

# **Gender Stereotypes in Story Textbooks for Primary School Students in Vietnam**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the gender stereotypes in story textbooks for primary school students in Vietnam before and after the textbook reform in 2002. The following research questions guided the research: How are females and males depicted in the story textbooks? Are their images stereotyped? Is there a significant change in the amount of gender stereotypes in the newly-renovated textbooks, compared to the previous ones? How stereotyped are the teachers? How do they react to the gender issues in the textbooks in their teaching?

The research was conducted in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. The data collection methods were qualitative, involving class observation, interviews with primary school students and teachers. The data analysis methods were also qualitative, including discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis.

The findings of the research indicate that both the old and the new versions of the story textbooks carry strong gender stereotypes. The textbook reform did not make any significant change in the amount of gender stereotypes in the story textbooks. Both the primary school teachers and students have stereotypical thinking. The teachers are not aware of the gender stereotypes in the textbooks and therefore do not criticize the stereotyped images of female and male characters depicted in the stories.

The research recommends constructing new concepts of femininity and masculinity in the Vietnamese context. Future research is also recommended to widen the sample pool, increase the number of teacher and student informants and include interviews with policies makers and textbook reformers.

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# 1. Chapter 1: Introduction

This research is a case study of gender stereotypes in textbooks for primary school children in Vietnam. At the time being, textbooks for school children in Vietnam are going through a chain of severe revision and reforms resulting in the introduction of new textbooks, including textbooks at primary level. The new sets of textbooks carry in themselves a new vision of teaching and studying, with a switch from teacher-centered curriculum to student-centered one. Together with these changes are the new teaching methods, new curriculum structures and new contents of the textbooks. Looking back at the ‘Vietnam: Gender Situation Analysis’ (Wells 2005)<sup>1</sup>, gender stereotypes in textbooks remain one of the three points for improvement in education. The question posed now is whether this breath of fresh innovations includes a change in gender stereotypes in the curriculum as well.

## 1.1 Objectives of the research

This research aims mainly at investigating whether there is an improvement in terms of gender stereotypes after the curriculum renovation in Vietnamese primary schools in 2002. The first objective is detecting the presence of gender stereotypes in the old and new textbooks through the occurrence of gender-related issues. On analyzing the situation of gender stereotypes in story textbooks, I would investigate details which enforce gender equality as well as those fostering discrimination against girls and women. The analysis of textbooks will, hopefully, identify the seeds of discrimination against Vietnamese girls and women. The second objective of the research is comparing the amount of gender stereotypes in the story textbooks before and after renovation. The result of this comparison will clarify whether an improvement in gender stereotypes has been made. Furthermore, the research can point out in which aspect of the textbooks changes have occurred and the intensity of those changes, if any. The last objective of this research is to investigate teachers’ attitude of gender issues relating to the studied textbooks. Since teachers are facilitators who directly talk, come into contact with students, manage the class and instruct students in acquiring

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Country-Gender-Assessments/cga-vie.pdf>

knowledge from textbooks, they can make even bigger impact than textbooks on the cognition and world vision of students. In the assumption that beliefs govern behaviours, I suppose what teachers think about gender roles may affect their treatment of their students, and their own behaviours as role models for students. In short, what they think about gender may play an important role in shaping students' beliefs about how men and women should be.

## **1.2 Scope of the research**

In this research, I choose only the story textbooks as the subject of analysis due to the fact that story textbooks reflect intensively cultural and social norms including those about genders. When students read or hear a story, they comprehend that the good characters are the models for them to learn from and the bad characters depict undesirable behaviors. In this manner, stories may lead students to categorize people if similar patterns occur repeatedly in the stories. Story telling as a school subject therefore is a subtle form of teaching student about moral values and desirable social manners. Additionally, stories are often appealing to young children and so might be read more often, hence leaving a deeper imprint on them.

I choose to focus on primary school level because Vietnamese primary school children have an age range from 6 to 10 years old. According to Kohlberg's stages of gender development (Kohlberg 1966), at the age around 6 and 7, which is approximately the start of school age for Vietnamese children, children reach the stage of 'gender consistency', i.e. "children have a full appreciation of the permanence of gender over time and across situations" (Banerjee 2005, p. 159). This means that from this age, the cognition of children about their own sex are fixed. Boys know that they will grow up to be men and girls to be women, and that their sexes generally can not be changed. Along with this consistency comes the more flexible attitude in cognition about the attributes of other people. Children start to rely more on input data about people's personalities to make prediction about them rather than relying merely on knowledge about their sex. This phase can be seen as a chance to introduce non-stereotyped female and male images as well as unconventional behaviours. According to Zemore, Fiske and Kim (2000), early intervention in the development of gender stereotypes can save effort in reducing their negative impacts later in life of children. Therefore, it is

advisable to start action when children are young. This is the reason for my choice of primary level.

### 1.3 Research questions

To fulfill the aim of my research, I would need to answer the following questions:

- How are females and males depicted in the story textbooks? Are their images stereotyped?
- Is there a significant change in the amount of gender stereotypes in the newly-renovated textbooks, compared to the previous ones?
- How stereotyped are the teachers? How do they react to the gender issues in the textbooks in their teaching?

The first research question aims at the depiction of females and males in the textbooks. While some argue that textbooks should reflect reality, which may show only a small number of women entering ‘male’s domains’, I agree with scholars who see textbooks as an educational tool, an agent of change which offers children a wide variety of options that they can choose for themselves, and let them not be imposed by the real world’s percentages. While answering this question, I would pay special attention to unconventional role models of men and women in the textbooks.

The second question requires a comparison of the amount of gender stereotypes between the old and new textbooks. Given the current context that all nations are fighting for a world free of sexism and Vietnam has strong aspiration of eliminating gender inequality, more unconventional gender patterns are expected to be present in the new textbooks.

The third questions are on the basis that what actually happens in the classroom (i.e. actual teaching and learning routines) makes an integral part of the curriculum. A teacher with sexist attitudes can turn the most neutral text into a sexist one and vice versa. Therefore, besides studying the textbooks – the intended curriculum, it is also necessary to observe the actual teaching and learning – the achieved curriculum.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction with the objectives of my research and the research questions to which I seek answers. Chapter 2 provides the background knowledge about Vietnam and how the Asian culture affects the gender relationship. In this chapter, I would also mention Vietnam's commitments to eliminate gender discrimination and brief knowledge about the textbook reform. Chapter 3 consists of two parts. The first part is the theoretical framework and the second one is the literature review. The theoretical framework is the scientific basis of my research which includes theories about gender development in children, stereotypes and prejudice, gender in discourse, and curriculum. The literature review is the summary and brief discussion of works about gender stereotypes in textbooks which I have read. The focus of this part is an UNESCO publication by Andrée Michel (1986). In chapter 4, I present data collection (interviewing and observation) and analysing methods (content and discourse analysis). Chapter 5 is about the findings of my research and in chapter 6, I discuss how these findings answer the research questions. Chapter 7 is the conclusion of my research and implications for future research.

