also noted by Atai and Mazlim (2013) who report on the inhibiting effects of a centralized system on communication levels at the middle levels of an education system in Iran. Indeed, Hue and Diep seemed to be caught in the middle of two worlds, where they were anxious to support and work with their teachers and at the same time to comply with DOET and MOET and the policy requirements of their supervisory role. The need to comply with reform policies has been described by Yin et al (2014) as 'a culture of compliance', visible in the implementation of large-scale reform in

China. While compliance with change policies can help to get a reform agenda off the ground initially through implementation procedures such as setting up INSET, designing textbooks, compliance culture can also impede deeper understanding of the change and the likely new learning required by change participants. For example, in this case study, teachers were expected to have the kind of agency in the classroom which affords an open, creative and unpredictable learning process, as was stated in the NFLP 2020 documentation (see section 2.5.3):

The vision ...is to build the professional English teaching beyond the level of technicians or teaching machines ...to practising teachers with 'adaptive expertise'.

(MOET Competency Framework for English Language Teachers, 2013, p.8.)

Yet paradoxically, this agency was restricted by teachers' interactions and relationships with others that tended to be shaped by a closed system based on compliance and predictability. Such a situation has also been described in curriculum reform in Thailand (Hallinger and Lee, 2011). Added to this and supporting the findings in my study, research of primary curriculum change in Scotland, (Priestly et al, 2013; Priestly et al, 2015) found that intermediaries, such as district specialists and trainers, need to have opportunities to exercise agency in their relationships with teachers, in order for teachers to be able to develop their own agency in the classroom.

7.6.2 Seeing the bigger picture

The significance of limited communication was also apparent in the participants' concerns about not being able to see themselves within the bigger picture of the change process or be part of 'the whole' system of change implementation. This was evident in the UTs' unfamiliarity with the curriculum and textbooks, the linguistic competencies required for a B2 level of English proficiency, primary teachers' everyday classroom contexts and dilemmas, and lack of awareness of how their training role fitted into the bigger aims of the NLP 2020 project. Indeed this fits a recent analysis of English language education policy in Vietnam, in which Bui and Nguyen (2016, p.382) highlight how the majority of university teacher trainers have "little understanding of the local context". Kim's relational map (Figure 6.3) highlights the isolation she felt, and the lack of connections or communication with other parts of the education system and other implementers at different levels is striking. This sense of isolation is also a factor in the extent of participants' feelings of being supported discussed in the previous section.

The narrow vision of the change process at different levels meant that participants were only able to focus on their own relatively small contribution to the 'whole' (Wedell, 2009) rather than have the opportunity to engage in a more interconnected curriculum implementation process. Fink (2001) describes a similar situation when he talks about the 'two solitudes' of policy makers and policy implementers in the curriculum change process in the US and England, who have little understanding of the contexts of the other's world or 'where they are starting from'. I would argue that the findings in this case study also show that there are 'worlds within worlds'. For example, while the UTs' world is isolated from that of the policy makers and planners, it is also isolated from the worlds of other implementers (e.g teachers and district specialists), as Kim's map highlights. Taken at a more micro-level, the sense of isolation felt by many of the teachers who were the only permanent English language teachers in their school, also suggests multiple solitudes. Not only were these teachers operating in a different world to policy makers and planners, many were also isolated from their colleagues within their own implementation layer. This sense of isolation also relates to feeling supported and having opportunities to share ideas and thoughts about the curriculum change with colleagues and others operating in different levels of the system.

7.6.3 Feedback loops

As well as wanting to be more involved in the bigger change picture, many of the participants were frustrated with not being heard by those above them. From a complexity thinking perspective, feedback loops between implementers and policy planners enable the process of new learning and emergence by addressing the problems in implementation and also amplifying what is working (Davis and Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008). However the findings in this case study indicate that the feedback loops in place probably did little to enhance collective learning of the implementation process, since the officials in DOET and MOET seemed to be mainly concerned with ensuring that the 2020 project was on track. Their focus was on administrative details and project outputs, as was evident in the nature of the pilot programme evaluation report (DOET, November, 2013). Although many of the teachers were able to share their experiences of applying the new curriculum and textbooks with their district specialists, few of these insights into implementation seemed to reach those of influence higher up the system. This seemed to matter to the participants because the curriculum change affected them directly, either in the support they were able to provide to teachers, or in what they did in the classroom,

and so they wanted the opportunity to “pass on their interpretations of what the problem was and what solutions might be possible” (Wedell and Malderez, 2013, p.218).

My intention in this section is not to argue that change is only possible in an idealistic open and decentralised system with multiple interconnections and shared learning. I acknowledge that most education systems are based on predominantly centralised and hierarchical patterns of organisation and unlikely to change. A complexity thinking approach has however enabled me to focus on relationships and to discover from the data that even within a tightly controlled and highly centralised system, spaces can exist that are likely to promote the kind of conditions to encourage new curriculum practices and behaviours. This is the focus of the next section.

