

**Looking inward, reaching out:
Divergent visions of education reform in Timor-Leste**



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Divergent visions of education reform in Timor-Leste**

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T H E S I S A B S T R A C T

Education is considered a cornerstone of international development; however, schooling is far from a uniform institution worldwide. Current debates in the anthropology of education explore the competing forces of localisation and globalisation in schooling systems around the world, while studies in the anthropology of development have analysed the relationship between the development industry's formulation of policy and the social realities of its implementation. Located at the intersection of these two fields, and drawing on visual ethnographic methods and analysis, this study examines how educational actors in Timor-Leste translate curriculum reform policy into practice. The current basic-education curriculum reform – a government initiative supported by international agencies – aims to improve educational quality by adapting international best-practice models to the Timorese context. The research draws on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Ministry of Education's reform office and primary schools in the capital, Dili, using audiovisual recordings, participant-observation, and semi-structured interviews. The resulting thesis comprises a written text and ethnographic film, which explore discourse and practice, respectively. The text juxtaposes the visions of education among two main groups of actors – school staff and reform-team members – and describes the result of their intersection across three main reform components: language policy, curriculum content, and pedagogy. The film describes how actors appropriate, enact, and resist reform policy in their work, including how the conditions of their respective working environments and the communication of the reform shape their perception of it. My key research finding is that, while all actors share a common goal of improving education and contributing to Timor-Leste's development, the ways each group of actors – school staff and reform-team members – translate policy into practice are, at this stage of implementation, greatly inconsistent. I argue that these inconsistencies are the result both of the actors' divergent visions of education, but also of their working conditions and unequal access to information about the reform.

A U D I O V I S U A L T H E S I S S T R U C T U R E

The two components of the thesis – this text and the 40-minute ethnographic film *Visions of Education: Perspectives on curriculum reform in Timor-Leste* – complement each other. To highlight the dialogue between text and film, timecodes (e.g., 01:00–02:00) and stills from relevant scenes in the film and clips of additional footage are embedded in this text.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

This research would not have been possible without the experience and networks afforded me by my work with the Curriculum Reform team within the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education. It has been an honour and pleasure to participate in the reform project, and I thank the Vice Minister Dulce de Jesús Soares, Debbie Katzman, and all of my reform colleagues for their contributions to this research. I hope that its findings will contribute to the ongoing, important, and complex discussions around what education can and should be for Timor-Leste and its children.

The staff and students of Aimutin Primary School extended a gracious and welcoming hand by allowing me into their community for several weeks in early 2016. I appreciate their openness, trust and good humour in hosting the strange *malae* with a video camera and endless questions. I also thank the staff of the two other schools where I conducted research.

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INTRODUCTION



The small half-island nation of Timor-Leste (East Timor), in South-East Asia, gained its independence in 2002, following centuries of Portuguese colonisation (early 1500s–1975), a 24-year Indonesian military occupation (1975–1999), and three years of United Nations administration (1999–2002). Timor-Leste has a population of approximately 1.2 million people and has become one of the most oil-dependent nations in the world.¹

These eras of foreign control marked the three distinct periods of education preceding Timor-Leste's independence (Beck 2008:3, Shah and Quinn 2014:4, Nicolai 2004:41), and were characterized by the imposition of a foreign formal schooling system that prioritised “colonial epistemologies” (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016:4). Portuguese schooling, run by the Catholic Church, was for a selective, urban elite and focused on instructing future colony leaders in Catholic values and Portuguese. Schooling during the Indonesian occupation expanded access to education in order to spread a pan-Indonesian nationalism, *pancasila*, and quell the resistance (Shah and Quinn 2014:5). While not explicitly colonial, the United Nations administration relied heavily on foreign expertise to rebuild the education system and focused on reconstructing schools, recruiting teachers and enrolling students in the wake of the violent Indonesian withdrawal, leaving complex questions of language and curriculum for an independent national government to solve (Millo and Barnett 2004:729). Bequeathed this legacy of foreign schooling in a razed country, Timor-Leste has faced enormous challenges in rebuilding its education system in a context of dwindling oil reserves (Strating 2016; La'o Hamutuk 2015) and a huge youth population (Amorim *et al.* 2010; Providas 2016), with 42 percent of the total population under 14 years of age.²

Due to the dire material and human-resources circumstances, the great urgency to get the nation's children back to school, and the fledgling capacity of the new Ministry of Education (MoE), early reforms left a lot to be desired: the first post-independence curriculum was funded by UNICEF,

1. Timor-Leste is the second most oil-dependent nation in the world, after Sudan, with oil and gas revenues accounting for around 90 percent of government revenue (Susan Marx, 2016, <http://asiafoundation.org/2016/06/22/timor-lestes-non-oil-economy-must-look-tourism/>; La'o Hamutuk, the Timor-Leste Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis, 2015. <http://laohamutuk.blogspot.nl/2015/04/timor-lestes-oil-and-gas-are-going-fast.html>; Australian Government, ‘Timor-Leste country brief’, <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/timor-2>. Source: World Bank Development Indicators 2015, ‘Population dynamics’, Accessed on 25 September 2016, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.1>. For detailed information on the history of education prior to and since independence, see, for example, Beck 2008; Millo and Barnett 2004; Nicolai 2004; Supit 2008.

written in Portuguese by Portuguese academics (Beck 2008:6; Quinn 2013:185; Shah 2012:32), and minimally adapted to Timorese culture and conditions.³

The MoE initiated the current basic-education (primary-school) Curriculum Reform (hereafter, also ‘reform’; *Reforma Kurrikulu* in Tetun) in 2013 under the program of the fifth constitutional government. The reform aims to improve educational outcomes by creating a uniquely Timorese education system and enabling young citizens to contribute to the development of a sovereign nation, competitive in the global economy (RDTL 2011). It does this by both ‘internationalizing’ teaching by introducing ‘international best practices’, such as learner-centered pedagogy and language progression methodologies, but also ‘localizing’ education through its use of local language and content relevant to the Timorese culture, history, and environment. The multinational reform team, which was formed specifically for the project, produces curricula for eight disciplines,⁴ scripted lesson plans, textbooks, teacher training videos, and even a literacy TV show. Implementation is phased, with two of the six basic-education grades starting to use the new curriculum annually, between 2015 and 2017. The MoE manages and funds the reform, though international donors like Australian Aid and UNICEF have also provided support, particularly for the printing and distribution of reform materials.

My involvement in Timor-Leste began in 2011, when I moved there to work with a local non-governmental organisation (NGO). For three years, my role included the management of education projects. Since mid-2014, I have been involved in the Curriculum Reform, working distance since I moved to the Netherlands to pursue my Masters in 2015. As the reform’s editor, copyediting thousands of lesson plans, I have observed how reform staff interweave official policy goals, ‘international best-practice’ models, and local content. My prior experience told me that the reform’s implementation would be a complex undertaking as the new materials made their way into under-resourced schools with minimally trained teachers (Quinn 2013:184). Given my only exposure to the reform was via the documents I edited and my contact with my reform colleagues, I became curious about how the reform was experienced by diverse educational actors, including in schools.

3. Interview with Debbie Katzman, 3 February, 2016. Shah (2012:35) reports that, “When the curriculum framework was first introduced in 2004, fewer than 6% of teachers reported fluency in Portuguese (World Bank, 2004, p. 47).”

4. The eight disciplines of the new curriculum are Tetun Literacy, Portuguese Literacy, Mathematics, Natural Science, Social Science, Art and Culture, Health and Physical Education. Religion is scheduled in the official timetable, but a curriculum and lesson plans for that discipline were not developed by the Curriculum Reform team.

RESEARCH QUESTION & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Current debates in the anthropology of education explore the competing forces of localisation and globalisation in schooling systems around the world and whether reform happens at the policy level or inside classrooms (Anderson-Levitt 2003; Verger *et al.* 2015; Paine and Zeichner 2012). Studies in the anthropology of international development have provided theoretical tools for analyzing the relationship between the development industry's formulation of policy and the social realities of its implementation (Mosse 2005, 2006, 2013; Olivier de Sardan 2005; Crewe and Axelby 2013). Social aesthetics (MacDougall 1999) in the visual ethnographic discourse highlights the influence of actors' sensory, aesthetic, and material environments, as well as embodied practice, in the process of educational change.

Positioned within these intersecting discourses, inspired by my curiosity about the reform's implementation, and drawing on ethnographic studies of similar reforms,⁵ the thesis answers the following research question:

How do different visions of education, working environments, and communications media and practices shape the ways in which reform actors and school actors appropriate education policy in the case of Timor-Leste's basic-education Curriculum Reform?

Together, the components of the thesis – text and film – comprise the answer to this question. They do so, however, in qualitatively and epistemologically different ways. The text highlights the visions of education as explicitly enunciated by actors. It relies heavily on interviews and the verbal content of observations, and uses information about the material context, resources and communications to contextualise these visions of education. In the film, the emphasis is inverted: interviews and explicit visions of education feature, but primary attention is given to the material context and the ways in which issues around working environments, resources, and communications are expressed in practice.

5. In particular, the following references provide specific inspiration for the formulation of the research questions: Lopes Cardozo's study of teacher education in the context of decolonisation education reforms in Bolivia aimed to "uncover both the discursive and material aspects that trigger various forms of support and resistance" to the reform "and to elaborate the perspectives of various important education actors involved" (2012:753). Shah and Lopes Cardozo, in a paper comparing teachers' engagements with (previous) reforms in Timor-Leste and Bolivia, pointed out that, "teachers' beliefs and practices are shaped by a myriad number of issues including the characteristics and nature of reform; [and] the local characteristics and conditions in which reform actors and structures are embedded [...]" (2016:2).

My conceptual framework centres around the five key concepts in the research question: **visions of education, working environments, communications media and practices, policy, and appropriation.**

My concept of **visions of education** draws primarily on Vavrus and Bartlett's (2012) "epistemological diversity" and Juffermans and Van der Aa's (2013) notion of "voice". The notion of epistemological diversity acknowledges that all knowledge is "local and not omniscient" (Vavrus and Bartlett 2012:638), underpinning individuals' and institutions' understandings and enactments of educational ideas. Voice in educational discourses contains both ideologies about education and actors' personal histories and contexts (Juffermans and Van der Aa 2013:114). Drawing on these two concepts, I define visions of education as, in the plainer language of Paine and Zeichner, actors' individual and collective bundles of ideas about what "schooling is for and what it should entail, what [...] learning requires, what knowledge is worth knowing, and [...] what good teaching is" (2012:577).

