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Problems on primary school-based in-service training in Vietnam: A case study of Bac Giang province

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Abstract

In Vietnam, despite the introduction of a new curriculum based on a child-centred education approach, there exist many problems and challenges in the educational process. To overcome these problems, the Vietnamese and Japanese governments have been conducting an in-service teacher-training programme, including school-based observation and reflection of lessons as a major activity. This study investigates the problems encountered in these schools. The results reveal that (1) the lesson is extremely fast-paced, (2) teachers tend to evaluate their colleagues and students, (3) teachers need to learn about how to learn and (4) promoting dialogue among teachers is considerably challenging.
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1. Introduction

The observation and reflection of lessons has been stressed as one of the most important activities in the pursuit of teacher professional development (TPD). Subsequently, it becomes necessary to set an entire school as a unit of activities. This is because such professional growth of teachers is closely related to their relationships within schools (Barth, 1990; Harpaz, 2005; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Leithwood, 1992; Taconis et al., 2004; Wrigley, 2003). This kind of professional growth is not confined only to cases in Western countries: a number of case studies in Japan also reveal the importance of enhancing collegiality within schools

for the purpose of professional development (Boyle et al., 2005; Inagaki, 1986; Ito and Takeda, 1994; Ose and Sato, 2003; Sato and Sato, 2003; Sato, 2006a).

While most of the above-mentioned literature is based on cases in developed countries, some research reveals the difficulty faced in altering the actions and behaviours of teachers through off-school INSET programmes, such as cases in Indonesia (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2003) or Sri Lanka (Johnson, 2006). Moreover, with regard to developing countries, the observation and reflection of lessons has been studied. Such studies emphasise the importance of opening classrooms for observation and obtaining comments from the colleagues or mentors present in the classroom at the time in order to develop the professional capabilities of teachers (Adey and Dillon, 1994; Harvey, 1999; Johnson et al., 2000;

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Reed et al., 2002; Saito et al., 2006a). Nonetheless, despite the emphasis on the importance of classroom observation, O'Sullivan (2002) candidly discusses the difficulty in promoting the reflection of lessons with teachers in a Namibian case study by referring to the lack of theoretical empowerment. Further, Saito et al. (2006a, 2007) also emphasise that the difficulty in reflection of lessons stems from the lack of detailed attention paid at the time of classroom observation. Moreover, the aforementioned literature of case studies—despite its clinical nature—tended to regard teachers as groups of individuals rather than to set schools as units of activities.

As mentioned earlier, a school should work as a unit in the pursuit of TPD. The reason for this necessity is essentially stated in the following literature: Barth (1990), Harpaz (2005), Joyce and Showers (2002), Leithwood (1992) and Wrigley (2003). In addition, another reason for this necessity is that the nature of schools helps to define the identities of and roles for teachers who work there. Studies on Indonesia (Bjork, 2005) and Turkey (Karakaya, 2004) have clarified that teachers tend to identity themselves with bureaucrats and focus on adhering to the rules and regulations stipulated by central governments, rather than identify themselves with autonomous professionals and focus on the development of children. These studies also indicated that this tendency of teachers to identify themselves with bureaucrats stems from the nature of schools that have an administrative endpoint. All these studies suggest that the orientation of teachers with regard to professional development is dependent on the culture of the school that they work in.

There are some studies that focus on schools in developing countries from the perspective of the professional capabilities of teachers, such as studies on schools in Pakistan (Retallick and Mithani, 2003), Zimbabwe (Mtewa and Thompson, 2000) and Indonesia (Bjork, 2005; Saito et al., 2006b). Each of these studies makes a significant contribution to further intensify the discussion on the relationship between schools and TPD. However, the study conducted by Retallick and Mithani (2003) has a limitation in that their study depends mostly on interviews rather than actual observation and reflection of lessons. Further, Mtewa and Thompson's study (2000) is essentially a proposal to reorganise in-service teacher education from a centre-based one to a school-based one; however, the proposal remains at a theoretical stage. More-over, although Bjork's study (2005) provides a comprehensive and thorough investigation of schools, its main focus is greatly related to decentralisation, and not necessarily to the professional development of teachers. Regardless of these limitations, the discussion does cover certain important elements of TPD, such as roles and identities of teachers. Finally, although Saito et al. (2006b) discussed the activities involved in TPD, namely, the development of joint observation and reflection of lesson, involving the entire schools, their research only dealt with the initial stages of the development.

With regard to Vietnam, which is the focus of the present paper, Duggan (2001) conducted research on curriculum reform at the lower secondary level and pointed out the risk of its limited impact only on large cities, expanding the gap between larger cities and rural areas. Duggan's (2001) analysis is largely based on secondary documents and lacks the examination of the situation of actual classrooms and TPD. In this regard, Ng and Nguyen (2006) investigated the extent to which instructors teaching physics at upper secondary levels integrate practical work and contextual teaching into the learning approach. According to Ng and Nguyen (2006), although teachers possess a strong willingness to include practical work and contextual teaching in the learning approach, they are unable to implement such activities and approaches due to limitations in the schools' environment. Moreover, the researchers indicated that in Vietnamese classes, the tendency of approaches to integrate real-life contexts into the teaching of physics is mostly through explanations and illustrations by the teachers themselves. However, their study is based on questionnaire survey methods and it does not investigate the situation in schools using qualitative research methods. Further, the issues pertaining to in-service training and professional development of teachers were not within the scope of their discussion.

1.1. Purpose of this research

As mentioned previously, there is a serious lack of study on the situation of TPD in Vietnam. Vietnamese society has almost universalised its primary education; from now onwards, the enhancement of its quality will be the main area of focus. Consequently, there will be a strong need to critically discuss the manner in which the professional capabilities of teachers can be developed. For this purpose, it will be necessary to clarify the types

of problems that exist in the promotion of TPD and to consider alternative solutions.