7.6.4 Spaces of possibility

The findings have shown that in many ways the nature of relationships and communication with their emphasis on compliance and accountability seemed to be contorting participants' efforts to be agents of change and facilitating a continuation of the status quo. This becomes significant when considering that it is these very relationships and interactions that create the conditions for 'spaces of emergence' (Osberg and Biesta, 2008). Osberg and Biesta (2008) define such spaces as spaces where change participants interact in an attempt to unsettle the status quo. Rather than being about resonance in terms of reaffirming existing conceptions of teaching and learning, spaces of emergence are characterised by dissonance, where existing beliefs and practices are questioned. It is the interactions within these spaces that help to bring about the emergence of new ideas, behaviours and practices through opportunities to generate dialogue, reflection and learning about the new curriculum. As I have established in section 7.5, much of the official support provided for the case study participants seemed to do little to enable the kind of changes congruent with the curriculum rhetoric. Even where there was a recognition that new learning was needed by teachers to be able to enact change in their classrooms, the nature of this new learning was based on the mechanistic view that teaching is a craft involving simply a repertoire of techniques to be learnt, rather than providing teachers with a theoretical basis on which to make informed pedagogical decisions in the light of the “unpredictable, personalised nature of teaching” (Day, 1999, p.94). These formal spaces of learning acted to more or less maintain the existing technical approach to both change and education. Some of the

teachers mentioned the limited support that other subject teachers in their school were able to provide. This fits with the findings from Nguyen's (2016, p.6) study of primary English language teachers in Vietnam where teachers reported that observing teachers of Maths and Vietnamese was not helpful as the classroom atmosphere was "...very strict and tense". In this situation, he found that the teachers took it upon themselves to arrange informal spaces of learning with other English teachers beyond their school.

However the findings in this study also revealed glimmers of opportunity, where participants self-organised and created their own informal learning spaces in which to adapt and transform. For example, the UTs Kim and Chung described how they continued to foster professional relationships with some of the primary teachers on their INSET courses once the courses had ended. This was a two-way learning process since it helped the trainers to develop their knowledge and understanding of the primary school context and teachers' working realities and it also provided further support and guidance to the primary teachers in trying out new ideas in the classroom. The lack of adequate support for implementers and the lack of awareness that learning involves everyone meant that these two trainers were pushed towards creating their own spaces of emergence. Whether these informal encounters provided the level of dissonance needed for the emergence of the desired new learning was not evident from the data, but the fact that they existed at all suggests the beginnings of self-organisation and different parts of the system embarking on shared learning across layers.

Such self-organisation was also evident at an institutional level, as could be seen in Kim's account of the school-based needs analysis her university department had started to carry out prior to planning INSET courses. This small-scale research enabled trainers to gain greater knowledge and awareness of the realities of primary schools and classroom practice. Again this was not part of the official implementation plan set out by MOET, and the other universities do not seem to be doing anything similar, but it was evidence of unpredictable self-organisation and emergence by a group of implementers in one location.

Different responses to implementation were evident at district level where spaces of emergence seemed to vary according to the relationship and interactions of the district specialist. This was particularly noticeable in District B, where the DS (Diep) had organised English teachers into cluster groups which met once a month to share and discuss pedagogical issues. These clusters provided teachers with the

potential space to reflect on their own teaching practices and behaviours in the light of the new curriculum. It also gave school principals and vice-principals who attended an opportunity to learn more about English language teaching and learning and the experiences of their teachers. Lien and Chi's data revealed a greater level of confidence and enthusiasm in their relationship with their DS (see section 5.4.4.3) as a result of these informal learning spaces, which I would argue has created potential for future shared learning and emergence. Indeed, the existence of these school-based clusters suggests a conscious awareness of the need to involve other levels of the education system (DSs, school principals) in supporting teacher change.

7.6.5 Chapter conclusion

What has emerged from the findings of this case-study is that the sense that teachers make of new curriculum practices and behaviours is mediated by how others involved in supporting them also make sense of the changes. The teachers struggled to make sense of and enact change and their emergent curriculum practices represented a paradigm shuffle rather than the desired shift. Those tasked with supporting the teachers in transforming classroom practices and behaviours were also struggling to make sense of the new curriculum. The majority of studies of TESOL change contexts identify problems with textbooks, INSET provision and classroom resources, for example, as obstacles to successful reform (see chapter 3 section 3.3). The contribution of this study is to highlight that it is the dynamics of overlapping interactions between *both* the different elements *and* people involved in the change process in different layers of the education system that mediate emergence of new curriculum practices. I believe that the significance of the data lies in its illumination of the 'messiness' of educational change and the fact that change is 'person-centred' (Parker and Parker, 2007; in Kennedy, 2013; p.26) involving interactions between participants in all layers of the system.

My research underscores the dynamics of overlapping control parameters which act to 'settle' the system so that individuals' practices and behaviours head towards a *shuffle* rather than, in complexity terms, a phase shift. The data points to interconnected *conditions* (inherent within the control parameters) rather than technical procedures or elements within the education system which are likely to promote the kind of emergence desired in communicative language curricula. These conditions are shown in Figure 7.2 below.