## **2. Chapter 2: Background information about Vietnam**

### **2.1 Patriarchal tradition and Confucian influence in Asian culture**

Although Confucianism is rooted in China, its influence has pervaded far beyond the Chinese borders, into many countries in Asia, including Vietnam. The Confucius's teaching about women's roles and status in my research is cited from a Korean author, Lee Sang Wha (2005). This author writes about Confucian traditions from an East Asian viewpoint providing "insider" opinions of this tradition, as contrasting to the Western viewpoint of Confucianism. Even though Lee Sang Wha discusses Confucian teaching in relation to Korean situation, the core spirit of this doctrine remains similar to that in Vietnam as well as in other Asian countries.

According to Lee, Confucianism emphasizes strictly the distinction between the public and the private spheres, locating men's activities in the public sphere and women's in the private sphere. Women therefore were captive as domestic laborers. This gender role allocation entails a long range of restrictions on the part of the women. Girls' training prepared them to fulfill the tasks of married women and caring for the needs of their future families. Exemplary women were praised not for their individuality but for their perfection in conforming to such stereotypical roles. Confucianism defines a woman's life as consisting of three stages: a daughter, a wife, and lastly a mother. It is apparent that a woman was defined by her relation to others at different periods in her lifetime but never by her own identity as an individual. A woman of true Confucian virtue, thus, never remarries after the death of her husband. Furthermore, throughout her life, a woman had to conform to the virtue of obedience to male supremacy, in particular: obedience to the father (as a daughter), to the husband (as a wife) and to the eldest son (as a mother). Such oppression upon women was particularly severe when they got married and left her natal family, since from then on she became a stranger to her natal family and they could no longer protect her. For her own survival, she had to comply to the rules of her husband's family, most importantly by producing sons. A woman gained her position within her husband's family as she gave birth

to boy children, and when she became a senior lady in the household and mother-in-law of her son's wife, she had establish an extent of power, especially over this new daughter-in-law. This explains why having a son was, and still is more valuable to a mother than having a daughter. A son was the sole vehicle for a woman to a higher level of power. This patriarchal mechanism of power ensures that a woman's power did not pose a threat to the patriarchal system. On the contrary, by appreciating sons over daughters, a mother strengthens the patriarchal rules for her own benefit. Lee concludes that

This is why, despite the existence of powerful women, the patriarchal system was not undermined or modified to improve the situation of women, ... Under this system, it is far easier for women to perceive other women as a threat to their livelihood and power than as allies in fighting against the system (Lee 2005, p.74).

## **2.2 Vietnamese feminism in the history**

### **2.2.1 Women's rights and resistance movements in feudal time**

Looking at the history of Vietnam, one recognizes that Vietnamese women have not always conformed to the docile roles defined by Confucianism. In fact, in most nationalist uprisings in Vietnamese history from the feudal time to recent resistance revolutions, women played an important part and sometimes were even the leaders. During the Le dynasty (from 15th to 18th century), the Vietnamese law gave women equal inheritance rights, property and land ownership. Some women rights were also secured by the law, including the right to divorce for faults on the husband's part (Jayawardena 1986). Unfortunately, when the Nguyen dynasty came to the throne in 1802, these progressive women's rights were withdrawn, and the national law was switched back to the patriarchal rules (Jayawardena 1986).

### **2.2.2 Feminist poetry in feudal time**

Political forces were crushed, yet voices opposing the Confucian ideology were strongly alive in poetry. The most famous work was *The tale of Kieu* - an epic poem about the tragic life of a talented woman. Nguyen Du – the male author of this work – wrote this poem at the beginning of 1800s. This poem was considered the most famous Vietnamese masterpiece, both for its literary value and the author's sympathy for women's suffering, particularly a non-Confucian approach to sexuality. Another famous and perhaps one of the earliest

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Vietnamese feminist poets was Ho Xuan Huong, a female writer living at the end of 18th century. Her poems challenged Confucian patriarchy, praising free love, unmarried mothers, calling for equality of the sexes, and thus they were forbidden. Nevertheless, her poems were widely popular, enjoyed and highly appreciated by the masses (Bergman 1975 in Jayawardena 1986).

### **2.2.3 Women's education and publication in the French colonialism**

Education for women, in the early periods, mostly focused on teaching about the roles of housewives and caring for the family, conforming entirely to Confucian norms. However, since the country was colonized by the French in 1859, there were indeed some intellectual voices encouraging women to engage into the nationalist movements, therefore calling for the need of educating women, criticizing the traditional attitudes towards women and urging them to take action. The late 1920s saw an upsurge of women associations and publications. As connections between Vietnam and foreign countries grew, knowledge about women's movements in Western countries exercised an impact on women's awareness of self-emancipation. Women associations and book authors encouraged women to be independence, develop occupational skill and join the national struggle for independence. Yet, according to Marr (1981), voices for women's equal rights were significantly powerful in the 1929 when Tran Thi Nhu Man – the female editor of the 'Women's Review' claimed that the Confucian "three submissions" and "four virtues" as well as other unequal treatments of women should be tossed out of the window. In her analysis of women oppression, she acknowledged that political regimes raised women's consciousness as they turned women into factory workers. She called for "socialising the family" and stated that "in contemporary Vietnamese social conditions, women must live not only for the family, but also for herself and for society" (Marr 1981).

However, the French colonialists later on suppressed all these demanding voices and women's movements. In fact, the images of new, liberated women were not always received positively. There was warning of losing traditional values, accusing women of abandoning their family, criticizing their competition with men in gambling, extra-marital sex and extravagance (Marr 1981). It was understandable that in a male-dominated society, any initial feminist protest would meet fierce condemnation in the name of preservation of traditional values. As long as the patriarchal system is still in rule, women are expected to

remain in their submissive roles, especially when protesting voices come from only a number of elite individuals and not yet from the core of the women masses.

#### **2.2.4 Women's movements in the Communist time**

When the communist party in Vietnam was founded in 1930, equality between men and women was included in its program to mobilize and engage women into the political and nationalist struggle for independence. Women's rights were demanded through the Women's Union which asked for "reduced rents, equal pay, two months' paid maternity leave, an end to dangerous work for women, and an end to forced marriage, polygamy and the practice of holding women in contempt" (Bergman 1975, p 52). The party along with its development fostered the growth of women movement and promoted women's rights. Women's liberation was seen as connected to the struggle of the working masses. In all the stages of the communist and nationalist revolution, women were active participants and their contributions played an essential role in the victory of the communist party in Vietnam. The achieved gender equality generally was a significant leap compared to the feudal time, still it has not reached to the point of an adequate presentation of women in the economic and political structure (Jayawardena 1986).