Vavrus and Bartlett insist that "teachers' working conditions [...] are more than mere variables but rather an essential aspect of teachers' understandings of how knowledge can be produced and disseminated in the classroom" (2012:653). As such, actors' institutional, social and material contexts form the basis of my concept of **working environments**, which I define as the set of physical (including infrastructure), material, professional and social resources available to actors that shape both their visions of education and the practical parameters in which interpret and enact educational policy (ibid:638; Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016:2). They include factors like the physical condition and crowdedness of working environments, access to materials, and the presence and use of technology. My conception of working environments also incorporates the social aesthetics (MacDougall 1999) of my research sites (see 'Visual ethnography').

I use **communications media and practices** to mean the set of mechanisms that convey the Curriculum Reform to actors, and the information they convey. These mechanisms include office meetings, teacher training, lesson-plan manuals and other classroom materials, politicians' public statements, and newspaper articles about education. The concept incorporates the form and content, as well as the context of reception of these communication media and practices. For example, the premise that Timor-Leste has an 'oral culture' as opposed to a literate tradition has implications for the effectiveness of printed materials provided by the Curriculum Reform to school actors.

Policy is an amorphous term that can describe trends and principles as well as detailed project documents (Mosse 2004:640). Mosse uses a "broad conception of policy" that encompasses "all kinds of development models, project designs and strategies" (Mosse 2005:14). Carney, an anthropologist of

'global education policies', defines 'policy' in a stricter sense, as vision and values, management systems, and learning processes (2009:68). Others in the field use a similar conception, using 'policy' to refer to models such as learner-centered pedagogy, decentralisation, and standardized testing (Verger *et al.* 2015). Here, I follow Mosse's broader conception of policy to refer to both the guiding principles of the reform (e.g., localisation and learner-centered pedagogy [LCP]), its specific strategies and designs (e.g., the curriculum itself) and its implementation materials (e.g., lesson-plan manuals). I also draw on Mosse's concept of 'enrolment' (2005), whereby various stakeholders with diverse agendas are united around a set of ambiguous policy principles which they practice, understand and enact in different, often contradictory, ways. For example, as shown below, localisation and internationalisation are enrolling concepts in the Curriculum Reform because they feature in both the reform and school visions of education, but are appropriated very differently by each group.

These contradictory enactments are part of **appropriation**, the process of translating policy into practice. In the context of education reform, appropriation moves "reform as policy" into "reform as practice" (Napier 2003: 54), often with unexpected or unintended consequences (Paine and Zeichner 2012:580; Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016:2; Olivier de Sardan 2005:145; Aikman and King 2012:680; Verger *et al.* 2015:22). It refers to different scales of translation – from global education policies into national policies, and from national policies into individual (teaching) practice. Appropriation in the context of global education policies such as LCP has also been called "recontextualization" (Verger *et al.* 2015:22) and "(re)creolization" (Napier 2003:51) and is invoked to describe the myriad ways in which transnational policies are adapted to diverse local discursive and material contexts (e.g., Anderson-Levitt 2003:4; Vavrus and Bartlett 2012). Appropriation's unintended outcomes are not purely the result of a misunderstanding or miscommunication of policies: actors also deliberately resist or selectively implement policies to suit their own interests and visions of education, especially when they perceive policies as being imposed from above (Olivier de Sardan 2005; Bartlett and Vavrus 2014; Lopes Cardozo 2012; Verger *et al.* 2015:25). I will use appropriation to refer to the ways in which educational actors understand, adapt, and enact education policies to align with their own visions of education and the limitations and resources of their working environments. While research on appropriation in education contexts usually focuses on teachers, I use appropriation to also refer to the practices of translation that reform actors conduct in their work. Reform actors appropriate global education policies and 'best practices' into local curricula, lesson plans and classroom materials. These are the very materials that form the concrete objects of policy that school actors engage with and subsequently appropriate through their teaching.

In conclusion, I employ the outlined concepts from the anthropology of education, the anthropology of international development, and visual ethnography to enrich the framework through which I analyse my ethnographic data and ultimately answer my research question.

R E S E A R C H D E S C R I P T I O N



Methodology

I conducted two months of fieldwork (January and February 2016) in Timor-Leste’s capital, Dili, in two primary sites: the Ministry of Education’s Curriculum Reform office and Aimutin Primary School. I chose urban case studies to enable my regular movement between them. Dili schools are by no means representative of schools nationwide, and in fact are considered to be some of the most difficult school environments (Debbie Katzman, personal communication, 21 September 2015), often being more overcrowded than their rural counterparts.⁶ Secondary research sites included two other primary schools, where I conducted classroom observations and interviews; the studio where the reform’s literacy TV show is filmed; and offices of other interviewees, including the Ministry of Education, Australian Aid and UNICEF.

My research methods during fieldwork centred on qualitative approaches, which Bartlett and Vavrus argue are particularly valuable for researching educational policy, due to “their ability to move beyond the professed aims of policy to examine how policies are made and contested at various levels by a more diverse range of policy actors” (2014:140). My methods included participant observation; interviews with 37 educational actors⁷; 19 classroom observations of grades 2 and 3 across three schools⁸; document analysis of government documents and reform materials; and audiovisual recordings of some interviews and observations. I drew on Vavrus and Bartlett’s Vertical Case Study approach, involving an “explicitly comparative perspective” across layers of the education sector (2014:139).

6. In 2015, Dili schools attended to 15 per cent of the nation’s 212,873 primary school students in only 6 per cent of its 990 schools, and the average class size in Dili was 42 students, compared to the national average of 31 (EMIS data, Ministry of Education website, accessed 22 September 2016, moe.gov.tl/?q=node/217).

7. These 37 interviews included the Vice Minister of Education, 2 international advisors within the MoE, 7 international reform consultants, 8 Timorese reform consultants, 4 Timorese teachers seconded to the reform project (3 still working for the reform and 1 returned to school), 12 Timorese teachers with no connection to the reform team, and 3 development partner representatives (1 foreign and 2 Timorese).

8. My choice to limit class observations to Grades 1, 2, and 3 was based on two factors: first, it gave me a selection of classes and teachers that already had one year’s experience with the new curriculum (Grades 1 and 2) and those for whom 2016 was the first year of using the new curriculum (Grade 3); and second, these were the grades being taught during the mornings, when I spent most of my time at Aimutin school, with afternoons generally spent at the reform office.

The diversity of my research participants reflected this comparative, multi-scalar approach. All of the approximately 25 reform staff participated in the research in some form, including those based in other offices, at home, or even other countries.⁹ The participants at Aimutin Primary School included roughly 12 of the school's 27 teachers. Although the approximately 1,200 students were not direct participants, they played an important role through the classroom observations and my contact with them during my time 'hanging out' at the school. Interviews with other research participants, particularly donor-organisation representatives (UNICEF and Australian Aid), provided important interpretive context for the global education policies framing the reform, but they are not included as the ethnographic data in this text, due to the focus on the reform and school actors.

In order to make a coherent and engaging audiovisual argument, the film centres around six key protagonists who represent the spectrum of visions of education (see 'A spectrum of visions'). The key reform protagonists are Mário, a national consultant and co-host of the literacy TV show; Yohan, an international consultant and producer of the literacy TV show; and Debbie, manager of the reform and international advisor to the Vice Minister, Dulce de Jesús Soares. The key school protagonists are Maria, a teacher and teacher trainer who worked with the reform for one year and co-hosts the reform's literacy TV show; the school's principal, Rogério Soares; and another teacher, *Mestre* Rogério. The text features these six protagonists, but is based on ethnographic data drawn from all research participants. The film protagonists are named in the text to strengthen the links to their role in the film, whereas other participants are referred to anonymously by their professional role (e.g., national reform consultant, teacher)¹⁰, given the condition of anonymity interviews were conducted under and the shared understanding that observations made off-camera were not to be personally attributed.

The inclusion in my research of Western participants not only reflected their important role in the Curriculum Reform¹¹, but was also a conscious gesture to address the "representational field" of development in Timor-Leste (Westmoreland 2015), a field that generally tries to minimise the visibility of foreigners, despite their prominence – for better or worse – in the design, funding and implementation of development projects. The choice to include Westerners as research participants was also a conscious gesture to avoid a neo-colonial approach that considers non-Western 'others' as the only viable subject group of development research (Crewe and Axelby 2013:42).

9. These 25 staff included 8 international (foreign) consultants, 7 national (Timorese) consultants, 4 Timorese teachers on temporary secondment to the reform, 2 graphic designers, 3 administration staff, and 1 intern.

10. In keeping with the local usage, I refer to foreign reform consultants as 'international' and Timorese reform consultants as 'national' throughout this text.

11. The foreign staff of the Curriculum Reform include Americans, Australians, and Portuguese. A few Indonesians also are among the staff, but they mostly function as local staff, in terms of their pay-scale classification, local living arrangements (housing, marriage, social integration), etc.

Positionality and “insider ethnography”

My professional involvement in the Curriculum Reform had various and complex impacts on my research. “Insider ethnography” (Mosse 2006:936) is not unusual for the field: many education and development researchers straddle academic and professional engagements (ibid) in a mode of “reflexive practice” (Vavrus and Bartlett 2012:635) or “reflexive anthropology” (Robben and Sluka 2007:10). In such a mode of research, each role informs and reshapes the other, and the blurred lines between pure and applied anthropology (McNess *et al.* 2015) are gaining increasing academic acceptance as productive of new epistemologies and modes of engagement (Crewe and Axelby 2013:40; Mosse 2013; McNess *et al.* 2015). Given my various research sites and participants, however, my insider-ness was not singular: my professional, cultural and linguistic identities saw me move along “more than one insider-outsider continuum” (Hellowell in McNess *et al.* 2015:311), with varying methodological and ethical repercussions.

Methodologically, it facilitated my access to the reform team, but created suspicion of my motives among some participants in the schools. My ongoing work for the reform also made drawing neat lines between research and work, and field and home near-impossible (Robben & Sluka 2007:27–28; Hannerz 2012). Indeed, at the end of fieldwork, it was difficult to fully ‘exit’ to a space of pure anthropological analysis (Mosse 2006) and I instead felt suspended between the logics of (anthropological) knowledge and (development) action (Olivier de Sardan 2005:199) as I produced this thesis. However, my ongoing editing work for the reform also provided moments of insight and examples that enhanced my research (e.g., Figures 5 and 6).

Ethically, my insider-ness required reckoning with how to “engage with a diversity of expectations and perspectives – many of which may be fragmented, imaginary or even contradictory and divisive” (McNess *et al.* 2015:312) and their impact on my existing professional relationships, as well as their potential to compromise my academic contribution (Crewe and Axelby 2013:43). I deliberately retained reflexive references to my professional role in the thesis text and film (e.g., 08:24–09:08; 21:28–21:35) to make viewers aware of its role in shaping the research.