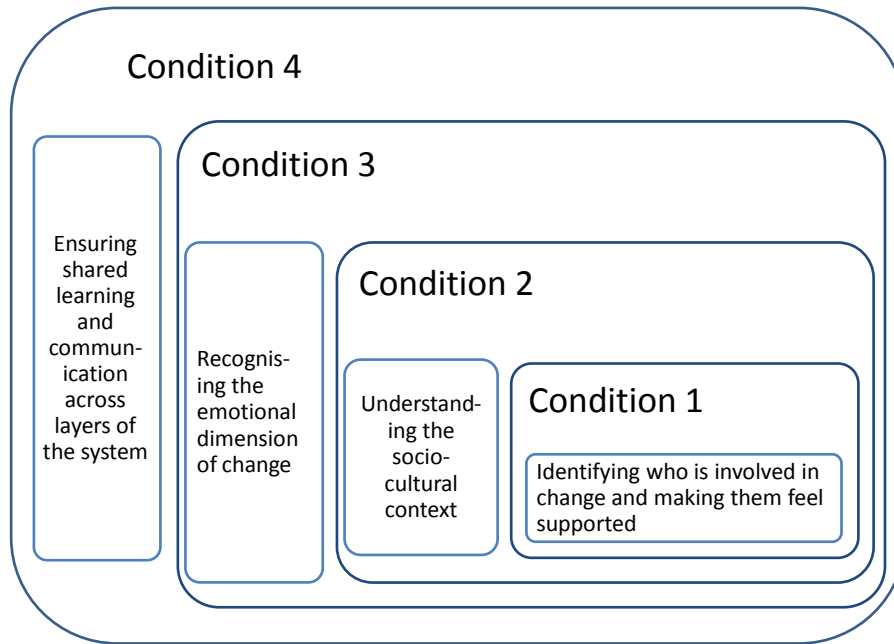


Figure 7.2 The conditions for emergence

Conditions in the context of this study, as shown in Figure 7.2, can be described as:

- knowing who needs support and providing the kind of support needed for all the different change participants in the many layers
- an understanding of the socio-cultural context into which the change is being introduced and thus the challenges that change will pose for different groups identified and the time scales involved for the support identified in 'condition 1'
- a recognition of the emotional issues around normativity and perceptions of risk and where these emanate from
- the establishment of feedback loops that will encourage shared learning across the layers, particularly in terms of the support needed for those identified in 'condition 1'.

While the findings show that many aspects of these conditions in the current implementation context of the three districts are barely visible, the data did reveal windows of opportunity reflecting learning, connectedness, and self-organisation which hint at the future possibility of emergence. This study offers a new

contribution to the literature on TESOL curriculum change through the adoption of a complexity approach which has helped me to uncover insights into the relational dimension of change.

The following chapter concludes this study. In this final chapter I restate my research aims and methodology and highlight in more detail the main contributions of the findings. I discuss the implications of these findings for curriculum change implementation policy and practice as well as providing suggestions for future research and highlighting the limitations of this study.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Educational change depends on what teachers think and do – it's as simple and as complex as that.

This inquiry began with critical reflection of the quote above (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991, p.117) in relation to the context of English language curriculum change in Vietnam. I set out to gain a better understanding of the complexity of curriculum change through examining how different actors operating in different layers of the education system make sense of curriculum reform. I have explored the nature of complex educational change in the context of three districts in one province in Vietnam and gained an understanding of what it is that makes *what teachers think and do* 'complex'. I have also established that a technical perspective of change, focusing on single, discrete parts involved in reform, misses the inherent messiness of curriculum change manifest in the multiple relationships and interactions involved within and between different layers of the education system.

My aim in this final chapter is to highlight the original contribution the study makes to our understanding of education change and discuss the implications of the findings for policy makers, change planners, educational managers and practitioners involved in TESOL curriculum change implementation, not only in Vietnam but also in other contexts undergoing similar educational change. The chapter also provides a reflection on the complexity approach that underpins this study. It goes on to look ahead to possible further areas of study and highlights the limitations of the study.

8.2 Contributions of the study

This study supports Fullan's assertion that the role of the teacher in educational change is complex. However the significance lies in the fact that the research presented in this thesis adds deeper understanding as to *what* complex change *is*. This deeper understanding can be seen in how the study has tried to demonstrate and explain the multi-dimensionality of curriculum change in action in a real context, supporting Fullan's (2007) view that educational change is complex because it is

'socially complex'. My research has revealed how what different stakeholders 'do and think' in relation to their professional roles has been shaped by the interconnected relationships and interactions involved in the sense-making process. This is significant because, as the analysis of the data in Chapter 7 has shown, it is the nature of this interconnectedness which harbours the conditions likely to promote the desired emergence of new practices and behaviours among change participants. In addition, while the educational change literature has continually highlighted over the past 30 years the inappropriacy of a purely technical approach to curriculum change (see Chapter 3), research still tends to focus solely on technical, isolated elements of change in an attempt to understand the implementation process (Tabulawa, 2013; Guthrie, 2013). While such research is useful, my study has attempted to show how only focusing on the technical misses the struggles, tensions and dilemmas of those experiencing change. It has highlighted how it is the interconnectedness of these human relationships which makes curriculum change complex and this constitutes a contribution to the TESOL change field.

Much of the literature on educational change provides a theoretical background of complexity (e.g. Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2008; Kuhn, 2008). There seem to be relatively few studies in the field of TESOL curriculum change that have explored the implementation process from a complexity perspective and analysed qualitative data regarding multiple stakeholders' sense-making of curriculum change. Recently there have been calls in the literature for a more multi-dimensional approach to examining educational change in an attempt to avoid looking at reform in terms of isolated fragments of implementation. (e.g. see Bastardas-Boada, 2013). This study attempts to answer this call through its empirical exploration of what 'complexity' means for particular people at different 'layers' of a particular context. This complexity has been shown through identifying the interconnectedness of the different people in different roles operating in different parts of the system and the unpredictability of their sense-making processes, all of which mediate implementers' emergent practices and behaviours.