During the Vietnam war (1954 - 1975), by taking up all the production tasks to support men in the front, Vietnamese women entered all the male domains and participate actively even in heavy industries and jobs requiring physical force. After the war, women were encourage to continue contributing to the workforce, but at the same time they are expected to carry on the "noble" role of wives and mothers at home. Men are supposed to share housework but as Fahey (1998) describes, these efforts remain mostly at ideological level. Together with the reformed economic policy (which is introduced in 1986) is the withdrawal of social services including subsidized childcare, healthcare, school fee, etc. The roles of providing those services once again fall on the back of women and many of them have to retreat to the housewife positions or into informal and private sphere. The party introduced reforms to enhance gender equality but mostly in legislation; how such laws are implemented remains ambiguous. The laws are there to protect women's rights theoretically but as a matter of fact, women's everyday life is governed by unwritten laws in Vietnam (Fahey 1998).



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### **2.2.5 Women's images in the market economy**

After the economic reform (*doi moi*) was introduced to Vietnam in 1986, the market mechanism has brought along with it a surge of commercialization, including women's images. Women become both the target consumers of household commodity (as they are still expected to do the cooking, cleaning, shopping, especially in family celebrations), and the tools to sell those products. The female body and smile are widely used as Vietnam's advertisement symbol of attractiveness. Under the propaganda of the media, urban and well-off women are increasingly conscious of fashion and their body shape; which is a contrast to women in rural areas who spend almost nothing on cosmetics and clothing for themselves (Fahey 1998). The disparity between women in cities and countryside is apparently growing.

In short, although heavily influenced by Confucian and patriarchal rules, Vietnamese culture is also under the influence of the Cham culture (which was matrilineal). Consequently, Confucian ideology was to some extent less severe in Vietnam. However, both men and women generally (especially in the rural areas) are still heavily indoctrinated by Confucianism, sometimes as much as they believe submissive norms are women's nature (Marr 1981).

## **2.3 Vietnam current gender issues – A panorama picture of women's disadvantaged situations**

The Vietnam Gender Situation Analysis 2005 conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has labeled Vietnam 'a leader in the Asia-Pacific region' in terms of gender equality indicators. In terms of Gender Development Index (GDI), Wells (2005) estimates that Vietnam is probably in the top third among all 28 East Asia and Pacific countries. However, beside those achievements, there remain problems to be solved and new risks emerging along with the economic and social changes taking place in Vietnam. Below I would briefly mention the gender drawbacks in major aspects of Vietnamese society.

### **2.3.1 Healthcare**

Although from 2002, 77% of women all over the country have access to healthcare, ethnic minority women still face reproductive hazards (ADB 2005). The majority of minority

women give birth at home without the assistance of any trained health worker. This practice of child bearing results in a much higher rate of child and maternal mortality for minority women compared to majority women (World Bank 2006<sup>2</sup>).

Also, despite the fact that Vietnamese women have much knowledge about methods of contraception, they do not have the power to negotiate the decision of contraception. Men are often the one to make decisions regarding contraceptive use (Wells 2005). Not having the control of contraceptive decisions, Vietnamese women are prone to another health hazard – abortion. The abortion rate in Vietnam is very high, perhaps among the highest in Asia. The consequences are that around 50% of women reported to experience health problem after having an abortion, and post-abortion complications is responsible for around 12% of maternal deaths (ADB 2005).

Lacking the power to negotiate safe sex , women in Vietnam run the risk of being transmitted HIV from their partners. It is shocking to learn that 63% of men aware of their HIV infection still **NOT** use condom while having sex with their wives (Le Dang Ha et al 2000). Besides, the burden of caring for HIV infected family members or friends are taken by women without recognition in the national policy (UN Gender Briefing Kit 2007<sup>3</sup>).

### **2.3.2 Employment**

Nowadays, more women are working in agriculture than men. For ethnic women, agriculture is by far their major work section with 87% involved. Despite their heavy participation, women in general and ethnic women in particular, are not likely to have the tenure over the land either for residential or agricultural purposes due to the issuing of land titles with only the name of men on them (World Bank 2006).

The percentage of men with wage employment almost doubles that of women. Also women occupy mainly in informal section, doing low skilled jobs and therefore receive lower pay. In occupations with technical nature which often offer higher degree of decision-making

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<sup>2</sup> See [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2007/01/24/000310607\\_20070124141846/Rendered/PDF/384450ENGLISH0VN0Gender01PUBLIC1.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2007/01/24/000310607_20070124141846/Rendered/PDF/384450ENGLISH0VN0Gender01PUBLIC1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.unaids.org.vn/resource/topic/gender/gbk02e42-48.pdf>

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power and better paid, women are far under-represented. Women in both rural and urban areas, receive less skill training, which lower their capability to compete with men in the job market. In Vietnam, discrimination against women in recruitment (i.e. some vacancies are available for males only) is also present and seen as acceptable (World Bank 2006).

### **2.3.3 Politics and decision-making**

Although in the world Vietnam rank number 18<sup>th</sup> in term of proportion of female parliamentarians, women are present well only in committees for ‘soft’ political issues. In strategic committees such as budget and economic, women account for only 13% and 0% in defense and security (World Bank 2006). The number of women in leadership positions is very modest at the central level in 2002-2007. At the local and grass root level, women’s voice are not likely to be presented in the family’s decision or the village’s meeting. (ADB 2005).

### **2.3.4 Cultural attitudes and social matters**

Many men and women show strong preference for son to daughters and intend to continue childbirth until the birth of a son. When Vietnam excised the ‘two children’ policy for each household, female foeticide becomes a way to ensure the birth of a son (ADB 2005).

While taking up the task of contributing to the household income, women are still in charge of the traditional role of domestic care-takers. While women spend an equal amount of time on generating income for the household, men do not share housework equally. Vietnamese policy only grants maternal leave for mothers and not for fathers. Therefore, taking care for children or the elders and the sick is widely assumed to be done by women only.

Violent behaviors of men – who are considered heads of family – are seen as ‘a normal prerogative’ and ‘ways to educate their wife and children’. According to Vu et al (1999), by this time Vietnam does not have any specific law prohibiting domestic violence or rape in marriage. Many women endure violence in silence partly because of lack of knowledge about their rights and partly of the lack of public condemnation of this ‘family’s private issue’ (Wright 2000).

Another form of violence against Vietnamese women is women trafficking both within and out of the country for prostitution (ADB 2005). The victims are exposed to further violence in the form of physical abuse, unwanted pregnancy, forced labor and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. Sex trafficking is strongly condemned by the Vietnamese government and measures has been taken to combat this problem.

### **2.3.5 Summary**

The above panorama picture of gender situation in Vietnam shows clearly that there are disparity between women in rural and urban areas, and that inequality between men and women still persist although in a finer cover. Actions for the enhancement of gender situation thus are still very much in need in Vietnam. The remedy for lessening gender drawback in the Vietnamese society may lie in education. But the Vietnamese education system may carry in itself some gender drawbacks despite of its commitments to protect women's right in the international arena.