The present authors have been involved in a project for in-service teacher training conducted jointly by the Vietnamese government and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The project was designed to conduct a series of in-service training programmes on child-centred education. The training was divided into the following two types: (1) a series of centre-based training—inviting teachers to the centre for a few days to receive training and to help them expand their theoretical understanding—and (2) school-based training, which is the focus of this study. In this project, the present authors visited the pilot schools to participate in the joint observation and reflection of lessons.

However, in the project, the authors encountered many difficulties and obstacles in promoting joint observation and reflection of lessons, and hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the same. It should be noted that the authors do not aim to criticise the teachers and schools in Vietnam; in fact, their intention is quite the contrary. The authors acknowledge that it takes time to reform the culture of schools and teachers (Macleod and Golby, 2003; Ose and Sato, 2003; Sato and Sato, 2003; Sato, 2006a; Wood and Millichamp, 2000). Furthermore, the authors consider that all these difficulties are significant and crucial because they provide an insight into the manner in which the progress of TPD in Vietnam, as well as other developing countries, can be accomplished. Therefore, such difficulties and obstacles would be very important because they would unlock the potential for dialogue for growth (Weiler, 2001) among stakeholders, that is not only Vietnamese teachers but also international partners, as well as for their development. Moreover, the authors believe that reporting these difficulties and obstacles would lead to the exploration and redefinition of these problems and result in their resolution (Bruner, 1996). For this reason, it is necessary to analyse the components of these difficulties and obstacles.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyse the problems encountered thus far while conducting joint lesson observation and reflection as TPD activities, despite O'Sullivan (2005) pointing out the necessity of referring to good practices through lesson observation. Moreover, it should be strongly emphasised that teachers in the target schools of TPD activities have been evolving considerably;

hence, additional research and study is necessary for further analysis. However, the authors believe that analysing the problems encountered while conducting TPD activities is extremely significant and important for instructors and researchers—both in Vietnam and other countries—in order to understand and resolve these problems at the initial stages of TPD in Vietnamese schools. Therefore, this paper includes a case study that was conducted to analyse these problems and their factors.

For this reason, the paper is divided into five sections. Section 2 contains an explanation of the methods used in this research. Section 3 presents a description of the case, focusing on the project framework and activities. Section 4 analyses the issues observed in the research period. Section 5 provides the concluding remarks.

2. Methods

The authors were involved as team members in the implementation of the project; moreover, they collected information pertaining to the progress of the TPD activities by directly observing the lessons and by exchanging information with each other as well as other colleagues during the project. This study will examine the situation of the five schools that were set as pilot schools to promote the observation and reflection of lessons. The research was conducted from June to December 2006, and the data were collected through participation in the observation and reflection of lessons in a series of professional teacher meetings (PTMs) in each school. The authors attended 52 PTMs and took note of the events that occurred at the time and noted their opinions regarding these events. The analysis presented in this study is based on the facts and ideas owned by the authors. The transcripts of the focus group discussion were translated from Vietnamese to English and typed by professional translators.

This paper employs a case study as the method to analyse the data (Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 1998). In other words, this paper provides an in-depth description and interpretation of the cases obtained from the project and the generalised lessons that were learnt. For this reason, the focus of the analysis was on statements regarding the involvement of the entire school in INSET. Therefore, Section 3 comprises a threefold description as follows: (1) outline of the project, (2) framework of the INSET implemented under the project and (3)

cases obtained from the Vietnamese schools. Section 4 of the paper presents an analysis, which investigates the factors.

3. Case

3.1. Policies for teacher professional development in Vietnam

With regard to Vietnamese education, primary education has almost been universalised. However, as admitted by the Vietnamese government, a large number of problems and challenges still exist in the teaching and learning process. Based on the conventional teaching model of imparting knowledge to students, the Ministry of Education and Training (2001) identifies that Vietnamese education tends to force mechanical abilities on students and pays little attention to real-life practical abilities.

In order to overcome these problems, the Vietnamese government introduced a new curriculum for primary education in 2002. As mentioned previously, the old curriculum had severe limitations such as voluminous content; this led teachers to force rote-learning on their students as well as compelled them to strictly follow the textbook when conducting lessons (Duggan, 2001). However, the new curriculum is different from the former one: under the new curriculum, teachers at the primary level are required to change their teaching approach, such as the inclusion of teaching materials and learning activities, based on the child-centred educational framework. Article 24 of the Educational Law established in 1998 states the following:

> The method of general education consists in developing activities, voluntariness, initiative and creativeness of the pupils in conformity with the characteristics of each form and subject; fostering the method of self-teaching, training their ability to apply knowledge to practice, and impact on the sentiments, bring joy and enthusiasm in studies for the pupils.

In order to promote this new curriculum which is based on a child-centred education approach, the Vietnamese government has currently been promoting three training courses at different levels. These are summer training, demonstration training and school-based training (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2004). These courses are explained below.

The Ministry of Education and Training had originally organised the summer training course in order to ensure the smooth introduction of the new curriculum. There are two steps in the implementation of this course: training at the national level and training at the provincial level. The national level summer training course is held in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City at the beginning of the summer school holiday season, usually in March and April. The training course in Hanoi targets educational personnel in the northern half of Vietnam, while the course in Ho Chi Minh City targets educational personnel in the southern half of Vietnam. Participants in the training course are mainly from the Department of Education and Training (DOET) of each province. The summer training course usually lasts for 3–4 weeks and consists of several modules by subject; each module lasts for 4–5 days.