However, I noticed a degree of self-censorship creeping into my depiction of conflicts, criticisms, and failures.¹² In the case of the school, these choices were made to avoid any backlash from government superiors; in the case of the reform team, I feared adding fuel to the already-smouldering fire of political controversy, and I wanted to avoid souring professional relationships with people I genuinely like (Mosse 2006; McNess *et al.* 2015:312). Indeed, Appadurai has described this dynamic as “the

12. At the time of writing, I am still employed as a curriculum reform consultant by the Ministry of Education on a part-time contract until December 2016.

most scary of prospects” for anthropologists: “informants who are not only friends but also colleagues” (1997:117).

Ethical considerations

Other ethical questions naturally formed part of my research. Bernard advocates always compensating research participants in culturally appropriate ways (2011:157), but finding one was not easy. At the school, my plan of mentoring teachers in the new curriculum fell flat. Teachers responded to my professional link with the reform either as a cause for suspicion or a conduit to relay complaints back to the Ministry. I soon realized that, in order to be treated as a researcher, I should not act like an advisor, and I would have to find other modes of reciprocity.¹³ Cash payments were inappropriate given the potential for jealousy and the fact that participants’ involvement in my research took place – with all necessary approvals – during paid work hours. After discussions with the Aimutin principal about an appropriate in-kind donation, and long and embarrassing delays, I finally purchased a TV-and-DVD set for the school, which I delivered on a return visit to Timor-Leste in August 2016 (Figure 1). However, other less tangible forms of reciprocity also took place. By relinquishing opportunities to defend the reform, I consciously stepped back from my professional, ethnocentric stance and opened myself to critical reflection and feedback on a project I was personally and professionally invested in.

Because of my closer personal and professional ties and the relative material wealth of the reform team, compensation of reform actors was of less concern to me. While it was important I express my gratitude, I did so mostly individually in interviews, and collectively with verbal thanks at the final weekly staff meeting I attended and a box of cookies on my final day.

My use of visual methods implied particular ethical considerations. The lack of anonymity necessitated that I attempt to get participants’ informed consent (American Anthropological Association 2012), something which I am now inclined to agree with Ruby may be impossible (2000:206–207).¹⁴ Each participant filtered my explanations of ethnographic film through their own reference points. Participants with media, political or filmmaking backgrounds often edited their own speech and actions to present a pre-determined message on-camera. Participants whose closest reference points were likely development-agency videos and TV news engaged with the camera as a platform to advocate for their own needs, express political points, or even protest against their

13. I did, however, always disclose my professional connection to the reform project and Ministry of Education when introducing myself and explaining my research at all schools I visited. Bernard writes, “There are situations where your expertise is just what’s required to build rapport with people” (2011: 276). While this was true at the reform office, at the school, it seemed more of a hindrance than a help.

14. Jay Ruby (2000:206) argues that informed consent is practically impossible except from other film professionals who have a deep understanding of the nature of shooting, editing and producing films.

superiors' directives (e.g., 11:45–12:29; 28:00–28:24; 38:23–38:59). When I showed a rough cut to participants six months later, I was pleased that they mostly approved of their depictions, but felt that the finished film did not change their understandings of my objectives in making the film.



Figure 1: Me and Principal Soares at the delivery of my donation of a TV-and-DVD set to Aimutin school in August 2016 – a gesture of thanks for the school's participation in my research.

Visual ethnography

I originally chose to use visual ethnography to expand the audience of my research to include development practitioners and the research participants themselves, and to build my skills in a form of communication I believe useful for the dialogue between the development industry and academic research. However, using a camera in the field opened my eyes to its potential for expanding not only viewership but also “authorship” (Tobin 1989:174), by giving “voice to the voiceless” (Hardy in Ruby 2000:197) and creating a ‘multivocal’ ethnography by giving equal space to voices which usually have unequal access to, and representation in, public (and particularly international) discourses.

But visual ethnographic methods – particularly observational cinema – are not simply an illustration of anthropological knowledge; rather, they constitute a “process of inquiry” through which new knowledge is created (MacDougall 1998:76). Observational cinema complements the abstraction of text by being “experiential and interpretive” rather than “explanatory and declarative” (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009:540). It is the “closest to ethnography as a method” of all film(ing) styles because it follows the unfolding of social realities (Postma 2015).



Figure 2 – Main research site 1: Curriculum Reform office at Ministry of Education, Dili.



Figure 3 – Main research site 2: Aimutin Primary School, Dili.

Visual methods shaped the trajectory of my fieldwork in order to follow visible phenomena, strong characters and storylines. You cannot film what is not there; hence, the absence of things (e.g., reform materials in classrooms) was left to the text to describe, creating a complementarity between text and film. The methods also complemented each other in the field. I only introduced the camera after establishing a certain comfort and trust with participants. When participants expressed discomfort with the camera during a sensitive discussion, I took out my notebook instead.

Not only do visual and written ethnographic methods capture different data; they also produce different types of ethnographic knowledge and emphasise different social and cultural phenomena. For example, my off-camera observations focused on the verbal content and quantifiable detail of observations (e.g., the number of students in a classroom, what reform staff said to each other in the office), whereas my on-camera observations focused on other qualities of interactions (e.g., body language, tone of voice, physical proximity) (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009:542) and the ‘social aesthetics’ (MacDougall 1999) of the sites: the aggregation of “seemingly ‘mundane’ things” in a social environment, including clothing, colours, gesture, and geography (ibid:4). Grimshaw writes that the social aesthetics of an environment is “not a neutral backdrop but [...] plays an integral and active role in shaping” the lives of the actors who inhabit it (2002:83). As such, the aural, spatial and material contrasts between my research sites did not only serve as stages for the playing-out of the actors’ visions and practices, but could rather be studied and incorporated in the film as elements which shaped these very visions and practices (Figures 2 and 3; Clip 1.)

Visual methods also alter the researcher’s ability to analyse ethnographic data. As MacDougall has described (in Barrett 2014), audiovisual methods allow the researcher to access different types of information—such as patterns of behaviour, nuances of social interactions, and the details of material environments—due to the repeated exposure to these phenomena in the reviewing of recorded footage, revealing information slowly through a depth of familiarity with the data impossible to grasp in the moment it occurs in the field.

Certain ethnographic films inspired particular aspects of my approach. Aryo Danusiri’s *Playing Between Elephants* (2007) is about a development housing project in Aceh following the 2004 tsunami that provided an example of how to visualise policy and its appropriation. Danusiri subtly yet powerfully depicts the material constraints that prevent the straightforward implementation of development projects designed in NGO offices, and skilfully uses visual juxtapositions to highlight the inconsistencies of discourse among various actors who ostensibly share the same objectives.

Daniela Vávrová’s film *Skin has Eyes and Ears* (2013) is a sensory ethnographic investigation of the world of the Ambonwari in Papua New Guinea, highlighting an aspect of sensory ethnography that

Postma describes as “multisensory experience and embodiment of culture as part of socialisation and communication within social worlds” (2015). This connects to the social aesthetics evident in MacDougall’s Doon School series, particularly *Schoolscapes* (2007) and *Doon School Chronicles* (2000), which informed my approach for capturing the working environments of my research sites.



Clip 1: Working environments

Research limitations

The research is by no means authoritative or representative; it provides just one window into the much larger and complex national picture of the Curriculum Reform and education in Timor-Leste. Limitations include the geographical focus, number of research participants and sites, timeframe, and the impact of my positionality. The focus on Dili case studies and actors paints a picture of some impacts and receptions of the reform in urban contexts, but excludes the rural contexts which account for the majority of the nation’s schools. The fieldwork’s timeframe of two months (in combination with the chosen methods) limited the number of participants and does not provide a longer-term view of changes in the reform’s implementation over time. Finally, as outlined above, my position as ‘insider’ was both a help and hindrance: it undoubtedly helped me conduct research with some, but erected barriers with others. These limitations point to valuable areas for future research, including the reform’s changing reception and implementation over time and in diverse geographical areas; and the experience and involvement of other actors, including international development partners and donors, parents, and the students themselves.

A SPECTRUM OF VISIONS



In the sections on language, curriculum content, and pedagogy that follow, I outline a school vision and reform vision for each component; however, these are polarised extremes of what is really a spectrum of visions. Describing the two extremes is a useful analytical tool, but each individual actor has a unique vision of education and hence occupies a nuanced position along the spectrum.

Among the key protagonists, Mestre Rogério at Aimutin School represents the most extreme version of the school vision, and Debbie that of the reform vision. People like Maria and Yohan present a middle-ground: Maria has had a lot of exposure to the reform vision, but is surrounded by the environment that shapes the school vision. Yohan, because of his own anti-establishment worldview, is cynical of a wholesale adoption of the reform vision, but adheres to its fundamental principles.

Many of these nuances emerge from actors' various positions – or 'voices' (Juffermans and Van der Aa 2013) – within a number of interlocking institutional contexts and hierarchies. For example, Aimutin Principal Soares is at the top of the school's hierarchy; however, he occupies a lowly position in the broader bureaucracy of the MoE. Maria enjoys a certain amount of prestige at the school because of her multifaceted role as teacher, trainer, TV star and former reform staff, but is subordinated by the principal because of her lower professional status in the school and her gender. These complexities point to the intersectionality of "multiple grids" of identity onto which actors' positions should be mapped (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:20) and which "differently constru[e] and constrai[n]" (Juffermans and Van der Aa 2013:116) their voices in different institutional contexts.¹⁵

Other factors also influence actors' visions of education and their ability and/or willingness to implement the Curriculum Reform. These factors include actors' own knowledge, qualifications, and educational background; actors' working environments and access to resources (including Curriculum Reform materials); and the impact of communications media and practices on actors' understanding of the Curriculum Reform.

15. Other analytical categories are similarly difficult to define and, while relevant, less central to my analysis. While on first glance, 'foreign' and 'local' could be easily applied along nationality lines, they, too, form a spectrum: a *malae* (foreigner) who has lived in Timor-Leste for fifteen years, is married into a Timorese family, and speaks fluent Tetun is not as 'foreign' as a freshly arrived international consultant who does not speak Tetun. Similarly, a Timorese consultant with an Australian Masters degree is simultaneously 'local' and 'foreign', depending on the context and the connotations of the label. The same difficulties emerge for categorisations of 'expert'/'amateur', 'developer'/'developee' and 'insider'/'outsider'.

Teachers' own skills and knowledge are one of the main challenges for implementation of the reform, which is widely acknowledged by reform staff. A significant proportion of Timor-Leste's teaching force have minimal education and teaching qualifications.¹⁶ In several of the classroom observations I conducted, teachers did not master the content they were teaching, including Portuguese Literacy, Mathematics, and even Tetun Literacy. The issue is compounded by the way the curriculum content is transmitted to teachers: lesson-plan manuals. Every trimester of each grade has a lesson-plan manual, often more than 800 pages long. While the rationale for using scripted lesson plans is clear – it provides a form of daily in-service support in a context of inadequate training and under-qualification – the sheer volume of written material for teachers to read is intimidating, especially in what many reform actors described as an 'oral culture' with a relatively new literate tradition. One international consultant expressed the dilemma by saying, "Text on a page, especially a huge amount of text on a huge amount of pages, isn't going to change anything. It can't, because that's not the way Timor works. But, at the same time, you need a new curriculum" (Figures 5 and 6).