## **2.4 Vietnam's international commitments on gender equality**

### **2.4.1 Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)**

CEDAW<sup>4</sup> was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations and is considered an international bill of rights for women. Vietnam has become a party to the Convention since 1982 with the date of signature on 29 July 1980. Since then Vietnam has committed to the international community in the fight against gender inequality. The Convention serves as the basis for achieving human rights and equality for women on a global scale. It highlights the importance of women's access to politics, education, healthcare and employment. It also points out the heavy impacts of culture and tradition in shaping gender roles and family relations. The Convention is therefore a major step in uniting countries in the world in the struggle for gender equality and women's rights.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

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## 2.4.2 Education for all

The World Conference on Education for All<sup>5</sup> was held in Jomtien, Thailand with the commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Ten years later, the community met again in Dakar, Senegal with 6 key education goals to be fulfilled by 2015. The goal number 5 among these 6 goals is to achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015. Gender issues in education surely deserve much attention and reforming effort as education can not truly be for all when girls are lagging behind (UNESCO 2007).

Right in 1990, Vietnam has signed the “World Declaration on Education for All” and the “Plan of Action to meet basic learning needs”. In October 1992, the National Conference on Education for All has set up educational objectives to be achieved by the year 2000 (EFA 2000<sup>6</sup>). Whether those objectives can be achieved within the due date as for Vietnam or for the international community remains controversial. However, it is obvious that Vietnam has shown strong willingness and commitment to international movements, especially in terms of gender goals. Reformative changes are expected to be found widely in the society, especially in the formal uniform national curriculum as the deadline approaches.

## 2.5 The National Curriculum for Basic Education in Vietnam

The National Curriculum was developed and piloted from 1996 to 2000. From school year 2002, the new curriculum for basic education has been implemented and in use throughout the country. I cite in this research the report about this curriculum by Do Dinh Hoan<sup>7</sup>. In his report, he included brief background on the National Curriculum, the new structures and learning content, how the new curriculum is implemented and the evaluation of the

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<sup>5</sup> See [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=47044&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=47044&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/vietnam/rapport\\_1.html](http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/vietnam/rapport_1.html)

<sup>7</sup> For the full version of the document “National Curriculum for Basic Education in Vietnam”, see <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/curriculum/Asia%20Networkpdf/VIETNAM.pdf>

curriculum reform. As the curriculum reform embraces in itself changes in various aspects, the major points I would focus on are the textbooks and the teaching methods.

The philosophies underlying the new curriculum are training the labour force to need of Vietnam's industrialization and modernization. The curriculum first and foremost focuses on children, inspiring their curiosity for knowledge and equip them with the skills of self-learning. The national curriculum should prepare for the new generations to "integrate in the community and compete in the international market" (Do, p.5). With the above philosophies, the objectives of education are specified in the report as

forming and fostering the personalty, quality and ability of a citizen; training working people who are holistically developed, faithful to the ideal of a national independence and the building of a just and civilized society, who are moral and healthy, knowledgeable, and possess a sense of being a member of the community, who are dynamic and creative and know how to preserve and promote the cultural values of the nation, and accept the essence of the cultural tradition of mankind, who have the sense of discipline in an organized manner so as to meet the requirements for building and defending the fatherland (Do, p.6)

As stated in Article 5 in the Education Act (1998) about the content and methods of education,

1. The content of education should be basic, practical, modernized, all-sided, appropriate to the psychological development of the learner, in order to meet the requirements of training people – the human factor, which serves the socioeconomic development and scientific and technological advance.

2. The methods of education should help learners learn creative thinking and the will to progress, and develop the ability for self-learning and self-study. (Do, p. 3)

In terms of primary education in particular, Article 24 describes the requirements of education content and teaching methodology

Primary education should enable pupils to have the basic and necessary understanding about nature, society and people; to obtain basic skills in listening, reading, speaking, writing and calculation; to acquire habits of maintaining health and hygiene; to have basic knowledge of music and the fine arts. (Do, p.4)

Textbooks as well as other teaching materials for the new curriculum was approved by councils established and managed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Members of these councils include a number of experienced teachers (at least one fourth of those are currently teaching in schools), educational managers and scientists of related areas. The agency responsible for the research and development of the new curriculum is the

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Centre for Curriculum Development and Methodology of General Education under the National Institute for Educational Science (NIES). Besides, there is a Board for Compiling Curriculum which consists of MOET experts of subjects, university and excellent teachers of general education. In the process of building the curriculum, comments and evaluation are welcomed from teachers, parents, administrators and all those who are concerned.

One strong point of the new curriculum is the flexibility to fit in each region conditions and pupils' level of development. Particularly, 15% of the curriculum is for local content (local history, geography, traditions and culture). The curriculum is tailored with room for gifted pupils, pupils in hard-to-reach areas, and handicapped pupils. For ethnic pupils who have not master Vietnamese, there is a bilingual program in ethnic language and Vietnamese. The textbooks is the sole, main teaching material in schools; they are unified all over the country and is under the control of MOET. Unfortunately, they are distributed free of charge only to pupils in especially inaccessible areas.

Along with the introduction of the new curriculum and textbooks, teachers have to adjust their teaching to fit with the new methodology. In-service training is compulsory (with financial support) and takes place for 45 days in summer vacation annually. As stated in the report, improvement in teaching methodology is one of the main foci of the new curriculum. The new teaching methods are toward forming self-learning skills for pupils, developing pupils' individual abilities, ensuring pupils' involvement in learning (namely student-centered approach), organizing learning in groups, individual, whole class, out of class activities, and increasing the use of learning/teaching aids.

Although the new curriculum covers all the subjects in primary school and not only the story textbooks, it is obvious that changes are expected in both the content of this textbook and the teaching in classroom. Viewing the National Curriculum from a gender perspective, I recognize that gender equality is not mentioned as component of either objectives or content of the curriculum, there is no gender perspective emphasized in the curriculum and there is no indication about the female percentages in the councils who compose and approve the curriculum. While the new teaching methodology is bound to pay attention to individuality of the pupils, no gender difference was acknowledged for either female students or teachers. The fact that females are present in all the vulnerable student groups (i.e. religious – the National Curriculum does not welcome religion in schools and any national educational

institutions, special needs, ethnic, poor, remote and inaccessible groups), each with their own social constraints which may keep them lagging behind same-group males are not given any attention. The cost for textbooks plus other study equipments entails the fact that sending children to school is still a hard decision for poor families and keeping girls at home continues to be a likely choice. The report also includes some comments of the curriculum and analysis of its strengths and weaknesses but among those weaknesses, gender issues are not mentioned.

In all, while the new curriculum is meant to be a tool to better fulfill the objectives of Education for All, gender equality seems to have not been given due attention. It is admitted in the report that the new curriculum is not without drawback and can be further improved in the future, it is hoped that the gender voice will be presented in the textbook as echoed from the announced commitments in the international arena.

## **2.6 Gender drawbacks in current Vietnamese education**

The two main issues that the Vietnam Country Gender Assessment (World Bank 2006) addresses to consider are: access to education for females from ethnic minorities and gender stereotypes in textbooks.