This study has contributed to a deeper understanding of the relational dimension of change, which also involves an awareness of stakeholders' emotional responses to change in terms of the levels of risk, compliance and trust they feel characterise their relationships with others. This emotional dimension of sense-making addresses the call for more focus on people and emotions voiced by many

educational change scholars (e.g. Day and Lee, 2011b, Day et al, 2007; Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2011; Smit, 2003) and, as I stated in Chapter 3, by Xu (2013, p.375), one of the few voices in the TESOL literature to assert that “it is a pity that teacher emotion remains an unrecognised area in TESOL”. I believe that this is the first time the Vietnam educational change context has been discussed in terms of relational dimensions of complex curriculum change.

8.3 Implications for TESOL curriculum change

This study has shown that the introduction of the pilot programme, the curriculum, the new textbooks and INSET workshops initially created a trigger for change. However the findings also showed that these tangible elements of curriculum change were not enough to sustain this trigger nor develop it into a momentum to push the participants beyond a ‘shuffle’. The findings therefore suggest that policy makers and change planners need to consider the role that less visible control parameters (curriculum change as a cultural change, perceptions of risk, feeling of being supported, and communication flow) play in controlling the direction and speed of change.

This implies that curriculum change policy makers and planners need to move away from a purely technical, rational approach to change implementation (which has been the call in the literature for the last 30 years or so) towards an understanding of the *conditions* which might enable emergence and an awareness of how these conditions can be created and sustained over a period of time. As I discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter 7), my findings highlight four conditions. Firstly identifying who is involved in change and who will be affected by any change policy so that support can be provided for all implementers in many layers of the system. Secondly, an understanding of the socio-cultural context into which the change is being put and so an awareness of where the change participants are starting from and the challenges that the change might pose for them. Thirdly, and closely linked to the second condition, a recognition of the emotional dimension of change and change participants’ feelings of vulnerability that are likely to arise around issues of normativity and perceptions of risk. Finally, ensuring shared learning and communication across the system through building connections and relationships.

However simply being more aware of the complexity of curriculum change implementation will not necessarily help policy makers and change planners move the change participants in the desired direction of change. Indeed, the messiness

that a relational dimension brings to the change landscape may understandably be daunting for those tasked with planning implementation. The findings of this study provide useful indications of where change planners might choose to prioritise their efforts and resources. This appears to be at the district or middle layers of the system where change implementation is actually being enacted. Therefore it is coherence in the understanding of the aims of the curriculum and the implications for classroom practice between change participants such as teachers, DSs and UTs that is likely to promote the conditions for emergence. This is because, as the data have shown, how teachers feel is likely to be affected by how their DSs and UTs and principals relate to them and their concerns, rather than by others operating in more distant upper layers of the system.

The following sub-sections draw on the four conditions mentioned previously that are likely to promote the emergence of desired changes and examines the practical implications for TESOL policy makers and planners.

8.3.1 Feeling supported

The findings show that the prevailing 'deficit' approach to curriculum change, where the underlying assumption is that English language education is ineffective because of the teachers in it (Snyder, 2013), limits the possibilities for shared learning and recognition of the kind of support needed by different change participants operating in different parts of the system. The study therefore suggests that policy makers and planners should consider not only the teachers' role in enacting change and the support they are likely to need, but also who else is involved and therefore likely to require support. This is crucial because if those that are tasked with supporting teachers implement a new curriculum are themselves also struggling to make sense of what that curriculum requires, or indeed not aware of what a new pedagogical approach means for teachers, then it is unlikely that teachers will be able to do more than 'shuffle'. This situation also highlights the need for recognition that curriculum change is a cultural change for *all* implementers and so as change agents, roles such as DSs and UTs will also need on-going and sustained support in making sense of what change requires. Policy makers and change planners, therefore, need to consider the extent to which the ideas in the new curriculum differ from the prevailing conceptions about teaching and learning and understand what changes implementers will need to make to their practices and behaviours.

Indeed, my findings indicated that it is *the feeling* of being supported that seemed to matter to the teachers and many of the DSs and UTs. While the participants voiced

concerns about the quality and quantity of formal INSET provision, it seemed to be the sense of isolation that created greatest frustration and anxiety. This isolation was manifest in terms of both the physical and emotional. The examples provided in my data showed teachers struggling to enact change in isolation from peers and colleagues, and UTs very distant to the contextual realities of the district level where change is actually carried out. At the same time feeling supported also referred to the extent to which the wider community (that impacts on the teachers) recognises the challenges of change and understands that the implementation process will be hard for implementers. Thus, support was also seen by the participants in this study as not only formal provision, but an underlying ethos of support.

This concern over feeling supported has three implications for change planners and education managers. Firstly, there needs to be greater understanding across different layers of the education system of the challenges that change brings to those who have to implement it, along with a shared empathy for the difficulties which can then be seen to be linked to clear support provision. Secondly, policy makers and planners need to consider how they can continue to be supportive to all those involved in change over time through on-going development and follow-up to training courses. Thirdly, policy makers and planners need to consider ways of building multi-level connections, creating opportunities to gather information and opportunities for as many stakeholders as possible to share learning.

Feeling supported seems to be linked to the nature and extent of communication. The findings support the view that feedback loops, and the flow of information and communication inherent in them, are crucial to encouraging change in the education system (Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2006). This implies that curriculum change should be viewed by policy makers, planners and those involved in implementation, as a learning exercise which can provide opportunities to gather information and build connections and relationships across layers of the system; perhaps in this sense of encouraging a learning-centred system in the spirit of what the TESOL change is claiming to promote.