The summer training course at the provincial level is conducted based on the training at the national level. The participants in the training course at the national level prepare training material for the provincial level course after returning to their own province. These training materials are distributed to the Bureaus of Education and Training (BOETs) and the summer training course at the local level is conducted in every district at the end of the summer school holiday season, usually in June and July. Participants in this local summer training course are mainly primary school teachers selected from each primary school. Every district, specifically the BOET in every district, organises the training course two or three times annually and invites different teachers each time in order to ensure that all schools in the district are represented.

The demonstration training course is initiated by the DOET and the BOETs. In this course, the local education officers and key teachers coordinate to demonstrate some teaching models to the local primary school teachers. This training course aims to familiarise local teachers with teaching methods introduced in the new curriculum and to equip them with some practical skills and techniques. However, no special training material is provided in this training course; instructors use teachers' guides and students' textbooks instead.

Although the DOET usually organises this training course two or three times annually, the schedule of these courses is not fixed. Selected primary school teachers are invited to the DOET and are introduced to new teaching techniques for 2–3 days. On the other hand, the training course

organised by the BOET is implemented more regularly. The BOET staff invite teachers from four or five primary schools for each session to demonstrate new teaching models.

Based on the summer training and demonstration training courses, each primary school organises its own training course as PTMs. Principals take the initiative in conducting PTMs, and typical PTMs mainly constitute discussions among teachers, sharing of their opinions and experiences, and some teaching demonstrations. Similar to the demonstration training course, no specific training material is provided for this course and principals and teachers refer only to teachers' guides and students' textbooks. PTMs usually lack a predefined schedule or a systematic methodology.

In addition to conducting the above-mentioned training courses, local education officers in the DOET and the BOET frequently visit primary schools in their province to observe classes and to offer their advice and comments. This activity is conducted every week, keeping the local education officers significantly busy and leading to their frequent absence from the DOET and BOET offices.

3.2. Activities in Bac Giang as target of this study

In addition to their own efforts to promote in-service teacher training, the Vietnamese government began working with various international donor agencies. This study centres on one such project, which was conducted with the support of JICA from 2004. This project focused on INSET and utilised the cascading system as well as involved teachers from five out of 10 districts in Bac Giang province. The cascading training programme was conducted annually and involved a period of 3 days. However, both Vietnamese administrators and Japanese consultants agreed that it would be necessary to conduct continuous activities in order to cause certain changes at the school level. Therefore, in June 2006, another component of school-based activities pertaining to INSET was added, namely, the joint observation and reflection of lessons by the entire school. This new component is termed PTM. PTM is essentially an obligatory school-based activity, wherein teachers are required to observe and reflect the lessons taught by their colleagues.

Vietnamese administrators and Japanese consultants jointly selected pilot schools from each district based on the schools' willingness to receive support from the project for further improvement. In May 2006, Japanese consultants visited the candidate schools; subsequently, after mutual consultation, both Vietnamese administrators and Japanese consultants selected the pilot schools. Since the schools were closed for vacation from June to July 2006, they commenced activities with weekly video-reflection.

The methodology employed during PTMs can be referred to as a lesson study, which is the use of case methods for the professional development of teachers. Although case methods in developed countries occasionally include case narratives in a written form (McAninch, 1995), lesson study is based on the observation and reflection of actual lessons taught by teachers, including collegial teachers or people from external sources—such as university faculty members—and on facts observed in the concrete practices of the lessons taught (Fernandez and Yoshida, 2004; Lewis et al., 2003, 2004; Stigler and Hiebert, 1999). There are some similar activities, such as clinical supervision (Stiggins and Duke, 1988), coaching (Joyce and Showers, 2002) or action research (Noffke, 1995). Nonetheless, all the above-mentioned terms involve the observation and reflection of lessons. In other words, regardless of the activity's name, the most important aspect of TPD is dependent on the development of a teacher's ability to observe and analyse the consequences of teaching approaches on students and the ability to continuously modify the teaching methods based on student reactions (Barth, 1990).

With regard to video-reflection, the study used short videos that were less than 10 minutes long. By screening such short videos, the authors attempted to allow the teachers to pay attention to the finer details of student learning. Subsequently, the teachers as well as the authors had discussions that lasted for 90–120 minutes. In these discussions, the authors requested the participants to express their opinions and views on watching the videos, in particular, to identify (1) the situations in which the students' concentration levels with regard to learning increased and (2) the situations in which the students' concentration levels decreased. Moreover, each participant was required to comment on the aforementioned situations. This activity was expected to be a rather unusual experience for many teachers since only a limited number of participants in Vietnam tended to dominate discussions on

Table 1
Basic information of primary schools in Bac Giang by district

District	No. of primary schools (satellite schools)	No. of teachers (female teachers)	No. of pupils	Total
Son Dong	22 (90)	632 (495)	9773	467
Luc Ngan	37 (192)	1100 (889)	26,356	956
Luc Nam	36 (83)	1209 (911)	22,085	835
Yen The	21 (33)	518 (454)	9556	394
Lan Giang	29 (53)	988 (898)	18,675	665
Yen Dung	26 (21)	837 (645)	16,232	583
Viet Yen	25 (53)	725 (638)	14,926	577
Hiep Hoa	34 (53)	980 (829)	20,711	765
Tan Yen	27 (44)	850 (732)	15,325	558
Bac Giang City	10 (0)	269 (264)	8220	215
Total	267 (622)	8108 (6755)	161,859	6015

Source: Japan International Cooperation Agency (2004).

public occasions. In other words, PTM has never been exceptional. Thus, initially, several teachers were reluctant to make a comment.