As stated in the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth 2003, “an alarming 19% of young women from ethnic minorities have never attended school.”(ADB 2005, p.31) Ethnic minority women in general are lagging behind compared to majority women and also minority men. They have a much lower literacy rate (74%) than that of the King majority (93%) (ADB 2005, p.30). When women have poor education, they certainly have less chances to earn decent incomes. The situation can be even worse as education for the mothers has a close connection not only with employment but also the quality of healthcare they can provide to their family and children, hence affecting child nutrition and child mortality (ADB 2005). It is rather obvious that if the education – poverty cycle is not broken, the education and living standard gap among ethnic minorities and the majority will continue to grow bigger, especially for those ethnic women who have already been living in some of the poorest regions in the country and are deprived of their educational rights.



For those who have access to education, they face the stereotypes present in school books. It is rather obvious that attitude - which shapes the way people think - can play a significant role in their behaviors. Unfortunately, schoolbooks continue to perpetuate the gender stereotypes about the roles of men and women, posing difficulties in changing attitudes for the young generation. Take for instance a Review of Citizen Education Textbook of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, female characters appear 5 times in 20 case studies and stories while male characters 11 times and neutral terms 4 times. Also, most of the females characters appear in negative or biased situations while males characters appear in positive ones (World Bank 2006, p.28). The gender patterns of males and females in the above textbook are apparently not realistic and pose false images about women and men. Such textbooks transfer to students the hidden message that women are at a lower position and of less value than men.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this chapter I have briefly mentioned the content of Confucius's teaching on women's roles, the development of Vietnamese women's movements from feudal time to the present years, and a panorama picture of gender current situation in Vietnam. Although Vietnamese feminist spirit has always been alive along the country's history, and Vietnam in general has attained significant achievements in closing the gender gap, much work still need to be done until equality can be reached. Vietnamese government has strong international commitments in the fight against gender inequality, however, as shown in the new National Curriculum, gender parity was not high in the agenda. In the next chapter, I would focus on the theoretical aspects of gender stereotypes, and review how gender stereotypes have been tackled in textbooks and children's literature.

## **3. Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **3.1 Theories about children's gender development**

#### **3.1.1 Timeline of gender development in children**

In this part, I only present a general picture of how much gender-typed children are at different stages in their childhood and when changes in the amount of gender-typing take place. Berk (2003) indicated that at 12 months old, both boys and girls show little difference in their preference for toys, but starting at 18 months old, their interest in gendered toys can be detected. Golombok and Fivush (1994) claim that children from 3 to 6 years old hold stronger gender stereotypes than adults, with the peak of rigidity at age 5, and starting to become more flexible from age 7. Not only that young children believe the sex stereotypes to be true, they use this knowledge of gender as the sole resource in making inferences about other individuals (Golombok and Fivush 1994, Berk 2003). Although elementary school marks the period in which both sexes develop a more flexible view of what females and males can do, they also figure out which subjects are "masculine" and which are "feminine". This academic stereotype lead children to have preference and sense of competence at different subjects. An example is that girls adopt the belief that boys are better at maths, and so are smarter than girls.

Looking at this time line with a more analytical view, Kohlberg (1966) proposes that preschool children go through 3 stages before they reach gender constancy. The first stage is gender labeling, in which children can label correctly the sex of themselves and others, but assume that one's gender may change in the future. The second stage is gender stability, in which children understand that one's gender is permanent, but they believe a switch in hairstyle, dressing, behaviours can turn people from one sex into another. The last stage is gender consistency in which children come to understand that one's gender will not change even if they dress or behave in "cross-gender" ways.

Berk (2003) acknowledges that stepping into middle childhood, as stated previously, children's gender stereotypes become more flexible, especially for girls. While boys still hold on to the "masculine" models, girls engage more in both "feminine" and "masculine" activities. The reason is perhaps both sexes recognize the more prestige attached to the "masculine" norms. After all, people are much more tolerant to a girl with "boyish" behaviors than a "girlish" boy.

In consensus with various authors, Berk (2003) remarks a period of gender intensification occurring during adolescence. This phenomenon happens to both sexes but stronger for girls who deviate more from gender stereotypes during their middle childhood. The forces drawing children back to traditional norms include the start of puberty, parental influences and dating with member of the opposite sex. Puberty introduces changes in children's bodies, causing them to have a stronger sense of being females and males. Together with these new signals, parents seem to encourage their children to conform to gender norms at a greater extent than before. And lastly, children believe that to be a closer imitation to the typical models of their gender, they become more attractive to the other sex.

So far we see that gender typing is not a static state. It is constantly changing in accordance with children's age, physical and psychological developments, their surrounding environment and various social influences. Gender stereotypes, therefore, is constructed and learnt, not totally a biological heredity. It also means that there are room for improving the situation and reducing stereotypes, if we just know how to do it.

### **3.1.2 Approaches to gender development**

There are three major approaches about the development of gender in children. The first one is the psychoanalytic perspectives proposed by Sigmund Freud (1925). The second one is the social learning processes developed by Bandura (1969, 1986) and Mischel (1970). The third one is the cognitive processes. The cognitive processes contain 3 theories: social cognitive theory, cognitive developmental theory and gender schema theory (Banerjee 2005). In this research I choose to mention only the gender schema theory as this theory somehow carries the ideas of both the social learning processes and cognitive developmental processes.

The gender schema theory, proposed by Martin and Halverson (1981) describes two key schemas which guide the process of gender information and experiences. The first one is the

‘in-group-out-group’ schema which “includes a broad categorization of attributes, activities and objects as either for boys or for girls” (Banerjee 2005, p.163). In other words, this schema presents to children what are supposed to be suitable for boys and girls, with the notions of ‘in-group’ (boy things are for boys; girl things are for girls) and ‘out-group’ (girl things for boys and vice versa). The second schema is the ‘own-sex’ schema which “involves more detailed information about those behaviours, traits, and objects that are considered to be characteristic of the child’s in-group” (Banerjee 2005, p.163) As mentioned previously in this paper about Kohlberg’s stages of gender development, when a child reaches the stage when she/he labels himself/herself as a boy or a girl (i.e. gender consistency), he/she starts to be more interested and learn more about their in-group toys or activities. The distinguishing point of the gender schema theory is an emphasis in the self-regulation ability of children. In this theory, children not just passively immitate from the surrounding models but use their cognition actively to make choices basing on their gender schema.

### **3.1.3 Influential factors on gender development**

In this research, I would not attempt to answer the question how much males and females are really different from each other. Authors like Berk (2003) and Berns (1994) both agree that females and males are more similar than different in their development potentials and sociability. The amount of gender stereotypes each individual have differs from that of others, and even between different periods in their life. I suppose there is nothing like ”the real concrete difference” that females and males are destined to have. By saying so, I do not mean female and male should be exactly similar (or androgyny as the term is). The amount of gender stereotypes an individual have is the result of a mixture of different impacts. Each of those powerful forces enters and vary in people’s life at different points, and in the meanwhile, other new influences keep adding on.

The majors forces shaping gender-typing are: chromosomes (XX or XY) that decide the gender of the foetus, hormones, parents, siblings, experiences gained from the surrounding culture and community, peers and teachers. Although each factors can have intense impact in shaping gender stereotypes, I only mention the factor that captures the focus of this research, the teachers and teaching-related issues.