8.3.2 Perceptions of risk

My inquiry highlights the often forgotten emotional side of reform and the influence emotional responses may have on the direction and nature of the change process. In the emotional environment of curriculum change, relationships that provide trust and freedom to allow change participants to take risks, decide on suitable practices and behaviours for their particular context and self-organise, are more likely to

promote emergence. Therefore if change participants such as teachers, UTs and DSs are to feel comfortable with taking risks associated with changing their practices and behaviours in line with the new curriculum, change planners and educational managers need to consider the kind of turbulence curriculum change is likely to stir up. Planners also need to consider how the different change participants can be supported through relationships of trust and independence, in a way that makes them feel secure yet at the same time steers them in the desired direction of change away from the status quo.

8.3.3 Spaces of possibility

While the control parameters in this particular change context were buffeting the individual participants along a path of status quo manifest in their 'shuffling', the glimmers of possibility evident in the data suggest how change planners might act to encourage desired emergence. The school cluster meetings, evident in one district, provided teachers with a collaborative environment in which to interact, analyse, learn and reflect on their current practices and behaviours. These clusters were also significant in their long-term approach to teacher development and their location within schools and districts. This contrasts with the formal INSET provision which was planned as one-off workshops or courses remote from the teachers' actual classrooms. Similarly the survey of primary schools conducted by trainers in one of the universities was outside the mandated implementation plans and shows how there was enough freedom and momentum for this part of the system to self-organise. These spaces of possibility were not explicitly encouraged by change planners or policy makers, rather it was the individuals in the district and in the particular university that took the initiative. However through greater shared knowledge and feedback, examples of self-organisation such as these might become known to planners and replicated in other locations at district and institutional level.

8.4 Areas for further research

One of the contributions of this study is that it provides an alternative view of TESOL curriculum change by focusing less on policy planning and technical steps involved in change, and more on the actual *people* experiencing change. This has begun to fill a gap in the existing literature, but I feel that more research needs to be done in the area of complex TESOL curriculum change. Research in other TESOL change contexts which looks at how multi-level change participants make sense of a new

curriculum and the influence of the connections, interactions and relationships of both visible and invisible elements of the change process would further help to fill this gap in the field.

My findings highlighted the significant role emotions play in shaping sense-making, yet there are still relatively few empirical studies, particularly in TESOL contexts, which examine the emotional dimensions of change. Further research in this area would help change planners and those tasked with supporting change participants understand what is at stake for implementers and how the emotional responses to change are bound up in the messiness of the curriculum change process.

In conducting this study, I became aware of the lack of research that has investigated the role of INSET trainers and their experiences of curriculum change. In the context of my study, the UTs had the dual challenge of learning how to train experienced teachers as well as developing knowledge of primary English language education. This situation is probably not unique to Vietnam, since the introduction of English into the primary curriculum has been happening at a fast rate across the world over recent years (Graddol, 2006). Gaining a greater understanding of who supports the professional development of primary English language teachers would help policy makers and planners in deciding where to provide support provision and would therefore be a useful and timely area of study.

A key finding in this study is that emergence in this particular case study setting is characterised by a *paradigm shuffle*. However the study captures only a temporal snapshot of the change process. I would be interested in conducting further longitudinal research which investigated the change trajectories of these participants and/or others to identify shifting patterns of emergence and the longer term influence of control parameters.

This case study was small-scale focusing on a small research population in a northern province. Vietnam is a large country with different contextual landscapes in the south and north and between urban and rural provinces. It would therefore be interesting to conduct similar research replicating the methodological tools and approach used in this study, in other parts of Vietnam. This would help to build a bigger picture of complex change in Vietnam and add to policy makers' and planners' understanding of the conditions likely to promote emergence. Further research may also complement recent research carried out by Nguyen and Bui (2016) in remote areas of Vietnam (see the beginning of section 7.2.1 in the previous chapter).

One of the strengths of this study is that the research design allows for an exploration of multi-level interactions and relationships. However further research could usefully include more layers of change participants, in particular those of children who are also stakeholders in the curriculum change process. There appear to be relatively few studies on learner-centred innovation in education in Vietnam which give voice to the students who are ultimately affected by any changes happening in the classroom, with the exception of two recent empirical studies (see Phelps et al, 2014 and Nguyen et al 2015). This paucity of students' lived experiences of curriculum change also seems to be the case in other contexts, as for example Schweisfurth (2011; 2015) and Zheng and Davison (2008) identify. Bringing these voices into future research would add to the literature in the field by enhancing our understanding of complex curriculum change and the classroom itself as a space for emergence.

This inquiry has revealed insights into spaces of possibility. However it is not clear from my data whether the more informal spaces such as school clusters and peer collaboration have triggered the kind of turbulence required to encourage new practices and behaviours. Canh and Minh (2012) have suggested that teachers' informal professional learning in Vietnam is an area that requires more research. I would agree with this and suggest that investigation of informal learning in other contexts is an area of research that would usefully add to the literature on educational change and teacher development.

8.5 Limitations

This study has yielded some important insights into the understanding of the complexity of primary English language curriculum change in Vietnam. However it also has some limitations which need to be considered when reading and evaluating the contributions and implications presented in this chapter.