Even when teachers do have sufficient academic skills to teach the new curriculum contents, limited access to reform materials makes this difficult to achieve (Vavrus and Bartlett 2012): delays with printing, delivery, and undersupply of reform materials was a common complaint both at schools and within the reform team (e.g., 07:20–08:19; 10:50–11:04; 11:45–12:29; 15:37–15:58; 15:59–17:50).

Another resource that impacts the implementation of the reform is space: many schools in Dili are overcrowded (Figures 4 and 9).¹⁷ Overcrowding was identified as an implementation challenge by more than half the school actors I interviewed. Two of the schools I visited had an average of 40 students; another had an average of 50. Some classrooms I observed had more than 60 students; others were reported to have almost 70. Many schools deal with overcrowding by accommodating two or three shifts of classes per day. Subsequently, each class's total classroom time is reduced to below the mandated amount, meaning that all content in the curriculum's strictly scheduled lesson plans simply cannot be covered; instead, teachers' own visions of education dictate how they prioritise disciplines (see 'Curriculum Content'). Overcrowding also made implementation of the reform's learner-centered pedagogy (LCP) an overwhelming, if not impossible, task for many teachers (see 'Pedagogy').

16. The situation has improved markedly since the Indonesian withdrawal following the independence referendum in 1999, when less than 10 per cent of the remaining Timorese teachers had minimum qualifications (Arneberg in Nicolai 2004:73). However, it still remains poor as judged by researchers and the Timorese government itself. Quinn, referring to MoE data, writes that, "over 23% of teachers have no teacher qualification, 61% have only partial qualification (generally having attended a vocational high school) and 11% have a post-secondary qualification in teacher training" (2013:184). In 2011, the government identified the improvement of teacher qualifications as a priority, because "[m]ore than 75% of teachers are not qualified to the levels required by law" (RDTL 2011: 21).

17. Ministry of Education data in 2015 showed that the average class size in Dili is 42 students, compared to the national average of 31 (EMIS data, Ministry of Education website, accessed 22 September 2016, moe.gov.tl/?q=node/217).



Finally, the communications media and practices surrounding the reform often obstruct access to, and information about, the reform, resulting in “conceptual vagueness” (Lopes Cardozo 2012:760) about the reform’s objectives, principles and methodologies.¹⁸ Specific examples of the impact of communications are given in each of the following sections.



Figure 4 – Class sizes and overcrowding: A 2nd Grade classroom with 33 students in the frame, excluding nearly two full tables to the left. [video still]

18. The MoE’s website (moe.gov.tl, as at 20 September 2016) does little to remedy the poor communication of the reform: the Basic Education page contains only a long list of bullet points in Portuguese and the Basic Education Curriculum page contains only links to download an incomplete selection of reform materials. It has no information on the reform’s objectives, principles, timeframes, structure, or implementation.

Dixiplina	Matemátika	Klase	3
Bloku	Númeru	Nº Lisaun	3
Sub-bloku	Frasaun no desimal	Durasaun	Minutu 50
Konteúdu	Revizaun: Frasaun	Períodu	I
Rezultadu	MAT2.1.4: Fahe unidade no sura parte unidade nian		
Objetivu	Estudante sira bele: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relasiona frasaun no divizaun hosi objetu ida. • Rekoñese no identifika frasaun $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{5}$ no $\frac{1}{10}$. • Identifika frasaun nia pár ne'ebé soma sei sai unidade ida. • Kompara frasaun simples, utiliza dezeñu. 		
Materiál	-		
Preparasaun	-		

LISAUN	
Minutu 10 	1. Revizaun: Korrije Serbisu ba Uma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dehan ba estudante sira: "Antes ita estuda lisaun loron ohin nian, ita korrije lai imi-nia Serbisu ba Uma." • Husu: "Sé mak bele mai hakerek ninia rezultadu iha kuadru?" • Hein sira balu bá hakerek iha kuadru. Halo balun de'it hamutuk, lalika halo hotu. • Halo diskusaun ba sira-nia rezultadu.
Minutu 5 	2. Introdusaun: Esplikasaun kona-ba frasaun <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dehan: "Ohin loron ita sei estuda lisaun sira-ne'ebé ita estuda ona iha Klase 2 nian kona-ba frasaun." • Husu no hein sira balu hatán: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Imi sei hanoin hetan?" ○ "Saida mak frasaun?" ○ "Sé mak bele fó ezemplu ida?" • Dehan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Bainhira ita fahe objetu ida ba parte 2, ka 3, ka 4, ka 5, ka 6, ka 10, ka seluk, baluk sira-ne'ebé mosu mak naran 'frasaun'." ○ "Entaun frasaun mak parte balu hosi ida tomak." ○ "$\frac{1}{2}$ katak sorin ida de'it hosi buat ruma ne'ebé fahe ba rua, nune'e, $\frac{1}{2}$ tau tan $\frac{1}{2}$ sei sai fali ida tomak." ○ "Iha maneira barak atu fahe buat ruma, entaun iha frasaun barabarak."




	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Ezemplu: biskoit ida bele fahe ba parte 2, ba parte 3, ba parte 10, ka liután." ○ "Depois fahe, parte sira-ne'e ida-idak mak naran 'frasaun'."
Minutu 30 	3. Atividade: Halo ezersisú hosi livru ezersisú <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haruka sira loke livru ezersisú ba pájina...??? • Esplika oinsá halo ezersisú 3 tuirmai ne'e, no haruka sira halo iha sira-nia kadernu. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Figura tuirmai ne'e representa frasaun $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{5}$, no $\frac{1}{10}$. <p>Hakerek letra no frasaun ne'ebé figura ne'e hatudu. Ezemplu: $A = \frac{1}{2}$</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utiliza simbolu matemátika (<, >, no =) kompara figura sira tuirmai ne'e. Hakerek iha kadernu. ○ Halo korrespondénsia hosi figura ida ba nia pár ne'ebé tau hamutuk sei sai unidade ida. Ezemplu: $A - 3$ • La'o hale'u haree no halo diskusaun ba sira-nia rezultadu.
Minutu 5 	4. Konkluzau <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dehan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Imi bele identifika ona frasaun iha figura sira, hatene kompara frasaun, no tau hamutuk frasaun sira hosi figura sira-ne'e sai unidade ida." ○ "Atu imi hatene di'ak liután, imi tenke halo ezersisú iha uma." • Hatudu Serbisu ba Uma ba sira.
	Serbisu ba Uma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haruka estudante sira dezeña figura ne'ebé mak bele representa $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{5}$, no $\frac{1}{10}$. • Haruka estudante ida-idak lori fatuk-musan maizumenus 25 ba lisaun aban nian.

Figure 5: A 50-minute Grade 3 Mathematics lesson plan about fractions.

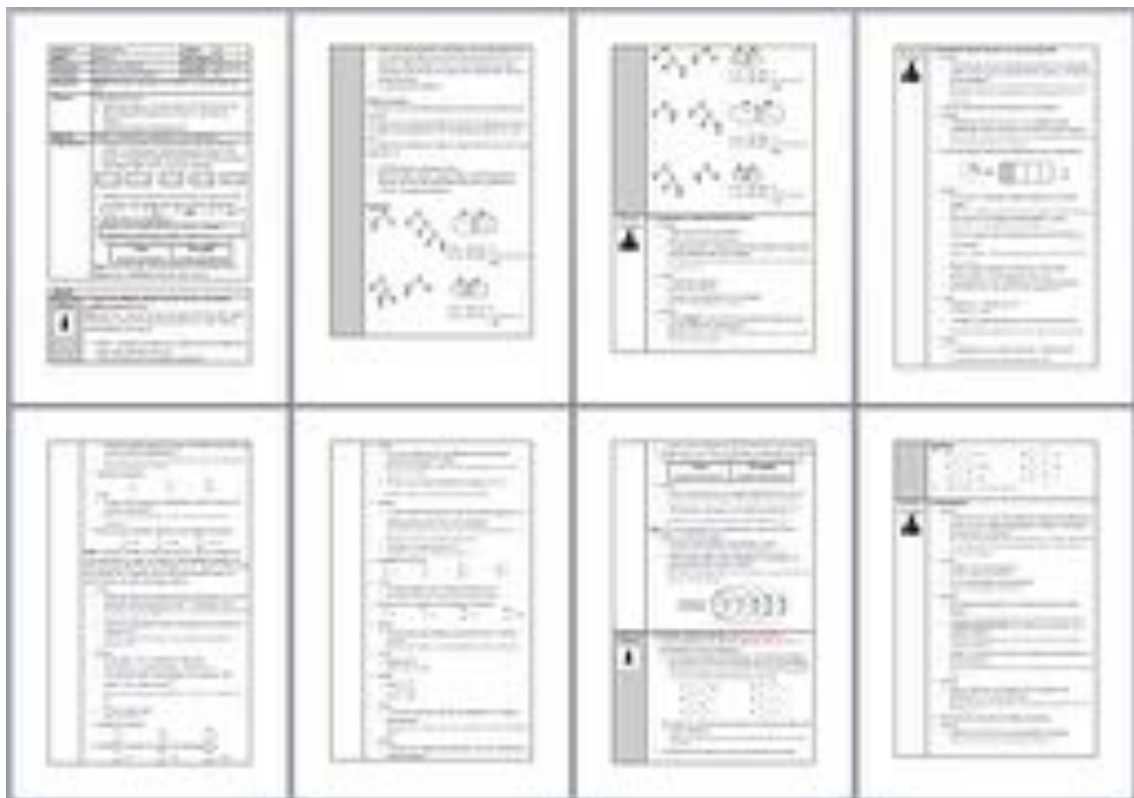


Figure 6: The length of lesson plans increases along with the complexity of the content in the higher grades. This 8-page lesson plan, also on fractions, is for a 50-minute Grade 6 Mathematics lesson.

COMPONENT I – LANGUAGE



Language policy is by far the most controversial feature of the Curriculum Reform and – given that “[l]anguage policy debates are always about more than language” (Taylor-Leech 2008:153) – provides a useful starting point for contrasting the school and reform visions of education. The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste recognizes Portuguese and Tetun as the nation’s two official languages, also acknowledging the existence of several other local languages.¹⁹ Although Tetun is the nation’s *lingua franca* and Portuguese is spoken fluently by a minority of the population (ibid:163; Soares and Dooradi 2011:16),²⁰ Portuguese has strong symbolic power (for reasons outlined below) and is a marker of status and privilege, conferring both symbolic and concrete benefits on its speakers.