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Schools may promote sex-typing if they divide the curriculum into boys' activities and girls' activities (Marland 1983, Basow 1992). The school itself is also an environment in which children can learn about gender-role typing by simply observing what happens around them. They can see that most of teachers especially for young classes are females, while most of the administrators are males (Berk 2003). Texts in school, which comprise a major part of the curriculum, is detected to carry "various forms of bias – women being invisible, female roles being stereotyped, the imbalance of male and female representation, the unrealistic portrayal of equality and language" (Bern 1994, p. 426).

The way the teacher and school latently support gender-typing is known as "the hidden curriculum". In fact, primary school teachers tend to promote "feminine" traits rather than "masculine" ones due to disciplinary issues (Fagot 1985a, Oettingen 1985). These scholars call this the "feminine bias" and claim that it causes discomfort for the boys to be kept obedient, and docile but also has destructive effects on self-esteem and confidence in girls who conform too readily. Teachers in general expect misbehaviours in boys more than in girls, but they also expect boys to be more academically able than girls. In general, boys receive more attention from teachers than girls do (Golombok and Fivush 1994). Teachers can exercise sex segregation by teaming up the boys and girls separately in doing some tasks, in which boys' tasks often involve more physical strength or mechanical skills (Berns 1994). It is not yet proven if primary school boys are actually fitter than girls, but definitely the message is clear: there are things males can do that females can't!

## **3.2 Theories about gender stereotypes**

### **3.2.1 Gender stereotypes – concepts and definitions**

Berk (2003) defines gender stereotype as "widely held beliefs about characteristics deemed appropriate for males and females." (Berk 2003, p. 520). For her, gender roles are "the reflection of these stereotypes in everyday behavior." (Berk 2003, p.520) Berns (1994) agrees with the concept of gender role as "a constellation of qualities an individual understands to characterize males and females in his or her culture." (Block 1973, p.512). Golombok and Fivush (1994) have a similar idea of this concept "gender role includes the behaviors and

attitudes considered appropriate for males or females in a particular culture.” (Golombok and Fivush 1994, p.3).

According to Leyens, Yzerbyt and Schadron (1994) the term stereotype is the combination of two Greek words *stereos* and *típos* which means rigid and trace. The meaning of the term stereotype nowadays is in fact not far from that. In psychology and social science, each scholar proposes their own definitions of stereotype, but perhaps the most famous one is made by Walter Lippmann (1922). This author regards stereotypes as ‘pictures in our heads’. According to him, people create representative of reality in their minds, and thus they respond to those representatives and not to objective reality. For him, the reason for such quasi-environment is that “the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting to direct acquaintance. ... To traverse the world men must have maps of the world” (Lippmann 1922, p.10-11). But what if this map is erroneous? A wrong map will result in a distorted picture of the world, leading people to wrong decisions during their journey. The same situation can be with stereotypes. But are stereotypes the erroneous map? To some scholars, the answer is yes. Stroebe & Insko (1989) mentioned stereotype as rigid, oversimplified or biased perception about some social groups (Stroebe & Insko 1989). Bar-Tal (1989) has a negative but somewhat milder definition “it is possible to characterize stereotypes as frozen contents of knowledge.” (Bar-Tal 1989, p.227). Lippmann (1922) himself acknowledges that “stereotypes were products of faulty thought processes that led to largely incorrect beliefs.” (Dovidio et al. 1996, p.279) Other scholars see stereotype in a more neutral aspect “A stereotype is the perception that most members of a category share some attribute.” (Brown 1995, p.116); or “stereotypes are shared beliefs about person attributes, usually personality traits but often also behaviours of a group of people.” (Leyens, Yzerbyt and Schadron 1994, p.3)

### **3.2.2 Content of gender stereotypes**

The above definitions have sketched a rough picture of what stereotype is. But stereotypes are not merely perceptions, beliefs or contents of knowledge. In their definition, Mackie et al. (1996) include as contents of stereotype

not only beliefs about general properties but also knowledge of physical features, attitudes, behaviours, roles, or preferences thought to be typical of the group; specific exemplar-based knowledge gained from personal experiences and interactions; knowledge and beliefs

acquired secondhand from others or from media presentations; and expectancies about likely future behaviours, outcomes, and so forth. (Mackie et al. 1996, p.43)

There is consensus among scholars that gender stereotypes involves not only personality traits but also a variety of aspects such as physical characteristics, occupations, activities or behaviors, social relations, attitudes and interests (Berk 2003, Golombok and Fivush 1994). Golombok and Fivush (1994) add a crucial point that these different aspects of gender stereotypes are interrelated, i.e. if a person is female, she is supposed to have certain personalities (gentle, caring, sensitive), certain physical characteristics (soft, graceful), and hold certain occupation (elementary school teacher, air hostess).

The various forms of stereotypes as stated in the above definition are clues guiding us to where stereotypes can be detected.

### **3.2.3 Classification of stereotypes**

Ashmore and Del Boca (1979) divide stereotypes into two types: cultural stereotypes and individual stereotypes. According to them, "cultural stereotypes represent a communitywide, consensual set of beliefs" whereas "individual stereotypes are a set of associations held by an individual about a social group." (Dovidio et al.1996, p.280). In this particular research, I am concerned mostly about the cultural stereotypes, as the stereotypes presented in the textbooks are more likely the beliefs agreed on by the Vietnamese community, rather than the personal beliefs of the textbook authors.

### **3.2.4 Functions of stereotypes**

Continuing with the metaphor that stereotypes resemble maps of the world to a traveller, the reason a traveller needs maps is the same reason people rely on their stereotypes, that is for the ease of information processing. The functions of stereotypes can be both inductive and deductive at the individual level (Diehl & Jonas 1991). In interaction with others, people constantly need to make interpretations and predictions basing on insufficient information about the individuals. Stereotypes about the social groups to which these individuals belong provide people basic information to adapt behaviours towards them. If girls are stereotypically supposed to enjoy playing with dolls, a person may choose to give dolls as presents to girls without knowledge of the exact toy preference of these girls. It can also be

in the other way when people observe behaviours of individuals, then with available stereotypical knowledge, make predictions of which social groups the observed individuals are members of (Stangor & Schaller 1996). For instance, a person with didactic manners can be stereotypically anticipated to be a teacher or professor.

Leyens, Yzerbyt and Schadron (1994) also agree with the idea that stereotypes fulfill "the individual need to organize and simplify the environment" (Leyens, Yzerbyt and Schadron 1994, p.70) but beside from that, they mention three other functions of stereotypes which are developed by Tajfel (1981): social causal explanation, social justification, and social differentiation. Social causality is identifying some groups to be responsible for some events, e.g. drug addicts are often thought to be culprits of crimes. Social justification means that stereotypes about particular groups are created in order to justify behaviours towards them. An example may be that colonialists create stereotypes of local populations to be inferior and need to be enlightened, hence easy control over them. Social differentiation involves indentifying and highlighting the differences between groups, aiming at placing the ingroup at a superior position (Tajfel 1981). These functions of stereotypes make it clear that excessive reliance on stereotypes with their rigid and exaggerative nature can lead to biased perception of the target social groups.