Subsequently, from September onwards, the teachers began to observe and reflect on the actual lessons taught by teachers in the pilot schools. During the entire period, at least one of the authors was present for each PTM from the very beginning. In Vietnam, although the length of one class is 35 minutes, the open lessons for observation tended to last for 50–60 minutes, followed by a discussion that lasted approximately 90 minutes. At this stage, the authors did not make it necessary for each teacher to comment on the children's learning situations due to the pressure experienced by the teachers during the screening of a series of video-reflections in June and July.

3.3. Characteristics of Bac Giang province

Bac Giang province is located at about 60 km from the northeast of Hanoi. It has an area of 3800 km^2 and a population of approximately 1,500,000 people. There are 10 districts in the province: Bac Giang Town, Hiep Hoa, Than Yen, Viet Yen, Yen The, Lang Giang, Yen Dung, Luc Nam, Luc Ngan and Song Dong. Although Bac Giang is close to Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, it has rural scenery. It also has a variety of topographical features—such as flat, delta and mountainous areas—as well as demographic characteristics, such as minority settlements in some areas.

Table 2
Description of five target districts

District	Main characteristics
Bac Giang City	It is the provincial capital. There are no satellite schools, and it is educationally the most advanced area in the province. Being the provincial capital, it has good accessibility from and to other places.
Hiep Hoa	It has both flat and mountainous areas, and it is less developed despite being relatively close to the provincial capital.
Viet Yen	The main route from Hanoi passes through this district. Therefore, it has good accessibility both in the district and between the district and other areas. It is relatively developed in economic and educational terms.
Yen Dung	It is close to the provincial capital and is relatively developed in economic and educational terms. Two primary schools will be built by the Japanese grant aid.
Luc Nam	It has the third largest land area and a large population. Most of its areas are mountainous, and it has poor accessibility.

Source: Japan International Cooperation Agency (2004).

There are 267 primary schools with approximately 160,000 pupils and approximately 8000 teachers, including about 6800 female teachers in Bac Giang province. Table 1 shows basic district-wise information on primary schools in this province.

Each of the 10 districts of Bac Giang province differs in several aspects, such as topographical features, climatic conditions and composition of the

population. In the present project, the following five districts from among the 10 were selected as direct target areas for the implementation of the project: Luc Nam, Yen Dung, Viet Yen, Hiep Hoa and Bac Giang City. Basic information about these five districts is shown in Table 2. This table indicates that there is socio-economic and geographical diversity in the target areas.

4. Analysis

This section analyses the issues identified in the observation and reflection of lessons. The following is the subject of each analysis: (1) fast-paced lessons, (2) evaluative attitudes, (3) teachers as bureaucrats, (4) lack of learning and (5) lack of dialogue.

4.1. Fast-paced lessons

As mentioned earlier, one of the characteristics of the lessons observed thus far was that they were taught at a very fast pace. Perhaps, one of the reasons for this could be the simple nature of the questions posed by the teachers. For example, a teacher asked, 'What does this tank contain?' A student replied, 'Water'. Subsequently, the teacher asked another question, 'What does this basin contain?' Another student replied, 'Water'. Thus, due to the simple nature of questions, students are likely to compete with each other in attempting to attract the teacher's attention.

This type of discourse can be identified as the very typical structure of initiation, response and evaluation (IRE) (Young, 1995, p. 119). In the observed lessons, the questions posed by the teachers tended to be very simple and were not beyond the level of recitation (Collins et al., 1995, p. 343). By posing questions for recitation, teachers are likely to create an atmosphere in which students are encouraged to raise their hands and answer the questions promptly; this will help to reproduce and strengthen the competition among students in classrooms. In fact, more often than not, the teachers encouraged their students to quicken the pace of their work when conducting group activities, or even individual tasks, as seen in the Hong Kong case (Fung, 2000).

In addition, it was observed that the teachers seldom asked the students questions pertaining to their opinions or the reasons for their answers. On many occasions, it was observed that the teachers evaluated the responses given by the students and allowed other students to comment on the responses

or answers. However, the comments made by the students did not exceed the level of evaluation at which the former answers were identified as being correct or incorrect. This serious lack of deeper reflection on the students' responses during lessons led to competition, which affected the pace of lessons.

The competition observed in these lessons was an important element in determining the instructional pace. This competitive nature of teaching resulted in an increased pace of the lesson, suggesting that the teaching was based more on students with a stronger aptitude for quick and correct response. As stated by Johnson and Johnson (1995, p. 350), 'The few best or highest performers' tended to be 'acknowledged as being successful' or 'rewarded'.

In such lessons, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to transform the syntax provided by teachers without necessarily understanding the nature of the problems in detail (Wrigley, 2003, p. 117). Consequently, some of the students become sufficiently competent to predict the teachers' expectations and satisfy them by offering the correct answers as fast as possible (Brooks and Woolfolk, 1987). According to Anderson and Torrey (1995, p. 212), teachers refer to the understanding and achievement of students who perform slightly below average as the criterion group when determining the pace of the lessons. However, in the observations made by the authors, the teachers were more likely to rely on the reactions of students with a stronger aptitude for fast and correct response as the criterion group.

Thus, by identifying students with quicker responses as the criterion group, some students were unable to cope with the pace of the lessons. Students who were unable to cope with the pace tended to be neglected by the teacher and did not receive sufficient care and attention during lessons. The following is an example of such an observation.

One of the authors observed an arithmetic lesson for the fourth grade. The teacher was attempting to instruct the students on how to solve the following question.

$$A + B = S \quad \text{and} \quad A - B = D.$$

If S and D are defined, provide the values of A and B.