In the education sector, language has been a continually contentious issue (Quinn 2013). Portuguese was the main language of the first post-independence primary-school curriculum, in which Tetun was designated an ‘auxiliary language’ (02:40–03:01, 26:56–27:56; Taylor-Leech 2008:162). In the Curriculum Reform, Tetun is the main language of instruction for the early grades, and a language progression methodology transfers from Tetun to Portuguese by Grade 6.²¹ Tetun and Portuguese are both languages of instruction (for other disciplines, e.g., Math) and also disciplines in their own right (i.e., Tetun Literacy and Portuguese Literacy). The reform’s language policy is premised on the idea that students learn best in a language they understand and on research showing that teaching in Portuguese has been ineffective in Timor-Leste. A number of interviewed reform staff referred to a 2010 World Bank study that found that “[m]ore than 70% of students at the end of grade 1 could not read a single word of the simple text passage they were asked to read,” with this rate dropping to 40% and 20% in grades 2 and 3, respectively (Amorim *et al.* 2010:2). The Vice Minister emphasised the

19. At least 16 other languages are used in the country, with some estimates pushing the number as high as 32, depending on classifications as language or dialect (Taylor-Leech 2008:155).

20. The proportion of Timorese self-reporting proficiency in Portuguese rose from 5–20 per cent in 2000 to 36 per cent in the 2004 census, compared to 86 percent who reported being proficient in Tetun in 2004. However, these statistics are self-reported and may reflect a greater identification with Portuguese as a part of the national identity rather than an actual increase in language capacities (Taylor-Leech 2008:163). In a United Nations media survey, less than 3 percent reported Portuguese as their mother tongue and only 1 percent of respondents listed Portuguese as the second language they spoke best, behind 11 other languages that were more common second languages (Soares and Dooradi 2011:16).

21. As explained by Yohan, “Portuguese is introduced year by year, increasing to Year 6, when, hopefully by then they’re [students] able to practically express themselves, read and write well in the language, getting them ready for middle school. That’s the theory.” Secondary school is still technically in Portuguese.

importance of these results and the reform's goal that students finish primary school with strong literacy skills in both Tetun and Portuguese (Clip 2). However, as Taylor-Leech notes, "[t]he relationship between language and identity in East Timor is complex and hotly contested" (2008:154), and the reform vision in relation to language is opposite to the school's vision in almost every respect.



Clip 2: Perspectives on the use of Tetun in schooling

The majority (7 of 10) of school actors who spoke about the reform's language policy expressed concern about the reduction of Portuguese in the new curriculum, and 9 expressed support for the continuation of Portuguese.²² Schools also receive pressure from parents to retain Portuguese as the main language of instruction: one parent I spoke with said her school's parent association opposes the increase of Tetun in the new curriculum and regularly petitions the school to provide more materials in Portuguese, believing it to be more educationally valuable. In the context of decolonisation education reforms in Bolivia, Lopes Cardozo found a similar preference among parents, who perceived education in "the 'modern' language of business", Spanish, as "*the way out of poverty*" (2012:757, italics in original). Conversely, Tetun is at the centre of the reform vision regarding language, and every single interviewed reform actor was in favour of Tetun's prominent place in the reform's language policy. In fact, a number of reform actors confided that they thought the continuation of Portuguese in primary school is unnecessary and perhaps even detrimental, but acknowledged that its complete removal was politically unthinkable.

Language is a key aspect of the school vision's focus on internationalisation. Speaking Portuguese is seen as a "window to the world" that will enable students to work and study overseas as members of an international community (28:00–28:24), including a specifically lusophone one: Timor-Leste's

22. These results are different to those of earlier studies of teachers' opinions on language. Shah (2012) reported that Portuguese as language of instruction was an unpopular choice among teachers following the introduction of the first post-independence curriculum, who saw the language as an imposition of a Portuguese-educated political elite. My data, on the contrary, show almost-universal support for its place in the education system. Quinn's (2013:182) research shows similar levels of support. The discrepancy may reflect the adoption of policy discourse over time, in an example of what Shah and Lopes Cardozo describe as an effect of the "vacuum of information" about policy goals and concepts, leading teachers "to continue with the last policy with which they were familiar" (2016:7).

membership of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP by its Portuguese acronym) was mentioned more than once, and also noted by Taylor-Leech in her study on the relationship between language and identity in Timor-Leste (2008:165).

School actors' support of Portuguese as the language of education also stems from the fact that schooling was, for centuries, a foreign system and many people accept this as a fundamental characteristic of the institution. Indeed, the association of 'modern' schooling with prosperity and 'modernity' is not abstract: Timorese who learned Portuguese and assimilated into the Portuguese culture during colonisation – the *assimilados* – gained direct access to citizenship privileges (Taylor-Leech 2008:154–7). Similarly, Lopes Cardozo sees the local interest in continuing foreign-inspired education systems as a natural consequence of centuries of engagement with a colonial cultural logic (2012:763). As such, many accept school as a place where children learn things disconnected from their daily lives and surroundings (see 'Content' below; Sarangapani 2003). International reform actors described this stance as a "post-colonial mentality of self-loathing" and a form of "internalized oppression" that should be countered by a more localized form of schooling, and some national reform staff recognized some Timorese felt using Tetun at school represented "going backwards".

Almost all school actors were themselves educated in Portuguese or Indonesian and refer to their own experience as evidence of the effectiveness of such a model. The principal of a primary school in Dili explained that teachers who attended reform trainings had been told children are confused by speaking Tetun at home but Portuguese at school. "I don't agree," she said. "[W]hen we were young, [...]we only spoke Portuguese at school." The position of school actors on this point contrasts with the views of reform staff, including Mário, and the Vice Minister, who referred to their own difficulties learning in the same circumstances as evidence for the need to teach children in their mother tongue.

Portuguese is also seen as deeply connected to the Timorese history and identity (Taylor-Leech 2008:157) by many school actors. Several mentioned the use of Portuguese as a code language to evade Indonesian surveillance during the resistance (13:08–14:53). But some reform actors disagreed with the notion of Portuguese as part of Timorese identity. Yohan said, "I don't hear that from any of the Timorese people I know that live around here [a poor, crowded neighbourhood on Dili's outskirts where he lives with his Timorese wife's family]. [...] A lot of Timorese people that are my friends just reject this [idea that Portuguese is part of Timorese identity] straight up [...]. Artists and musicians [...] are excluded and they're denigrated by the mainstream mentality, which defines the good Timorese as the Portuguese-speaking, Catholic, church-going, short-haired man". Indeed, his view of the language policy draws on his social circle, which largely consisted of the young Timorese artistic community, many of whom lived through the Indonesian occupation but not Portuguese colonialism.

Interestingly, no interviewed school actors referred to Tetun as part of the Timorese identity. Many reform staff, however, did make this connection, similar to findings in other studies (ibid:158; 25:56–27:56), and highlighted the role of Tetun in the localisation of the curriculum. Indeed, Tetun’s connection to national identity is identified in lesson plans as one of the reasons it was chosen as an official language in the Constitution (Figure 7).

Another reason for many school actors’ preference for Portuguese over Tetun as the main language of instruction is a perception that Tetun is insufficiently developed. Five of the ten school actors who discussed language policy said Tetun’s rightful role is as an auxiliary language to Portuguese, as per the previous curriculum. Taylor-Leech also found such attitudes in her research, pointing out the self-fulfilling prophecy of the legal precedent set in the first post-independence curriculum: “Self-effacing attitudes towards Tetun lead to a policy approach that treats it as an inferior medium for educational purposes. Such language attitudes run the risk of reducing the official status of Tetun to symbolic status only” (2008:162).^{23,24} In contrast to the school vision, the reform vision holds that Tetun is indeed sufficient as a language of instruction, and practically all interviewed reform staff emphasized its viability (30:31–31:27; 32:32–33:17). The reform language policy emphasises that Timorese people’s *knowledge* of Tetun’s literate form, rather than the language itself, is insufficiently developed. Indeed, the reform’s literacy TV show, broadcast nationally, provides basic instruction in the Timorese alphabet and orthography in a way that is targeted at children but meant to appeal to a broad audience of people with minimal literacy skills (25:58–26:53).

The importance of improving Tetun literacy skills was connected, for some international reform staff, with a political project of democratisation. For example, Yohan explained: “[If] you want to build a democratic society [...] you need newspapers that are well written, well researched and clear. You can’t have this confusing mush everywhere passing for social, public discourse.” He recognises that this goal is not shared by everyone in Timor-Leste but is important to “those of us that want to see the kind of democratic society that we’re imagining, that we imagine we might have back home or, or we hope we did have back home.”

The distance between the school and reform visions regarding language is exacerbated by the (mis)communication of the reform. Two of the three interviewed school leaders complained of mixed messages about language from government officials (e.g., 13:22–14:02). The third spoke of the lack of information about the language progression methodology, compounded by limited exposure to the

23. ‘Tetun’ and ‘Tetum’ are alternate spellings for the name of the language in English.

24. In Timor-Leste, this language “gap between policy and practice” is not only evident in the education sector. Despite the fact that, by law, all legislation should be published in both national languages, most laws are published only in Portuguese.

methodology's full scope due to its staged implementation (i.e., teachers have only seen materials for the early grades where Tetun is predominant, but not yet grades 5 and 6 where Portuguese becomes a language of instruction). The 'cascade effect'²⁵ of reform training undoubtedly is partly responsible for this confusion, but so are the contradictory statements of politicians with different positions on the language debate and the media's unclear and inconsistent reporting on the topic.²⁶ The reform team is aware of these miscommunications and has taken steps to address it: in April 2016, Debbie, the reform's manager and Vice Minister's advisor, produced a document for teacher trainers with answers to the main misconceptions about the language policy (personal communication, 15 April 2016).

This miscommunication has contributed to teachers resisting the policy or appropriating it to their own vision. One school director explained that teachers feel disheartened that the new language policy seemingly wastes the years of time and energy they have invested in learning Portuguese.²⁷ This same director advises teachers to use more Portuguese so as not to disadvantage students academically. Other examples of appropriation were abundant in classroom observations: teachers at Aimutin expanded the vocabulary of Portuguese Literacy exercises using a strict methodology, Total Physical Response (*Resposta Física Total*, RFT), unaware of the reform's position that the methodology must be strictly followed in order to be effective. Teachers regularly used Portuguese in the teaching of other disciplines, even Tetun Literacy. Within the time constraints of shifts in overcrowded schools, many teachers enact the school vision of language in their selectivity of the subjects they teach, with Portuguese Literacy consuming proportionately much more class time than it should according to the official timetable (see 'Content' below).