### **3.2.5 Categorization**

When studying about the effects of stereotypes, one of the most important concepts that deserve attention is categorization. Categorization can be understood simply as grouping people into categories, assuming that all members of a group share similar attributes. This concept of categorization relates directly to the formation of stereotypes as a stereotype begins when a set of people are thought to comprise a group, an entity (Mackie et al. 1996). This concept also leads us to further concepts of ingroup and outgroup. Leyens, Yzerbyt and Schadron (1994) explain the ingroup process through three stages: identify oneself as member of one social group, learn about the attributes of that group, and assign those attributes to him/herself. The result of categorization is often "information loss" due to overlooking the individuality of each member in the category. However, at the same time, it involves "information gain" because group characteristics are ascribed to the members, without empirical knowledge about that individual (Mackie et al. 1996). Because information about people as a group is distorted in such a way, the similarity among ingroup



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members are exaggerated, and the differences between groups become bigger than they actually are. It is also worth noting that when splitted into ingroup and outgroup, human by nature tend to have favourable evaluation of their own group, and therefore can derogate other groups. The effect of this sense of self-enhancement toward the ingroup is in fact the formation of negative stereotypes and attitudes about the outgroup, which resists attempts for changing stereotypes and block intergroup contact (Mackie et al. 1996, Hewstone 1989).

### **3.2.6 Negative effects of gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes possess all the effects that stereotypes generally cause to the social groups. In this part, I only wish to draw some clearer points regarding to gender. Gender stereotypes display traits which are seen as desirable for males and females in a particular culture, therefore, people who deviate too far from the stereotypical 'standards' are seen as gender-inappropriate. Furthermore, traits classified as typical for males are often regarded more highly than those for females (such as being a doctor is better than a nurse; being physically strong is better than physically soft) (Golombok & Fivush 1994). Whether this male advantage is due to the hierarchical status of males and females in the society or the result of natural roles is controversial. Nevertheless, Berk (2003) asserts that extreme gender-typed traits either on the part of male (e.g. aggressiveness or competitiveness) or female (e.g. passiveness or conformity) prove to be harmful to mental health. Golombok and Fivush (1994) emphasize one point which is shared by various scholars: males are more rigidly stereotyped than females, which means that although females can be seen as inferior by the stereotypes, they have a bigger chance to deviate from the female "standards". Males, in fact, are more stuck in a tight set of attributes that they need to strive hard to keep up to. Gender stereotypes, therefore, take a toll on both males and females.

### **3.2.7 Relation between stereotypes and prejudice**

Before we investigate how stereotypes are related to prejudice, it is necessary to know what prejudice is. In the definition mentioned by Stroebe & Insko (1989) "a prejudice is an attitude toward members of some outgroup and in which the evaluate tendencies are predominantly negative." (Stroebe & Insko 1989, p.8). When comparing stereotypes and prejudice, Stroebe & Insko (1989) refer to the distinction between beliefs and attitudes. While stereotypes are beliefs about a particular group, prejudice is the attitude toward that

group. They also clarify further that an attitude is a form of evaluation with some degree of favour or disfavour. And in the popular meaning of the term 'prejudice', the attitude embedded is often a negative one. Theories such as the information processing approach and consistency theory propose that the attitudes toward a social group is related to the beliefs about that group's attributes and whether these attributes are seen as positive or negative (Stroebe & Insko 1989). For example, African students are thought to be lazy by European professors (stereotype), and if the attribute 'lazy' is seen as negative by European professors, the attitude European professors hold toward African students would be also negative, hence a prejudice about them. There have been various empirical studies done to prove and disprove this relation between stereotype and prejudice, and although there are still debates about the complex nature of this relation, there are strong theoretical ground for the conclusion of a close relation between prejudice and the relevant stereotypes (Stroebe & Insko 1989).

### **3.2.8 Changing stereotypes**

There is a belief that stereotype reflect gender role patterns in the society, thus when these patterns change as the result of society development, gender stereotypes will also change. Unfortunately, Golombok and Fivush (1994) claim the truth is far from that. They cite a research by McBroom (1987) which concludes that "as people age, they may become less stereotyped in their attitudes about gender, but there has been little change in gender stereotypes over a 30-year period in which we might have expected great change." (Golombok and Fivush 1994, p.36). In a word, the struggle against gender stereotype can not be placed at the mercy of natural society evolution but must be fought determinatively for the sake of the children.

Hewstone (1989) mentions three main methods to change stereotypes. The first method is the individualization technique. This technique focus on the individual characteristics of each outgroup member rather than the group attribute as a whole. The effect of this technique can be even stronger when the unique characteristic of the individual is inconsistent with the group attribute. The second method is called the contact hypothesis. The content of this hypothesis is that by increasing direct contact with outgroup members, one may gain knowledge about the outgroup individuals and thus hold less stereotypical assumptions about them. The fostering environment for this hypothesis is cooperative

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interactions between group members on an equal footing, doing tasks of high probability of success and an atmosphere free of tension or conflict. The third method bases on the belief that people hold on to stereotypes in order to satisfy some particular needs. If people are aware that their needs will be better satisfied when they alter the stereotypes rather than maintaining them, this can also be a motivation for stereotype change (Hewstone 1989).

Regarding the time for stereotype change, Zemore, Fiske and Kim (2000) believe that the widely use of gender stereotypes in adulthood stems from earlier stages in childhood. Therefore they argue that "blocking the development of gender stereotypes reduces the need to control ... stereotyping and its effects later in life." (Zemore, Fiske and Kim 2000, p.208). Attempts to reduce stereotypes in general and gender stereotypes in particular should be started at a young age. Zemore, Fiske & Kim (2000) confirm that "early interventions is bound to be more successful than trying to control stereotypes at later stages. ... Efforts to control well-practices stereotypes exact heavy costs. So much the better to start young." (Eckes & Trautner 2000, p. 234)

It is highly agreed that effective interventions must come from all aspects influencing the development of stereotypes (family, school, society, etc), but in this research I only mention interventions that can be carried out by the curriculum and teachers.

The role of the curriculum: Oxfam (2005)<sup>8</sup> describes the curriculum as reflecting "the knowledge that society considers valuable and appropriate to be taught in school" (Oxfam 2005, p.1). The curriculum is apparently not the only source of social impact on children, however, the curriculum can be seen as the formal standard of social norms and practices for children to follow. In Vietnam, the school not only educates children academically but also morally. It is therefore crucial to keep this standard free of gender bias.

The role of teachers: "The curriculum is only as good as the teachers who deliver it" claimed Oxfam (2005, p.3). In fact, teachers are those who bring the curriculum to their students and filter the knowledge through their own lens of world view. Experience sees that each teacher implements the textbook in their own way as he/she interprets the intentions of the textbook authors through his/her models of gender relations and identities (Sunderland 2006). As this

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<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what we do/issues/education/downloads/edPaper2.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/education/downloads/edPaper2.pdf)

author states "The most non-sexist textbook can become sexist in the hands of a teacher with sexist attitudes" (Sunderland 2006, p.151). A teacher who treats schoolboys and schoolgirls on an equal basis can reduce and even teach students to be critical of the gender bias in the textbooks. The role of teachers is especially important for young children as they set the standard for the children's thinking of right and wrong.