The teacher provided the students with yellow and green papers and allowed them to solve this problem by folding these two sets of paper. While many students began folding the papers, some

students directly used their scales to determine the values; there was one student who was unable to join in the activities. She kept very quiet and looked around restlessly. Moreover, she was unable to ask the other students for help as they were already absorbed in the task. Thus, while other students began solving the problem on their slates or notebooks, she noted some numbers but was unable to develop the idea and continued to look around nervously. At the end of the lesson, the teacher called on her to solve the problem. She stood up and merely murmured a few words in an inaudible voice. The teacher asked her to sit down and continued with the lesson.

This example suggests that the teacher's concern for the students is limited to an extent, particularly with regard to the competition among the latter. In this context, concern means to make sound decisions pertaining to students and their educational needs and to help them fulfil their basic need for security and attachment (Oser and Patry, 1995, p. 39). According to Oser and Patry (1995, p. 39), such concern should be an unconditional acceptance of the child as a person and as an autonomous individual. However, situations similar to the above-mentioned example were frequently observed during the series of PTMs. In such a case, it is possible that the inequality in the provision of concern would facilitate and strengthen competition in daily practices.

4.2. Evaluative attitudes

This section addresses the evaluative attitudes of teachers; these attitudes were clearly observed in the reflective discussions. Evaluative attitudes refer to the teachers' tendency to express their subjective judgments on students and teachers rather than analyse the contexts of the actions by students and teachers during the lessons. This section is divided into the following two parts: (1) teachers' evaluative attitudes towards students and (2) teachers' attitudes towards other teachers.

With regard to teachers' evaluative attitudes towards students, certain collective punitive viewpoints were observed. In other words, more often than not, the teachers' discussions commented merely on whether or not the students concentrated during the lesson, that is, the teachers tended to end the discussion by stating that the students were unable to concentrate during the lesson rather than describe the contexts of student learning. Moreover,

they rarely mentioned the situations that made them believe that the students were unable to concentrate on learning. Following the discussions, the authors believed that the teachers' viewpoints regarding the students would never be positive; in fact, there is a concern that these perspectives will grow more rigid and unsympathetic. Given below is an example of the discussions held during one of the PTMs; it was an arithmetic lesson on averages for the fourth grade.

Teacher 1	In one group, there were two girls who displayed a high level of concentration during the first activity. During the group activity, the boys initially showed a great deal of enthusiasm towards their work. In the correcting exercise, a boy named Huy did not concentrate on the task. Later, although his concentration level rose, it fell again because the teacher did not call on him. However, towards the end of the class, Huy's attention level rose once again and he concentrated on the lesson.
Teacher 2	Since I was seated next to Teacher 1, I agree with her response. Further, although the demonstrator's idea was interesting, it did not complement the main theme of the lesson. In addition, there was considerable cooperation among the children in some groups.
Teacher 3	I believe that the demonstrator's idea was good. Although if I were the demonstrator, I would have allowed the children to use the learning aids to calculate in the first activity.
Teacher 4	I concur with some of your ideas. I felt the atmosphere in the class was quiet. The boy who had his chin propped up on one hand did not concentrate on the lesson for the first 15 minutes. Further, two other boys did not concentrate on the lesson in the 41st minute. However, by the end of the lesson, I believe the children understood the lesson's content and gained adequate knowledge.
Teacher 5	In my opinion, the children were unable to learn actively because they were tense. In the first activity, some children in group 3 did not use the

learning aid. The questions posed were perhaps easy for the children to answer. In general, the children did not pay attention when the teacher provided the solution. Moreover, although one boy raised his hand, the demonstrator did not call on him.

Originally, the purpose of organising PTMs in such a manner was to facilitate the sharing of learning contexts and to examine the learning context in detail. The Japanese experts believed that by so doing the teachers' attitudes towards the students would become more affectionate and positive. However, the teachers have neither been able to nor are willing to understand student learning in detail. On the contrary, the teachers tended to criticise the observed students, referring only to the negative impressions that they had observed. In addition, Fung (2000) found a similar reaction among teachers in Hong Kong.

With regard to teachers' evaluative attitudes towards other teachers, the observers were inclined to evaluate the observed teachers rather than learn from the observed lessons. Most of the observers' comments included statements such as 'you have achieved the goal' or 'I do not think that you achieved the goal'. Further, the teachers occasionally ended their comments by identifying the short-comings and limitations of the observed lessons.

Teacher A	I noticed many new points in this lesson. In group work, some students were active, while others were not. In the last activity, the students were active. I think that this lesson was successful since they were able to learn how to cut I and T.
Teacher B	The teacher was selective in her choice of students for giving responses.
Teacher C	In this lesson, the students were able to achieve the objectives of the lesson. Initially, the teacher allowed the students to cut freely; this was a good idea. However, when many children walked up to the blackboard to put their works, it would have been better if the teacher had selected a few good ones to place on the board and had put the rest on the desk.
Teacher D	This lesson was successful because the lesson objectives were achieved. In group work, some of the students appeared to be tired of the task.

This type of evaluative attitude towards colleagues tends to stagnate the development of collegiality. An important reason for conducting reflection following the observation of lessons is to share difficulties, feelings, contexts or even joy (Inagaki and Sato, 1996, p. 138). This sharing is important because it can help teachers to relate their own experiences and practices with the experiences and practices of those in another classroom of the same school as well as help them to learn from each other and improve their professional capabilities (Barth, 1990, pp. 49–50). However, the evaluative attitude is a product and a precedent of schism in schools. This is because evaluative attitudes are third-party view-points and are separated from the instructor's, that is, judgements are made based on the actions of instructors and their students.