The sample size for this case-study was small, limited to seven primary teachers, three district specialists and four university INSET trainers. It would be impossible and undesirable to generalize from my findings based on the perceptions of a few change participants, and this is not my intention in conducting this research. What my research aims to do is to understand the particular (Simons, 2009); to illuminate the 'messiness' of curriculum change in the single setting of this case study in the hope that this may lead to greater understanding and new learning of the complexity

of curriculum change and that these understandings based on my findings might resonate for other people beyond these data to other national educational contexts.

While having two field visits was one of the strengths of this study, I also recognise that complex educational change takes time and thus I am aware that my data reflect emergence at a particular moment in time in a particular setting. I am cautious therefore not to suggest that the findings are 'fixed' for these participants, since the dynamics of complexity means that it is impossible to predict the nature of emergent practices and behaviours in the future.

One of the challenges I encountered in the data gathering process was the selection and recruitment of participants. I was aware that the final choice of teachers and DSs 'approved' by DOET tended to be participants who had a good command of English and who had been engaged in activities with international donors before. The DSs working in three of the pilot districts not included in this study were not able to communicate in English and perhaps if I had included them, my findings may have been different. However despite this, I feel that the findings I have gathered and analysed provide a detailed account of how a particular group of implementers in a particular setting experience curriculum change, and as long as the reader is aware of who those participants are and how they were selected, then they will be able to make informed judgements about the trustworthiness of the claims that this study makes and how they might relate to their own contexts.

8.6 Reflections on using a complexity approach

As I set out in Chapter 1, the rationale for this study began from a questioning of what it is that makes curriculum change complex and how this relates to the teacher in the implementation process. There were several approaches I could have used which would have helped me to focus on layers of interdependent relationships, such as ecological approaches or Actor Network Theory (see Fenwick et al, 2011). However with the overwhelming focus on the 'technical' still so abundant in educational change contexts and within the research literature, I felt that drawing on a theory of complexity would help to foreground exactly that; that curriculum change is complex , how it is complex and why this complexity might matter.

One of the challenges was how to go about actually using complexity theory, particularly since there are relatively few empirical examples which draw on complexity theory in the educational change literature, and even fewer in the

TESOL curriculum change field. I found the terminology of Complexity Theory challenging and often hard to get to grips with. This may be an alienating feature of a complexity approach. However I was able to focus on just a few concepts which had the most relevance to my study. This framework of connectedness, feedback, self-organisation and emergence helped me to focus all stages of my research on the interconnectedness of a multi-dimensional change context. In this sense, I would agree with McQuillan (2008, p.1793) who (as I reported in Chapter 3, section, 3.5.3) argues that complexity theory “is good to think with” and that it “...offers a holistic framework for understanding the systemic nature of educational reform”. Yet at the same time, at the back of my mind throughout the research process was a niggling question put by Morrison (2006) as to whether applying a complexity perspective to a research study can actually really add anything new. Could I have got the same findings and made the same claims without adopting a conceptual framework drawn from complexity theory? My answer would be “quite possibly”, although I am also not entirely sure if using a different framework would have helped me any better identify and describe what it is that is complex about curriculum change.

The dangers of complexity theory being purely metaphorical in application have been well documented (e.g. see Morrison, 2006; 2008). However I believe that this study has attempted to move beyond the metaphorical to pinpoint *lived* conditions, actions and relationships within the case setting which reveal the complexity of change and the implications for those involved in curriculum change implementation. This is a modest step towards beginning to understand the relational and emotional dimensions of change that seem to be lacking in much of curriculum change planning around the world and in much of the educational change literature.

Ultimately it is up to the reader to decide whether a complexity approach has helped to address the research aims and questions in this study, and whether the findings resonate with the notion of complexity. It is an approach I would like to use again, and one that others might apply to their own research, perhaps for the same reasons I did; to explore and put a spotlight on the human factor of curriculum change.

8.7 Summary and final thoughts

This study has explored the nature of complex educational change in the context of three districts in one province in Vietnam in order to gain an understanding of what it is that makes *what teachers think and do* 'complex'. Using a qualitative case study and multiple data gathering tools, my research adopted a complexity approach to examine the relational dimension of change. I feel that this case study has been conducted rigorously and paints a trustworthy picture of the messiness and complexity of the primary English language curriculum change process in Vietnam.

Although I set out to explore complexity and so to some extent recognised that it existed, one of the surprising things for me that emerged from the data was the extent of this complexity and just how crucial the relationships and interactions between the different stakeholders actually seemed to be in terms of understanding the picture of change. I discovered that the *paradigm shuffle* evident in the practices and behaviours of the participants was influenced by a number of control parameters acting to maintain the status quo. However contrary to much of the literature on TESOL change, these control parameters were not discrete, technical elements of change policy, but rather people-focused elements related to educational culture, emotions, support and communication. Within these control parameters lie the conditions that are likely to help propel individuals in the education system towards the desired emergence of new practices and behaviours. The research suggests that policy makers and change planners need to take account of these less visible control parameters and the conditions which may positively influence the direction and speed of the curriculum change. So, to end where I started, with Fullan: change depends on the teacher *and* those who support him or her, and the complexity of this lies not so much in the technical steps of implementation, but in the relationships and interactions the teacher has with both the other people and elements in different layers in the system.