Portuguese also continues to dominate the social aesthetics of the learning environment: the prayer at the start and end of class is in Portuguese, as are class rules, birthday charts, and the ubiquitous




25. 'Cascade training' is a training model whereby individuals who receive training in turn provide the training to others, often repeated through several levels. In the case of the curriculum reform, Curriculum Reform staff train trainers from the national teacher-training institute, INFORDEPE, who train the school adjuncts, who train the teachers. The model, often used in resource-poor contexts, is popular because of it is cheap, but is commonly criticized for distorting messages along the long chain of messengers. (Suzuki, T. 2008. 'The Effectiveness of the Cascade Model for In-service Teacher Training in Nepal', EISTA 2008 conference paper, <http://www.iiis.org/cds2008/cd2008sci/EISTA2008/PapersPdf/E964RM.pdf>; Hayes, D. 2000. 'Cascade training and teachers' professional development', *ELT Journal*, 54(2): 135–145, doi: 10.1093/elt/54.2.135). In the case of the Curriculum Reform, several reform staff acknowledged that the reform's objectives and content get diluted, distorted, or lost during this training process.

26. Recent newspaper articles about language in schooling include: 'System of language instruction causing confusion in schools' (*The Dili Weekly* 2016), 'It's a "patriotic duty" to learn Portuguese in Timor-Leste, says the Minister of Education' (*Timor Agora* 2016), 'Ministry of Education Maintains Old Curriculum' (*Timor Post* 2016), 'Timorese PM [Prime Minister] wants teachers to teach Portuguese in all schools in the country' (*Sapo Notícias* 2015), 'Timorese Ministry of Education committed to Portuguese despite challenges' (*Pájina Global* 2016), and 'Students who speak Tetun will be fined 1 dollar' (*Timor Post* 2016).

27. Indeed, a similar argument could be made about resistance from the Portuguese lobby and within some political factions, given the significant financial investment of several million dollars (and political investment) in the use of Portuguese since Timor-Leste's independence (Taylor-Leech 2008:158).

blackboard listing of the date and subject. Although few teachers and practically no students speak Portuguese proficiently, the language's presence is part of an aesthetic backdrop that legitimizes the classroom as a space of formal education. The reform's language policy disrupts the social aesthetics (MacDougall 1999) that teachers are used to enacting, regardless of their own conscious positions on the use of Tetun and Portuguese. The social aesthetics of the reform team's environment in regard to language is significantly different. Albeit multilingual, the office environment is marked by an abundance of printed materials and posters in Tetun, many produced by the reform team itself. Due to the temporary nature of the reform team and its office space, their whole working environment has been fashioned in the image of the reform and its principles, including the valorisation of Tetun.

In regard to language in education in Timor-Leste, Taylor-Leech writes, "Medium-of-instruction policy plays a central role in nation building and social reconstruction. It is perhaps the most important means at the state's disposal for maintaining and revitalizing languages and cultures" (2008:161). As outlined above, the reform's language policy aims to improve literacy and educational performance across all disciplines, but also to localise education through the use of Tetun. Apart from language, localisation is most evident in the reform's approach to curriculum content, which forms the basis of the following section.

<p>Minutu 20 (Portugés)</p> 	<p>7. Atividade: Lee no komprende kona-ba lian Portugés no Tetun sai lian ofisiál</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haruka sira lee <i>Livru Antolojia Klase 5</i>, parte 'Lian oioin iha Timor-Leste'. • Bainhira sira lee, taka pergunta ne'ebé prepara ona iha surat-tahan boot (haree iha Preparasaun). • Bazeia ba sira-nia leitura, fó tempu maizumenus minutu 10 atu kada grupu diskute no fó resposta iha sira-nia kadernu. • La'o hale'u hodi rona sira-nia diskusaun no ajuda, se preziza. • Haruka grupu ne'ebé seidauk prezenta atu hato'o ka lée sira-nia resposta. • Enkoraja atu estudante sira prezenta iha lia-portugés. <p>Nota: Resposta sira bele hanesan tuirmai:</p> <p>4. Lian inan maka lian ne'ebé ema aprende no ko'alia uluk husi uma-laran kedas. Bele nia inan ka aman nia lian ka mahein nia lian. Baibain lian inan maka lian ida-ne'ebé ema hatene di'ak liu.</p> <p>[Lian inan maka lian ne'ebé ema aprende no ko'alia uluk husi uma-laran kedas. Bele nia inan ka aman nia lian ka mahein nia lian. Baibain lian inan maka lian ida-ne'ebé ema hatene di'ak liu.]</p> <p>Nota: Asegura sira fó ezemplu lia-inan ho di'ak. Depende lian saida maka nia aprende uluk iha uma laran hanesan tetun, tokode, fataluku, portugés, makasae, baikenu, mambae nst.</p> <p>5. Lian ofisiál katak lian ne'ebé nasaun ida aprova atu uza iha sistema administrasaun governu, tribunál no parlamentu nian. Nune'e mós lian ofisiál uza hodi hanorin dixiplina sira iha eskola; nu'udar lian negósiu no lian prinsipál ba meiu-komunikasaun iha jornál, televizaun no rádiu.</p> <p>[Lian ofisiál katak lian ne'ebé nasaun ida aprova atu uza iha sistema administrasaun governu, tribunál no parlamentu nian. Nune'e mós lian ofisiál uza hodi hanorin dixiplina sira iha eskola; nu'udar lian negósiu no lian prinsipál ba meiu-komunikasaun iha jornál, televizaun no rádiu.]</p> <p>6. Lia-tetun sai lian ofisiál tanba lian ne'e hori tempu uluk kedas ema timoroan komunika ba malu liuliu iha negósiu entre Timor-oan sira ho lian inan ketak-ketak hafoin igreja mós uza hodi hanorin doutrina Katólika. Tan ema barak maka ko'alia no nu'udar identidade nasional iha tinan 2001 Asembleia Konstituinte hakerek iha Konstituisaun RDTL katak lia-tetun, hamutuk ho lia-portugés, nu'udar lian ofisiál ba Timor-Leste.</p> <p>Lia-portugés sai lian ofisiál tanba lian ne'e iha relasaun boot ba Timor-Leste nia istória no durante okupasaun Indonézia sai lian rezisténsia nian. Lia-portugés mós influénsia maka'as ba lian</p>
	<p>sira iha Timor-Leste, liuliu ba lia-tetun. Lia-portugés mós bele liga rai Timor-Leste ba nasaun sira-ne'ebé ko'alia lia-portugés no nu'udar identidade ne'ebé halo Timor-Leste diferente ho ninia nasaun vizifiu sira hanesan Indonézia no Austrália. Iha tinan 2001, Asembleia Konstituinte hakerek iha Konstituisaun RDTL katak lia-portugés, hamutuk ho lia-tetun, nu'udar lian ofisiál ba Timor-Leste].</p> <p>[Lia-tetun sai lian ofisiál tanba lian ne'e hori tempu uluk kedas ema timoroan komunika ba malu liuliu iha negósiu entre timoroan sira ho lian inan ketak-ketak hafoin igreja mós uza hodi hanorin doutrina Katólika. Tan ema barak maka ko'alia no nu'udar identidade nasional iha tinan 2001 Asembleia Konstituinte hakerek iha Konstituisaun RDTL katak lia-tetun, hamutuk ho lia-portugés, nu'udar lian ofisiál ba Timor-Leste.</p> <p>Lia portugés sai lia-ofisiál tanba lian ne'e iha relasaun boot ba Timor-Leste nia istória no durante okupasaun Indonézia sai lian rezisténsia nian. Lia-portugés mós influénsia maka'as ba lian sira iha Timor-Leste liuliu ba lia-tetun. Lia-portugés mós bele liga rai Timor-Leste ba país sira-ne'ebé ko'alia lia-portugés no nu'udar identidade ne'ebé halo Timor-Leste diferente ho ninia nasaun vizifiu sira hanesan Indonézia no Austrália. Iha tinan 2001, Asembleia Konstituinte hakerek iha Konstituisaun RDTL katak lia-portugés, hamutuk ho lia-tetun, nu'udar lian ofisiál ba Timor-Leste.]</p>
<p>Minutu 5 (Tetun)</p>  	<p>8. Konkluzaun</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Husu no rona sira balu hatán: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Husi lisaun ohin, saida mak imi aprende?" ○ "Saida mak interesante liu?" • Fó-hanoin katak sira preziza halo entrevista molok lisaun tuirmai hodi iha lisaun tuirmai bele prepara apresentasaun peskiza.

“Tetun is an official language because it was used in the past by Timorese people from various different mother tongues to communicate, particularly when trading. The Church then used Tetun to teach the Catholic doctrine. Because many people speak it, and because it is part of the national identity, the Constitutional Assembly wrote in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste that Tetun, together with Portuguese, would be an official language of Timor-Leste.

“Portuguese is an official language because it has a strong relationship with Timor-Leste’s history and was the language of the resistance during the Indonesian occupation. Portuguese has also had a strong influence on Timorese languages, particularly Tetun. Portuguese can also serve as a link to other countries that speak Portuguese and as part of our identity that distinguishes us from our neighbours like Indonesia and Australia. In 2001, the Constitutional Assembly wrote in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste that Portuguese, together with Tetun, would be an official language of Timor-Leste.”

Figure 7: Excerpt from Grade 5 Social Science lesson plan about Timor-Leste’s official languages. Note: The lesson plan includes text in Tetun twice; this is where the original text in Tetun is waiting to be translated into Portuguese, after I see it as the editor.

COMPONENT II – CURRICULUM CONTENT



The *Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011–2030* refers to the role of education in ensuring that “all Timorese children [...] receive a quality education that gives them the knowledge and skills to lead healthy, productive lives” (RDTL 2011:16) and to “participate in the social, economic and political development of our nation” (ibid:18). The plan outlines the country’s alignment with international development trends and targets, but states they should be “tailored to reflect the unique history, culture and heritage of Timor-Leste” (ibid:16) – an objective in line with a global education trend (Anderson-Levitt 2003; Aikman and King 2012; Sarangapani 2003).

It is important to distinguish between two clear forms of localisation in the Curriculum Reform.²⁸ The first is the inclusion in the curriculum of local content, including Timorese history, geography, music, arts and permaculture practices (e.g., 05:01–07:16; 10:13–10:46), with the objective “to strengthen our Timorese identity and values,” as one national reform consultant put it. An international consultant said the localisation of curriculum content, “really tries to [...] look at the onus of being proud of your ancestors and your traditional culture and traditional belief systems.” This type of localisation is most evident in the Tetun Literacy, Art and Culture, and Social Science disciplines.