Moreover, this lack of trust stems from, and in turn results in, a strong self-defensive attitude among teachers who are unwilling to admit their own weaknesses, failures and mistakes. From the perspective of the Japanese experts, the main purpose of conducting PTMs under this project was to develop collegiality among teachers based on the reflection of lessons and student learning. This is because it is beneficial as well as necessary for the teachers to learn from the difficulties and problems observed in other lessons. Moreover, it is important for the teachers to show acceptance of and mutual respect for each other based on the self-recognition of weaknesses and limitations when conducting lessons (Fung, 2000; Ito and Takeda, 1994; Ose and Sato, 2001; Sato and Sato, 2003; Wood and Millichamp, 2000). However, thus far, based on the existing situation, it is necessary to eliminate the self-defensive attitude among teachers and consequently achieving the above-mentioned goals.

4.3. Teachers as bureaucrats

As is evident in the Turkish (Karakaya, 2004) as well as the Indonesian cases (Bjork, 2005), the approach of Vietnamese teachers towards teaching is based on a strong centralised education system. In such a system, the teachers are essentially placed as bureaucrats and, at times, they tend to reproduce the concept themselves. This section focuses on the

issue of teachers who regard themselves as bureaucrats or are regarded as bureaucrats. The discussion is divided into the following two parts: (1) lack of autonomy and (2) power order, leading to the oppression of students in classrooms.

Firstly, in terms of autonomy, two problems become apparent when dealing with the curriculum and evaluation procedure. Regarding the curriculum, teachers function as the deliverers of a curriculum defined by the government rather than as developers of an autonomous one. In general, it has been said that the Vietnamese school curriculum is extremely voluminous (Duggan, 2001; Ministry of Education and Training, 2001; Ng and Nguyen, 2006). Thus, the teachers experience tremendous pressure to finish the entire syllabus as soon as possible.

Moreover, teachers tended to have difficulty to be flexible with regard to the curriculum and seldom reorganise it during lessons. As Duggan (2001, p. 208) indicates, 'Textbooks bind teachers to a rigid pattern of delivering each lesson, and this reduces flexibility in teaching and restricts student exposure to activities such as problem solving'. Local educational authorities in Bac Giang have admitted that general autonomy with regard to teachers' reorganising the curriculum is acceptable on certain occasions. However, in reality, with regard to specific topics, exclusion or reorganisation is rejected. Further, teachers themselves are considerably reluctant to reorganise the curriculum and prefer to systematically follow the textbooks in order to avoid any criticism by colleagues and authorities.

Moreover, the teacher evaluation system in Bac Giang follows the criteria set by the central government. This system strictly examines the behaviour of teachers in classrooms on a superficial basis, such as clarity of letters on blackboards and the coverage of the teachers' voices. However, it does not focus on detail of student–teacher relationships or relationships among students. Moreover, the present criteria for evaluation are extremely teacher-centric. Consequently, teachers need to annually compete with each other based on these criteria at the school, district and province level in order to be chosen as an 'excellent teacher'. In Vietnam, as is observed in the Indonesian case, teachers have learnt to follow the rules established by the ministry and organise their behaviour accordingly (Bjork, 2005, p. 164). In addition, due to this evaluation system, a huge conflict exists

between the ideological foundation of child-centred education and the present evaluation system. Therefore, this unchanged view, which is incorporated into the evaluation system, allows teachers to reproduce conventional ideas with regard to the teaching and learning process.

In addition, in classrooms, teachers are regarded as wielding power over students. There are many ways in which students can be placed under their teachers' rule; in particular, one typical physical action needs to be introduced as an example. For instance, orders can be given by banging the desks with a sharp noise. In other words, teachers give various orders without saying anything and merely banging their desks with rulers or sticks. This physical action reflects the power structure that exists in teachers' viewpoints with regard to students, and is observed in almost every classroom.

For instance, in an arithmetic lesson on the topic of subtraction resulting in zero for the first grade, the teacher frequently instructed the students to use small slates to write down their calculations. When checking the results, the teacher would always bang the students' desks or her own desk with a thin stick, without actually saying anything. Regardless, the students were required to follow her orders. On the first bang, the students placed their slates in front of them to show their calculation to the teacher; subsequently, on the second bang, the students were required to turn their slates down while holding them. Finally, on the last bang, the students put their slates on their desks. This type of action was repeated consistently during the lesson. However, it should be noted that this kind of physical action—banging on desks—is not confined to this teacher alone and is practised by many teachers.

Additionally, this action is not only limited to giving orders but also used to quieten students and make them obey the teachers' rules. A principal at one school informed the authors that this kind of behaviour is a custom and a habit that has been prevalent for a long time and that it would be extremely difficult to discontinue it. In another school, the principal informed one of the authors that although they tried to stop the banging on the desks, they found it extremely difficult to do so. These remarks suggest that teachers depend considerably on the use of such physical actions to generate, strengthen and maintain their authority.

The teachers' practice of maintaining authority in classrooms in this manner is greatly inconsistent

with the concept of child-centred education. Although all the teachers participated in the training programme on child-centred education conducted as part of the project and took notes indicating that they understood the concepts, only a few of them actually practiced during the lessons what they had understood. This is because the concept of child-centred education is not only related to teaching skills or techniques but also to the identity of both students and teachers. As Wood and Millichamp (2000) reported a case in England, the concept of students taking control of their own learning has been very difficult for Vietnamese teachers to accept, particularly at an emotional level. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to be more proactive in changing their attitude towards as well as their opinions of students; moreover, they should notice the vulnerability of students (Wood and Millichamp, 2000).