This study has involved me in a transition from a practitioner to a student and then to a researcher. It has not always been an easy journey, but it is one from which I have learnt a considerable amount. I have been challenged to theorise my own experiences of educational change in Vietnam and to reflect on my previous role as project manager in the light of the complexity approach that underpins this study. I have also developed methodological skills in research design, data gathering and analysis. I hope that my sincere interest in and concern about the Vietnam English language education context and the people in it shines through in this study and that

the reader finds new ideas and insights in relation to educational change that may be relevant to their context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Example consent form for teachers¹

Consent to take part in the research project: *Complexity, connections and sense-making: Stakeholder experiences of primary English language curriculum change in one province in Vietnam.*

| | Please put your initial next to the statements you agree with |
|--|---|
| I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated X 2013 explaining the research study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it. | |
| I understand that I do not have to take part in the research study and I can drop out at any time without giving a reason and without there being any problem. | |
| I agree to take part in the following research activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two individual face-to-face interviews • one group interview • three classroom observations and follow-up interviews. | |
| I give permission for the interviews to be audio-recorded. | |
| I give permission for my drawing in the second interview to be kept by the researcher. | |
| I understand that my name and my contributions to the research study will not appear in any reports, publications or presentations. | |
| I agree for the anonymised data collected from me to be used in the PhD thesis, future reports, presentations or publications. | |
| I agree to take part in the research activities described above and will inform Laura Grassick (email address) if my contact details change. | |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Name of participant | |
| Participant's signature | |
| Date | |
| Researcher | |
| Researcher's signature | |
| Date | |

¹ Adapted from the form available on the University of Leeds Research Support Website.

Appendix 2 Interview schedule 1

Interview 1 –Experiences and perceptions of curriculum change

Teachers

Professional background

Can you tell me about your job as primary English language teacher?

Why did you become a primary English language teacher?

Experiences and perceptions of curriculum reform

How are you involved in the primary English curriculum reform?

How would you describe the curriculum reform in primary English language education?

How do you feel in your role in the implementation of the new primary English language curriculum?

How would you describe your school's/DOET's perception towards the curriculum reform?

How would you compare your feelings at the start of the pilot implementation programme and now?

Can you outline some of the main challenges you have encountered in implementing the new curriculum?

How would you describe the role and position of English in the primary school curriculum?

Pedagogical approaches

What approaches do you use in your teaching? Can you give an example?

Has your teaching changed since you started using the new textbooks? If I came into your classroom how would I see these changes?

Has your view of primary ELT changed since using the new curriculum and textbooks? Can you explain?

Training background

Did your previous training background prepare you for teaching primary English language teachers? Can you explain?

Do you consider yourself well-prepared to teach primary English language teachers and implement the new curriculum? Can you explain?

Did DOET or others organise specific training to prepare you in using the new textbooks and curriculum? Can you give an example?

What kind of professional development has been provided for you since you started using the new textbooks and curriculum?

Appendix 3 Interview Schedule2

Interview 2 – Connections and relationships

In this interview we will talk about the **people and events and things** that have influenced how:

you understand the new primary English language curriculum/2020 project
you have been able to implement changes in primary English language teaching and learning in relation to your job (as teacher/ trainer/ District Specialist).

I am interested in:

- **who** has influenced you (e.g. DOET, MOET, textbook writers, colleagues, Department Head, School principal)
- the kind of help or support they have provided you in your job and how helpful this has been
- your relationship with the people you identify
- how you feel about those relationships

- **what** has influenced you (e.g. the curriculum, meetings, the textbooks, training courses, tests)
- how you feel about these things or events
- how they have helped/or not helped you in your role in implementing the new curriculum/2020 project
- which people/things you feel have had the biggest influence on how you can implement the new curriculum/2020 project

In the interview I will ask you to draw a diagram/mind map to show your relationship and connections with the people, events and things that are relevant for you.

You are free to draw your diagram in any way. We will then talk about your diagram and the connections and relationship between the people and things you have included.

Appendix 4 Observation schedule

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Themes | Aspects of 'communicativeness' (as suggested in the new curriculum) |
| Classroom activities | <p>What are students doing during the lesson? (e.g. speaking, reading, writing, listening activities)</p> <p>What is the nature of the activity? (choral work, pair/group work, role play, individual work)</p> <p>What is the purpose of the activity? (repetition, using language for communication)</p> <p>What is the teacher doing during the lesson? (e.g. leading choral work, setting up activities, monitoring pair/group work, supporting language use)</p> |
| Teacher-student interaction | <p>What is the nature of interaction between the teacher and students? (e.g. repetition, Q/A, discussion, praise, correction)</p> <p>How does the teacher engage students? (e.g. direct questions, choral questions, personal talk, use of voice, gestures, use of resources)</p> <p>How do students appear to react to the interactions with the teacher?</p> |

This is a rough schedule which focuses on the two main themes that reflect the changes in the new curriculum. During the observation I was open to other events and behaviours that occurred in the lesson and these were recorded in my field notes as part of the lesson description and included in the lesson narratives.

Appendix 5 Interview schedule 3

Themes for individual/group interviews in Phase 2

The interviews in Phase 2 were guided by these themes and categories that emerged from initial analysis of Phase 1 data.

Some of the questions formed from these themes overlap with the interviews in Phase 1, however this helped to gain a richer picture of a particular issue.