The second form is the localisation of (abstract) concepts through the use of local materials and examples, with a clear pedagogical function in its focus on experiential learning. It is most evident in Mathematics, Natural Science, Portuguese Literacy, Physical Education, and Health. For example, stories of community events and market shopping are used to relate mathematical concepts to daily life; local fruits are used to construct a model of the solar system in Natural Science; and students conduct research on their family members’ daily routines in Health. One international consultant described this type of localisation as being about “mak[ing] links to the experience of the student. So if we have this concept that we thought was important to put in the curriculum, that’s because it related to everyone’s life here or it’s related to the international canon of what people should know.” National reform staff also identified this objective of localisation to increase effectiveness of learning and help students “remember [content] easily.”

28. Reform team participants referred to this component of the Curriculum Reform interchangeably as ‘localisation’ (*lokalizasaun*) and ‘contextualisation’ (*kontestualizasaun*). In this text, I use ‘localisation’ for consistency.

Localisation features prominently in the reform vision of education in relation to curriculum content, but not in the school vision. The majority of interviewed reform staff named localisation as a reform objective, giving reasons and examples like those outlined above. The same was not true for school staff. When asked what has changed in the new curriculum, many pointed to the language changes and the provision of new materials, namely the scripted lesson plans. In many interviews, I pressed further, asking about changes in curriculum content. Not one interviewed teacher mentioned anything relating to local content or the localisation of (abstract) concepts. Localisation, it seems, is absent from the school vision in regard to curriculum content.

This is not to say that Timorese nationalism or identity are absent from the school vision. But, similar to its position on language, the school vision considers the *internationalisation* – not localisation – of content the best way to secure future prosperity, contribute to national development, and affirm Timor-Leste’s place as a modern, sovereign nation in the international community. Principal Soares expressed the importance of Timor-Leste ‘catching up’ to the rest of the developed world, and saw the reform as an attempt by the government to ensure this outcome (see Clip 3).



Clip 3: Timor and the international community

This position is not surprising. As described above, schooling in Timor-Leste has always been a foreign system that prioritises “colonial epistemologies” (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016:4; see also Sarangapani 2003), whose abstraction and disconnection from local, lived realities historically has had an almost inverse correlation to the concreteness of the social privileges it confers on its bearers. This element of the school vision reflects similar positions found in other research about reactions to the localisation of curricula: Jungck and Kajornsinn have described efforts in Thailand to incorporate local content, or “local wisdom”, into curricula, acknowledging the tensions this can cause. While the intention was to bridge local culture and the demands of a globalised work force “in ways that enable people to be more strategic in negotiating the homogenizing currents of globalization” (2003:34), local actors began to question whether these efforts focused on social reproduction at the cost of social mobility (ibid:42).

Although they did not agree with this position, Timorese reform staff understood this mindset, noting that it was prominent in their own families and educational experiences. One national consultant described it thus:

If you want to learn something, learn about science, [people think you have to] go to school to learn it. In reality, parents do a lot of things related to science, but they don't know how to explain them. They say that if you want to learn science, you have to go to school.

When asked why school actors might resist the localisation of curriculum contents, some – both national and international – reform staff responded that some people think learning local culture (and language) is backward, a position commonly found in educational research internationally (e.g., Sarangapani 2003:202; Lopes Cardozo 2012). One international consultant said:

I've heard that people don't want to learn ... or use mother tongue or know about 'ai-knanoik' [myths] and all of that, because [they think] it's backward. And they're embarrassed to be proud of that and [think that instead] we need to move forward and be modern and contemporary. And our curriculum is actually counter that [position].

The same consultant, however, also expressed a view that the Timorese education system is backward, but not because of the reform's use of localisation: "We need to move Timor into [...] the current age. Because it really is [...] what schools were like fifty years ago." Here, we see that keeping pace with global changes is an objective of both the reform and school visions of education, but one that is understood differently: while school actors generally do not see the function of localisation in service of that goal, reform staff do. For example, one aspect of global change that some (particularly international) reform staff mentioned was a concern with the threat to environmental and cultural sustainability of a globalised, industrialised world, which Yohan summed up by saying, "Lots and lots of concrete is being poured and built everywhere, and day by day, valuable knowledge, which has always made the people survive and be sustainable here, is being lost." While he acknowledged that many Timorese "link education to jobs", his support of localisation in the curriculum centred around other values: "[W]ith my background and philosophy of life and education [...] it's a philosophical question of quality of life [...]. What is it that makes life worth living?"

Localisation does not, however, erase other obstacles to effective teaching, including gaps in teachers' own knowledge. An example of the previous curriculum's lack of localisation that reform staff commonly mentioned was the use of pizza to teach fractions. Interviewees pointed out that few Timorese children know what pizza is, let alone eat it. Hence, the solution was to swap the pizza being divided into fractions with a local object. I saw one Grade 3 teacher give a lesson on fractions using the reform lesson plans: children called out their favourite fruits, which he drew and divided into fractions on the blackboard. Despite the content being localised, it was clear (as in several of my

classroom observations) that the teacher did not understand simple fractions. He split a watermelon on the blackboard into four quarters, labelling them $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, and $\frac{1}{5}$. Pointing to a halved banana, he explained, “One-over-two ($\frac{1}{2}$) is the same as one-point-two (1.2).” I fought back the urge to interject as the teacher fumbled his way through the lesson and his 56 students carefully copied incorrect examples into their notebooks (Figure 5).²⁹ It was clear that, in this case, localisation could not overcome the teacher’s fundamental lack of knowledge.

Unclear and inconsistent communication of the reform’s objectives can also partly explain the lack of localisation in the school vision. Such miscommunications have led to “conceptual vagueness” (Lopes Cardozo 2012) around fundamental concepts and objectives of the Curriculum Reform, including localisation, resulting in many school actors simply not recognizing the presence and function of localisation in the curriculum and lesson plans. As mentioned above, not a single interviewed teacher identified localisation as a feature of the Curriculum Reform.

The overcrowding of school actors’ working environments also affect their appropriation of the curriculum content. In the three schools I visited, the preferred strategy for adjusting the timetable to accommodate shifts was selectivity. Rather than reduce the time allocated to each subject proportionately (e.g., by reducing each 50-minute lesson to 30 minutes), teachers taught a smaller number of full 50-minute lessons of their preferred subjects. Despite constituting only 10 per cent of the grades 2 and 3 timetable (averaged), Portuguese Literacy was taught in 32 per cent of my observations (6/19 times) – more than three times the official requirement; while Tetun Literacy was taught slightly more than in the official timetable (7/19 times). Math was taught 4 times, Natural Science 3 times, and Social Science once. I did not observe any Art and Culture, Physical Education, or Health classes (Table 1).

In conclusion, localisation holds very different places in the school and reform visions of curriculum content. It also holds very different places in the two visions regarding pedagogy, as argued below; however, with a reversed significance. Indeed, the pedagogical frameworks in the school and reform visions of education result in significantly different appropriation’s of the reform’s policy on pedagogy.

29. Such moments presented ethical dilemmas about my responsibilities as a researcher. I wondered whether to later correct the teacher, or to discreetly inform the principal of my observation. In the end I did neither, reasoning that any intervention would likely be a band-aid solution to one of numerous gaps in the teacher’s knowledge. Indeed, if I had stepped in to ‘correct’ a teacher every time I saw a misunderstanding or mistake, this would have consumed my fieldwork, as such mistakes were so common. Of course, this provokes more questions about the gap between the curriculum’s ideal learning outcomes and the current teaching population’s own skill and knowledge base.

Discipline	Grade 2 official timetable		Grade 3 official timetable		Grades 2 & 3 average		Observations			%
	Minutes/week	%	Minutes/week	%	Minutes/week	%	N° times observed (total) (Grade 2) (Grade 3)			
Tetun Literacy	325	28	250	22	287.5	25	7/19	3	4	37
Portuguese Literacy	75	7	150	13	112.5	10	6/19	3	3	32
Math	250	22	250	22	250	22	4/19	3	1	21
Natural Science	150	13	150	13	150	13	1/19	–	1	5
Social Science	150	13	150	13	150	13	1/19	–	1	5
Art and Culture	100	9	100	9	100	9	0/19	–	–	0
Physical Education	50	4	50	4	50	4	0/19	–	–	0
Health	50	4	50	4	50	4	0/19	–	–	0
Total	1,150	100	1,150	100	1,150	100	19/19	9/19	10/19	100

Table 1: Occurrence of each discipline in Grade 2 and 3 curricula and in 19 classroom observations



Figure 8: Students whose chairs face the back of the classroom turn or stand to see the board and teacher [video still]

COMPONENT III – PEDAGOGY



The conceptual use of localisation and internationalisation is reversed in the school and reform visions of pedagogy.³⁰ The school vision privileges local pedagogy, particularly regarding discipline, religion, and teachers' authority. Conversely, the reform vision favours pedagogical methods and rationale drawn from an international base that emphasise democratic and child-centered values.

The school vision of pedagogy reflects local or 'traditional' pedagogy (as many actors described it), centred around rote learning (the memorisation of facts), infused with religion and strict (physical) discipline, and maintained through order, control and the teacher's authority (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016:10; 20:05–21:20, 29:30–30:30). Despite being a public school, all classes at Aimutin begin and end with a prayer (28:25–28:44; Figure 9), every classroom has a religious image on the wall, and religion is seen as having an ethical, pedagogical purpose in schooling (Clip 5). Part of the strict discipline of many Timorese classrooms involves corporal punishment (UNICEF and Plan International 2006), and I saw several instances of ear-twisting and light slaps in classroom observations. Principal Soares sees violence in the classroom as unfortunate but inevitable due to its cultural (and colonial) prevalence and community support, despite his recognition that the Curriculum Reform – as well as international law – prohibits physical punishment (Clip 6). The moral role of teachers in helping to shape children into complete citizens is also part of the school vision of pedagogy. A phrase I heard in a number of my observations and interviews is that education “makes people into people” (*forma ema sai ema* in Tetun; 29:58–30:03), perhaps also reflecting a colonial-era view of school's 'civilizing' role (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016:10). Several teachers identified this role and the social prestige it brings as part of their professional identity and motivation to teach – their love of *teaching*.

The reform vision of pedagogy, conversely, focuses on engendering a love of *learning* in students (19:45–19:50), which is central to the reform policy's most salient pedagogical feature: learner-centered pedagogy, or LCP. An international consultant loosely described LCP as a focus on ensuring

30. I follow Vavrus and Bartlett's definition of pedagogy in this text, as “teaching and its attendant theories” (2012:636), i.e., the *methods* with which which curriculum content is taught, rather than the curriculum *content* itself.

students are, “involved and a part of their own learning; it’s not just remembering something, it’s applying it as well. It’s also helping with life skills, being confident, you know, having faith in yourself, interacting with people—all of that stuff.” Two national consultants agreed, explaining that the reform aimed to “change the mentality” around various social issues. The reform vision is explicitly anti-violence and secular, separating religion as a discipline of the curriculum, rather than a permeating influence (although many of the Timorese reform staff are themselves strongly Catholic). Although, Debbie did see religion as serving a useful purpose in transitioning Timorese schools from their traditionally authoritative atmosphere to a more democratic, child-centered one. During colonial times and the Indonesian occupation, she said,

Their behaviour was always controlled through fear, not through respect. Not real respect. So you need time to develop that stuff. [...] You need to make it [the classroom environment] somewhat punitive. Not violent, not physically violent. But you do need to do that because that’s the culture that we’re in and you can’t just do some totally new way. [...] Because if they [teachers] don’t keep things disciplined, they’re never going to be able to do this new curriculum. [...] And religion, like it or not, helps people keep things kind of tight.