4.4. Lack of learning

Learning is an integral part in the advancement of TPD. In other words, TPD itself is a learning process for the teachers. Although previous literature dealt with this issue by classifying learning with regard to teachers into several categories, such as four (Little, 1992) or six (Leithwood, 1992), in this study, it has been classified into approximately two categories: (1) the professional capability pertaining to scholarly and academic backgrounds, which refers to knowledge on subject matters and (2) professional capabilities pertaining to clinical backgrounds, which refers to the practical skills acquired during lessons. This section addresses these two aspects from the perspective of learning pertaining to teachers.

Firstly, the teachers lack the opportunity to further enhance their academic and scholarly backgrounds. There are several reasons for this, including (1) it is not necessary for a primary teacher to acquire a university degree as a precondition and (2) the teachers are trained in teacher training colleges for 2 years. Consequently, their academic training is likely to be weak.

Moreover, after graduation, a limited number of academic and professional resources are available for further broadening of their knowledge. In general, the number of professional journals for teachers is extremely limited. Additionally, in Bac Giang, the number of book shops providing professional or academic books is less; therefore, it becomes almost impossible for the teachers to enhance their knowledge by accessing external resources. Although academic resource books have been published under this project, the lack of resources continues to exist because more resources are required to practically sustain the teaching profession.

In order to strengthen the professional capacity of teachers, the Vietnamese government has been conducting a series of training courses, as described in Section 3.1. However, as pointed out by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (2004), there are two problems in this approach: the number of participants and the relevance of the programme. First, regarding the number of participants, only a limited number of educational staff and teachers participate in the training courses; especially, the summer training course and the DOET's demonstration training course invite very few participants. Thus, it would be extremely difficult for the participants to share the insights obtained with all the teachers in the school. Moreover, the contents of the training courses do not necessarily cater to the requirements of primary school teachers. The current training courses, especially the summer training course, emphasise on ethics and general philosophy that prepares teachers to help children become good individuals. Although this knowledge is important for teachers, it entails further steps to be taken by teachers to assimilate such philosophy and translate it into concrete expertise in their daily teaching practice.

With regard to the enhancement of clinical backgrounds, it is presumed that PTM is the opportunity needed for this purpose. However, as mentioned earlier, PTM tends to function as an arena to 'evaluate' colleagues. Therefore, it becomes extremely difficult to develop relationships in which the teachers are able to share their expertise, skills or insights. Such a problem is extremely grave because the lack of collective learning leads to a decrease in the motivational levels of individual teachers with regard to learning.

Furthermore, teachers were extremely reluctant to conduct PTM on a clinical basis, particularly with regard to the sharing of evidence pertaining to the realities of student learning during reflection. Thus far, although the project conducted PTMs based on clinical cases, the teachers tended to display a certain level of dissatisfaction. Consequently, they believed that their individual learning was negligible. Further, the teachers indicated a preference for lecture-style training, clear-cut conclusions and strong guidance from authorities.

In general, most of their preferences contradict the policies of the project, and the schools have frequently indicated a clear objection and have expressed doubts with regard to the policies of the project. Undoubtedly, the kind of training mentioned as their preference would satisfy the teachers' interests, thereby leading them to believe that they have learned something. Nonetheless, as Sato (2006a) stresses, the gap between what the teachers have learnt and what they actually practice during their lessons still remains. As a result, reflecting on the actual practices and determining the means to overcome these limitations would appear to be tedious. However, it is only through this tedious and slow-moving process that the teachers will be able to change their teaching approach and culture (Macleod and Golby, 2003). Thus, the authors, as consultants, were compelled to engage in this tedious process and wait for the teachers to alter their perspective.

4.5. Lack of dialogue

This section discusses the lack of dialogue that is prevalent among teachers when conducting PTMs. In other words, this section aims to reveal how difficult it is for teachers to enter into an open dialogue at the PTMs. The lack of a dialogical custom is apparent in a few characteristic phenomena, observed during PTMs: (1) the lack of attention by listeners towards speakers, (2) the tendency of speakers to talk to facilitators and (3) the reluctance of some teachers to provide their opinions and comments. Each issue has been addressed individually and in detail in the following manner.

Firstly, the PTMs tended to become very noisy because the teachers were less likely to listen to the speakers and more inclined to absorb themselves in conversations with their neighbouring colleagues. Often, they would completely turn away from the speaker and display no sign of interest in his or her remarks. In fact, even the instructors of the demonstration lessons did not show any inclination to carefully listen to the comments given by the participants. Thus, at many instances, the authors requested the participants to pay attention to the speakers and their comments. However, they would commence conversing with each other again after a brief pause.

Secondly, the speakers themselves were partially responsible for the lack of attention on the part of the listeners. The speakers displayed tendencies to speak to their facilitators rather than the audience. Thus, their comments and remarks were likely to be addressed to only a limited number of people, mostly the facilitators of the discussion; in such cases, it appeared that they did not intend to address the other members of the audience. In fact, the authors believed that the speakers responded to the facilitators as their duty rather than as participants in a discussion. Moreover, the speakers would begin conversing with their neighbouring teachers after making their comments.

Finally, there was significant inconsistency among the teachers with regard to the frequency of speech. In other words, while some teachers participated actively in the PTMs, the others displayed tendencies to remain silent. In the PTMs under the project, initially, all participants were requested to provide their comments, although they were urged to be brief. However, as the PTMs progressed, it became extremely difficult to provide the quiet teachers with an opportunity to voice their opinions. In fact, they were hesitant to such an extent that they would invariably end their comment with the words, 'my opinion is the same as those of previous teachers. Just that's it'.

As a result of the above-mentioned factors, it was extremely difficult to conduct an open dialogue or forge a dialogical relationship among teachers in the schools through the PTMs under the project, particularly at the beginning. This difficulty is attributed to the lack of training available to teachers. This can be regarded as indirect evidence of the fact that schools in Vietnam are an arena of monologue. The reason for this could be that the teachers are unaware of how to exchange their ideas in a democratic and dialogical manner with their colleagues because they have not received any training pertaining to this since their school days.