Theme 1:

Perceptions of English language teaching and learning

- what communicative teaching means
- perceptions of what others understand by 'communicativeness'
- a 'good' primary English language teacher
- possible constraints/enablers to being a 'good' primary teacher

Theme 2:

Perceptions of change and the NFLP2020

- the role of the teacher in curriculum change
- the role of others
- perception of involvement/voice/agency in change process
- shared understanding of change

Theme 3:

Perceptions of support in implementation

- perception of being prepared to implement curriculum
- nature of support for their role
- feelings about support provided
- opportunities for feedback
- opportunities to learn from colleagues

Appendix 6 Interview dates for main participants

| Participant | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| | Experiences and perceptions | Relational Mapping | Follow-up individual and group interviews |
| | Phase 1 | Phase 1 | Phase 2 |
| UT1 Phuong | 04.11.2013 | 28.11.2013 | 21.04.2014 (Individual) |
| UT2 Kim | 06.11.2013 | 15.11.2013 | 04.04.2014 (Individual) |
| UT3 Tam | 14.11.2013 | 18.11.2013 | 21.04.2014 (Individual) |
| UT4 Chung | 19.11.2013 | 28.11.2013 | 14.04.2014 (Individual) |
| T1 Mai | 04.11.2013 | 21.11.2013 | 17.04.2014 (Group) |
| T2 Bao | 08.11.2013 | 14.11.2013 | 18.04.214 (Group) |
| T3 Nhung | 05.12.2013 | 10.12.2013 | 18.04.2014 (Group) |
| T4 Lien | 05.11.2013 | 07.11.2013 | 17.04.2014 (Group) |
| T5 Chi | 12.11.2013 | 13.11.2013 | 18.04.2014 Group) |
| T6 Thanh | 29.11.2013 | 09.12.2013 | 17.04.2014 (Group) |
| T7 Chau | 29.11.2013 | 16.12.2013 | 18.04.2014 (Group) |
| DS1 Thai | 21.11.2013 | 25.11.2013 | 02.04.2014 (Individual) |
| DS2 Diep | 12.11.2013 | 13.11.2013 | 15.04.2014 (Individual) |
| DS3 Hue | 31/10/2013 | 01.11.2013/ 27.11.2013 | 03.04.2014 (Individual) |

Appendix 7 Transcription code used in data transcription

| Code and explanation | Examples |
|--|--|
| The use of punctuation and new sentences are applied based on the speakers' intonation, content of talk and/or pauses heard. | Ah I get it! So first when I do the training normally, so normally I have quite a lot of demonstrations. And in the demonstrations I show them how I as a primary teacher what would I do, what words should I say how should I teach? So in my demonstration then you know that's how I do and then so they could imagine and it's easier for them to picture what exactly they should do in the er ,you know, in the class the real class. |
| No punctuation is used where the speakers' talk continues in a long utterance. | For example this year I can hold a festival an English festival for students but next term I can hold a competition for teachers or for students in the district ok so they have to take note do it in this and do it in the schools first yes they do it in their school and then they chose the people to go to the district competitions. |
| Pauses in talk are marked with (.) Longer pauses (over 5 seconds) are indicated with (...) | And er (.) for example this one module for students is very difficult and sometimes it's difficult it's different from the-the some foreign books er .. |
| False starts and stammers are marked with a dash - | So er for example the-the teacher er ask children to work in groups and w-work in pairs and so the teacher er only er watch er how-how they er work. |
| Hesitation noises are marked with er, mm , um | Yes er yes er but I think er as I said the textbook when you want to apply for the whole Vietnam it must be er very simple, um very standard. |
| When the talk is inaudible it is marked with (?) | About this topic and so they can first, first they can (?) and um. some key words I give based on how to ask, how to greet and er how to introduce their name or age and so they are talking to each other. Yes. |
| Activity other than talk is marked in []. Non-verbal emotions are also marked in []. | But I think they have changed Tieng Anh 3 like this one [shows L the textbook] um this is the new one but there's another new one. L: Ok and have you seen er this is the curriculum [L shows document] have you seen this document? T4: I receive some I receive some like this. [hesitant]. |
| Overlapping talk is marked in { } | L: Yes, and when you were a pilot teacher and you did Grade 3, 4, 5 as a pilot {Yes, I have done it} when you were doing the pilot programme, the pilot is now finished, were you teaching 4 periods or 2 periods? |

Appendix 8 Sample units from Tieng Anh textbook

Unit 17
My Area

Lesson 1

1 Look, listen and repeat.   

Nam: Are you free now, Mai?
Mai: Yes, I am.
Nam: Let's go to the bookshop. I want some books.
Mai: Great idea! I want some books too.



2 Look and say.  

Let's go to the _____.

Great idea!
Sorry, I'm busy.

a  post office

b  supermarket

c  bookshop

d  cinema

48 Tiếng Anh 4

Talk. 

Let's _____.



Listen and tick.  

1.  a  b

2.  a  b

3.  a  b

Unit 17 My Area 49




Unit 17, Tiếng Anh 4 Student Book

(Links to Lesson extract from T.Nhung.LO2/11.4.14)

Unit 18



Colours

Lesson 1





1 Look, listen and repeat.   

Mai: What is it?
 Nam: It's a rose.
 Mai: What colour is it?
 Nam: It's red.
 Mai: Yes. It's red.





2 Look and say.  

What colour is it? It's _____

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| a  | b  | c  |
| red | orange | yellow |
| d  | e  | f  |
| green | blue | pink |

54 Tiếng Anh 3 



3 Talk. 


What _____ ? _____



4 Let's sing. 

Colours
 Red, blue and yellow
 Green and white
 and pink and brown.
 Red, blue and yellow
 These are beautiful colours!



Unit 18 Colours 55  

Unit 18, Tiếng Anh 3 Student Book
 (Links to Lesson Extract from T.Chau.LO/14.4.14)