Many reform staff referred to research studies to support their belief in the effectiveness of LCP. A number of international reform consultants spoke about LCP in universal and scientific terms, rather than culturally specific ones. Debbie acknowledged that rote-learning pedagogy might be appropriate in some cultures, particularly Asian ones, but that it was “not [a] natural” way for children to learn, whereas LCP was. International reform staff also conceived of pedagogies as sitting on an evolutionary timeline rather than in different cultural spaces. Yohan described international best practice as “an evolving science” and LCP as “progressive pedagogy”, while labelling local pedagogy in Timor-Leste as “old-style rote learning.” Indeed, behind international reform staff’s professional opinions of pedagogies lie their own experiences as students, often with pedagogies similar to the LCP now being promoted by the reform (18:39–19:50). Indeed, one international consultant acknowledged that Western reform staff had, as students, absorbed the logic of LCP as if by “osmosis”, making it *feel* natural. But, as scholars have pointed out, LCP does not come from a universal, timeless vacuum; it has a distinct cultural history and “assume[s] certain material conditions for teachers” (Vavrus and Bartlett 2012:637). This culturally, historically and materially specific package of practices must then interact with local conditions when LCP is transplanted to, and appropriated in, new contexts.

In interviews, many school actors identified LCP as a feature of the new curriculum, though their characterisations revealed the term’s “conceptual vagueness” (Lopes Cardozo 2012). These characterisations included that LCP reduces teachers’ workload – a perception that was often a reason for school actors’ support of the change. Another perception was that LCP substitutes ‘real learning’ for ‘play’ in the classroom – a perception that featured in criticisms of the method. Many teachers

recognised that LCP aims to increase student involvement in class, but this did not change their premise that teachers are the font of authoritative knowledge. Rather, it altered the mechanisms for sharing that knowledge, as found by Vavrus and Bartlett in their study of teachers' appropriations of LCP in Tanzania (2012:647). For example, I commonly heard call-and-response and yes/no questions in classrooms, whereby students repeat knowledge provided by the teacher or respond to a pre-determined prompt (Clip 7).

One international reform consultant said LCP "puts kids at the top of the agenda in school, which is just not the way that people view kids in Timor." Indeed, children themselves find the reform's pedagogy unfamiliar: having learned their place in the prevailing hierarchy, they are confused by new expectations of them. For example, Maria, following a lesson plan, asked volunteers to tell a short story. The two volunteers froze with embarrassment and barely managed to stutter a few words before their classmates howled them down with laughter. Maria slipped back into a more authoritative style in her frustration at making the activity work. After gentle coaxing did nothing, she commanded the boys, "Speak!" (Clip 4).

As with all aspects of the reform policy, not only actors' visions but also working environments shape their appropriation of reform policy. Overcrowding was a key reason that several school actors disagreed with, or outright rejected, the reform's policy of seating students in groups rather than rows (03:02–03:13). Several teachers said that group seating was problematic because it encouraged students to talk to their classmates rather than listen to the teacher (hence challenging the teacher's control and authority), and that overcrowding meant that some students inevitably sat with their backs to the teacher (Figure 8), a situation also noted by Shah and Lopes Cardozo (2016:10). One school leader found group seating so ineffective and problematic that she ordered her teachers to return to row seating, though one class I observed at that school did have group seating. All classrooms at Aimutin use group seating, while all classrooms I observed at the third school (with the highest teacher-to-student ratio) had row seating.

The changes the reform implies for the spatial and behavioural organisation of classrooms also relate to the social aesthetics (MacDougall 1999) of the classroom environment that school actors are accustomed to. Group seating both violates the seating arrangement that symbolises schooling and requires that teachers use a method that they have never seen embodied before, let alone embodied themselves. While the Curriculum Reform is producing a number of teacher training videos to provide visual demonstrations of LCP and other reform aspects, these media have not yet been widely distributed to schools, nor do many schools have the technology required to play them.



Clip 4: Student responses to pedagogical change



Clip 5: Religion and discipline



Clip 6: Violence and discipline



Clip 7: Call-and-response teaching

Certain communication practices were also problematic for the transmission of LCP. A number of reform staff acknowledged that training does not sufficiently explain the reform's pedagogical approach to teachers, for various reasons, including the quality, model and frequency of training – problems also noted by Shah and Lopes Cardozo (2016:8). In addition to concerns about the aptness of lesson plans in a predominantly oral culture (discussed above), some reform actors worried that the prescriptive plans would hinder teachers' pedagogical creativity, but ultimately thought they were a necessary compromise. An international consultant said:

I had been really against [the lesson plans] because it takes away teachers' freedom to do what they see would be most effective for the students. But then I realized, here, that was assuming teachers had a repertoire of different strategies to use in teaching. And here, the repertoire is singular. [...] And it's this lecture-and-listen, stand-at-the-chalkboard model. And so if you tell teachers to be creative, they don't do anything different; they just do that.

The school actors, however, did not express the same concern, despite the fact that many teachers were clearly not reading everything in the lesson-plan manuals.³¹ Those who commented on the lesson plans are generally in favour of them, because they are no longer expected to prepare their own lesson plans, as required by the previous curriculum. These different perspectives on the lesson plans highlight a key pedagogical difference in the school and reform visions: while reform staff value creativity and independent thinking, and hence reluctantly produce resources that may limit these qualities in teachers or students, school actors' more authoritative pedagogy can accommodate materials that provide strict instruction, albeit in methods that do not match their own vision. (Their understanding and implementation of these methods, however, is another matter.)

As in all components, there is a spectrum of visions on pedagogy. Some school actors embrace the reform's internationalisation of pedagogy, and some reform staff doubt its applicability in Timor-Leste. Maria tends more towards the reform vision, perhaps because of her experience with the reform team and her own theatrical personality, well-suited to the reform's play-based, experiential pedagogy. Maria said that the role of international consultants on the reform team was to "give us ideas from [overseas] about how to organize schools in Timor so we can also become advanced," ideas she said Timorese would not have reached on their own.

31. The Grade 1 teachers at Aimutin gathered in the staffroom everyday after class to prepare for the following day using the lesson-plan manuals. But it was clear that many other teachers were not doing such preparation and often appeared to be reading the lesson plan, when it was present, for the first time during my classroom observations. Other teachers, such as Mestre Rogério, did not seem to be using the lesson plans at all (19:53–21:02; 28:44–30:30).

However, the very fact that much of the reform's pedagogy is foreign-inspired is cause for concern for at least one international reform consultant:

The ideals of the curriculum are so far removed from the reality on-the-ground in the classroom currently that there's absolutely no way that those ideals are going to be met in the short term [...]. It is a shift not only in teaching but also in the way you view the world, and how do you change that? Can you change that? And do you want to change that?

These are pertinent questions. As found in other studies of pedagogical reform (e.g., Shah and Quinn 2014; Vavrus and Bartlett 2012; Ahn 2015), the reform's pedagogy is largely appropriated through the school vision of education, resulting in superficially altered versions of traditional methods. Constraints in working environments and inadequate communication also contribute to the resistance of some school actors, who see the reform policy as disconnected from the reality of their working environment (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2016:10). In the words of Principal Soares, "I think it's better we talk about quantity first, which doesn't mean we should forget quality. [...] But quality..." he cringed, "not yet."



*Figure 9: Panorama showing 41 students in a Grade 3 class lining up to pray before leaving school.
[video still composite]*

C O N C L U S I O N S



In light of the analysis of the reform and school visions of language, curriculum content, and pedagogy, I now return to my research question:

How do different visions of education, working environments, and communications media and practices shape the ways in which reform team and school actors appropriate education policy in the case of Timor-Leste's basic-education Curriculum Reform?

The use of concepts from the various anthropological fields and of both written and visual ethnographic methods provided the framework within to ask my research question and ultimately arrive at its answer.

The concept of visions of education was essential to defining the packages of beliefs and ideas about education through which actors interpret the Curriculum Reform. The complementary concepts of working environment and communications media and practices provided deeper and broader context to what shapes these visions and the receptions of the reform. The concept of appropriation draws on the anthropologies of education and development to understand the process through which the reform is filtered through actors' visions, working environments and communications media and practices. The use of development anthropology's conceptions of policy, including Mosse's concept of enrolment, was a useful tool for research in a context where education is seen as an explicitly development-focused endeavour. In Timor-Leste, the government and citizens look inwards to the needs, aspirations, and identity of the new nation, while reaching out to the international community for support, inspiration, and a place among fellow nations.

The simultaneous use of visual and written ethnographic methods allowed me to enrich the scope and nature of my research field, gaining an answer to my research question that can attend to these overlapping and multifaceted contexts. Visual ethnography – particularly the concept of social aesthetics – drew my attention to the rich material, sensory, and embodied elements of the working environments of reform and school actors, enriching my understanding of the backdrops to their visions of education and engagements with the reform. Researching with a camera maintained a focus on the present moment, albeit in contexts deeply imprinted with traces of the past. Written

ethnography gave me the space and abstraction necessary to attend to the discursive patterns of language and argument in the conscious and explicit visions of education of each actor group, providing a critical, sometimes historical, view of educational traditions, reform, and change.

Drawing on this conceptual framework and the ethnographic data produced through these methods, my key research finding is that school and reform actors' appropriations of the Curriculum Reform are, at this stage of implementation, greatly inconsistent. These inconsistencies are the result both of the actors' unequal access to resources and information about the reform, but also their divergent visions of education, which include not only explicit ideologies and beliefs but also the material, sensory and aesthetic contexts that shape their understand of how education should look and feel, as well as what content it should contain. Improving education and contributing to national development are vague goals that enrol diverse stakeholders in the Curriculum Reform. However, in practice, actors appropriate these goals and the reform policy on language, curriculum content, and pedagogy in different ways in their working practice, often producing unintended consequences.

For some, the Curriculum Reform represents a breath of fresh air in Timor-Leste's education system, a cause for celebration and hope. For others, it represents a destabilising challenge to the vision of education that has underpinned their own place within the education sector. Bridging the gaps between these visions of education – between looking inward and reaching out – is where the challenge lies for the Curriculum Reform as its implementation progresses.

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