In countries such as Japan, students are trained on how to communicate at public venues, including both speaking and listening. Sato (2006b, p. 33) indicates the following: If a teacher speaks to a student during a lesson, that student is supposed to respond not only to the teacher but also to everyone else in the classroom. This is because there is a rule that all the people present should be listeners, except the speaker.

On the other hand, it is possible that only a limited number of Vietnamese teachers in the pilot schools had received such training in their school days. Moreover, even among colleagues, only a few

people—such as managers or leading teachers—spoke about their ideas or policies in public; others appeared to follow and were not checked when they were found paying less attention to the speeches.

Then, another probable reason for this could be the hesitation to displease their colleagues. In other words, the participants from the schools seemed as though they were split into two sections: teachers with collegial recognition as leaders and those without such recognition, that is, ordinary ones. Teachers with recognition tended to be the heads of grade groups, with excellent records in teacher contests. Based on such a status, the leading teachers tended to dominate with regard to expressing opinions, and the other teachers were likely to be silent and attempted not to displease the leading teachers. Interestingly, it appeared that the other teachers would not be criticised and remained secure as long as they did not express their ideas. However, in such a situation, they were unable to engage in frank and fruitful dialogues as well as to develop mutual trust.

However, this phenomenon is not limited to Vietnam; this type of political schism is seen in other countries as well. Reflecting on this phenomenon, Sato (2006a) identifies the problem of dominance by some teachers with a strong voice as repressing democratic dialogue and leading to stagnation in the development of collegiality. This stagnation would result in a sort of 'Balkanisation' (Hargreaves, 1994) in a school. It is internationally acknowledged that such differences among teachers tend to result in mutual apathy. Thus, the examples in this study are not exceptional, but they do demonstrate a typical situation in schools with low collegiality.

Moreover, difficulty in understanding what Japanese consultants attempted to express was another reason. The original attempt by Japanese consultants, namely authors, was to create a democratic and open discourse, wherein every single teacher could mutually learn from another teacher, based on the realities of student learning. However, the teachers appeared to lack belief in the value of mutual learning; they always expected the authors to summarise and provide strong and straightforward guidance and conclusions, with special reference to teaching methodology. The authors declined such a request by the Vietnamese teachers and attempted to let them discuss issues and learn from each other from the realities of student learning; as a result, the teachers were dissatisfied and became

non-expressive. Moreover, the confusion among the teachers resulted into frustration against the Japanese team. In July 2006, after a PTM, one principal asked the authors, 'Will it be really possible for us to develop professional capacity by conducting such PTMs?' In September 2006, most of the teachers from that school complained to another Japanese consultant, saying, 'There is nothing that we can learn from observing students learning. Please tell us what we should do'.

Moreover, it should be noted that this type of friction is not confined to Vietnam; in fact, the conflicts tend to occur based on complaints by teachers who are against such reforms (Sato and Sato, 2003), or due to the confusion caused by drastic changes in their identity as teachers (Bjork, 2005; Ose and Sato, 2003). In the cases of Sato and Sato (2003) and Ose and Sato (2003), the school principals had strong trust in reform policies that were similar to those of the present project; despite this, frictions or confusions occurred. In the case of this project, the policies were totally new for principals as well as other managers, and their difficulty in accepting the ideas is fairly understandable. Thus, as a result, it became increasingly difficult for teachers in the pilot schools to engage in dialogues based on the realities of student learning and to learn from each other, because of their managers' lack of understanding and trust in the new approach of PTM.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to examine the difficulties and challenges experienced when conducting school-based observation and reflection of lessons under the teacher-training project in Bac Giang province in Vietnam. According to the series of observations, it was clarified, firstly, that the pace of the lessons was extremely fast. Secondly, the teachers tended to be evaluative about their colleagues and students rather than showing compassion or sharing their opinions. Moreover, a serious difficulty in learning on the part of the teachers existed, including both access to academic resources as well as sharing of insights with colleagues. Furthermore, the development of dialogue among teachers was found to be extremely challenging.

Although the governmental policies pertaining to the curriculum are entitled 'child-centred education,' there existed a huge gap between the policies and the actual practices. In reality, children, who

need to be at the centre of the educational policies and practices were still oppressed and regarded as marginal. Moreover, there was a severe lack of trust among colleagues in schools despite the fact that it was imperative to develop teacher collegiality; without professional collegiality in schools, it would be impossible to promote child-centred education. In sum, based on what was observed, primary schools tended to be institutions which would lack a certain amount of care and concern pertaining to the students. Instead, they were more likely to be institutions conducive to evaluative classification and competition.

For future research, it is necessary to further analyse the on-going school reform supported by the project. The problems discussed in this paper are now addressed and tackled in each pilot school regardless of the inconsistencies in the speed of the reform. Therefore, all the problems indicated in this paper should not be regarded as perpetual and prolonging. Further, it becomes necessary to analyse the changes ensuing due to the reform. It should be noted that the pilot schools gradually began to change intrinsically. Although this paper listed the critical issues observed at the initial stages of reform, the intrinsic changes that the schools underwent during the process should be analysed. This issue will be discussed in a future study.

Moreover, there is a need to provide a historical analysis on the aforementioned issues. This study is based on contemporary phenomena observed by conducting a case study on the project. However, such issues appear to have deep historical roots; hence, it is imperative to consider the reasons for the existence of such phenomena in order to obtain radical solutions to the problems. Thus, it would be necessary to conduct a historical study on classrooms and the present situation in schools.

Acknowledgement

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