Stereotypes do not necessarily take the form of preaching. Oxfam GB (2005, p.2) mentioned some aspects which reveal teachers' unconscious assumptions of stereotypes, such as: encouragement for boys and girls to voice ideas in class; amount of attention paid to girls and boys in class; teachers' expectation of students' intellectual abilities; level of feedbacks from teachers to girls and boys; and teachers' own preferences of teaching boys or girls. Since teachers are usually seen as models for young students to learn from, it is necessary that before teaching students of gender equality, teachers should assess their own behaviours to make gender equality a component part of their thinking.

In general, the interventions for gender stereotypes are no different from the intervention for other stereotypes. Role modelling proves to be an effective way to reduce gender stereotypes in children. Teachers can start to reduce the gender-role typing from their own behaviours, choices and language, especially when communicating with children. Zemor, Fiske and Kim (2000) announce that children who are exposed to less gender-typed role models rely less on those stereotypes than children who live in more traditional environments. Teachers should also facilitate mix-gender groups, both in play time and studying. According to the contact hypothesis (Hewstone 1989), more contact with the outgroup enable groups to acquire information about the individuality of each members and reduce the reliance on stereotypes. Naturally, boys and girls tend to form own-sex groups without the intervention of adults, thus, teachers should encourage activities that involve both sexes and structure the activities so that boys and girls can cooperate with each other. Once children have established knowledge about gender stereotypes around them, teacher can point out exceptions of non-stereotypes role models in the society, or discuss about the unrealistic male and female gender-typed presentation in the media. Teachers can also explain to older children that gender stereotypes can lead to gender inequality and other the consequences of stereotyping. By giving children the chances to have an open mind and knowledge about genders, we enable children to be agents of change toward a world free of gender bias (Berk 2003).

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Considering changing stereotypes, one may as well think about the means that transmit stereotypes and measures to block this transmission. Language, being shared culturally, is supposed to be the major channel (in both written and spoken forms) to preserve and transmit stereotypes (Maass & Arcuri 1996). The remedy for it, which is proposed by various scholars, is through education. Education actually allows all three mechanisms for changing stereotypes described previously. Within the educational institute, students can be exposed to stereotype-disconfirming information about outgroups, they can be encouraged to join intergroup activities and can be instructed to have more tolerant attitudes to others' differences. Education changes stereotypes in individual's mind, but also has collective effect as it aims at a large group of people at a time (Stangor & Schaller 1996). With such promising potential, the resources that education can refer to to fulfill this mission are undoubtedly textbook (written language) and teacher's instructions (spoken language). But whether these resources have been exploited successfully in Vietnam remains a question to which this research is seeking an answer.

### **3.3 Theories about gender discourse**

One of the main issue in the discussion of discourse is the power relation. Zatzel (in Wodak 1997) claims that the function of racist or sexist discourses is to ensure the oppression on the objects of these discourses. The process of oppression is done by the structuring the "other" based on dichotomy. The "self" positions him/herself on the positive side and construct the "other" as "the mirror image of different, problematic aspect of the "self" ... The "other" is a victim, where the "self" is an agent" (Zatzel 1997, p. 75). Through this process, the "self" exercise power over the "other".

The gender discourse is not excluded from this power relation. Corson (1997) sees power as the variable that separate men and women from each other. He reasons that the exclusion of females from public sphere entails their exclusion from "access to the creation, maintenance, and elaboration of dominant ideologies and the sign systems used to express them"(Corson 1997, p.143). As can be inferred in this case, the sign systems mentioned here is language in form of discourses. On the other hand, men are not equally excluded from female dominated domains. Consequently, in such societies, men hold the command of the discourse, and they keep the power to define status (Corson 1997). In most cultures, women, when compared to

men as a group, is clearly the oppressed one, the ones defined as the "other" and this oppression shows as differences in their discourses. Although discourse can be understood as the use of language, it also have implication for the written texts in which males and females are described. The power relation between the sexes remains the same no matter when the form of language is spoken or written. As the social structure of oppression is produced and reproduced by individuals, the gendered power relation has an individualized face. It is thus more important to listen to what people say specific statements in their daily context than the already familiar political discourse (Zahzel 1997). A person may preach about gender equality in public whereas holding strong stereotypes in his/her own family.

Among different types of discourse, children's literature can be regarded as an important area for gender investigation. Children's literature is often written with a purpose of teaching some values or ideas to children. For many children, literature is a part of their childhood and the stories in literature evoke in them different emotions (e.g. happy when good characters are rewarded, upset when the villains dominate, etc.). Literature becomes significantly important during the 'early discourse production' period (Francis 2000). According to Stephens (1992, p.5) "it is through language that the subject and the world are presented in literature, and through language that literature seeks to define the relationships between child and culture." The text as well as the metaphors, relationships, power patterns and desires presented within the text, are considered a fantasy vehicle that inserts the reader into the text, and also help them to define themselves as a person. Because of such an influencing role children's literature has, social changes and challenges in gender relation should also be reflected in literature (Sunderland 2006).

### **3.4 Review of literature: Previous research on gender stereotypes in children's stories and textbooks**

There have been works investigating gender stereotypes in children's literature and textbooks. Golombok and Fivush (1994) find in their review of research in the 1960s that females were underrepresented to a great extent in children's stories. In the 1970s, research found that although there was better representation of females in children's books, the ratio of male characters over female was still 2 over 1 and gender was still portrayed in relatively stereotyped ways (Golombok and Fivush 1994). Besides, when reading stories to children,

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mother label 90% of characters whose gender was unknown to be male, hence the greater representation of male characters. Males are often describes as adventurous, whereas females are only adventurous in the absence of males. Compared to males, females are described as more passive or as caregivers. Apparently, such stories are highly stereotypes and can act as harmful role models to children (Golombok and Fivush 1994).

Sunderland (2006) cites a study of Davies (1989) about children's understanding of feminist fairy tales. This study focuses at gender from an different angle, i.e. the attitude of children, and not the stories (as the stories are constituted to be feminist). The result shows that

if a woman is active and powerful she can only be accepted as such if her agency is directed in a selfless way towards a man or a child whom she loves. ... Men, in contrast, have a much more complex array of possibilities – their power is admired and celebrated, their strength and cleverness can be associated with negative or positive powers, even both at the same time, and their right of access to safe domestic spaces by no means depends on their virtue (Sunderland 2006, p.212)

It is clear that non-stereotypical stories are not always warmly welcomed by children who still hold rigid knowledge about how women and men are supposed to be. From the study above, the dominant quality that a woman is expected to have, above power and cleverness, is still a sense of sacrifice for others. This quality, however, is not needed in a man.

However, the major book that I would review here is a publication of UNESCO "Down with stereotypes! Eliminating sexism from children's literature and school textbooks" by Andrée Michel (1986). This book is structured into two main parts, with the first part is an overview of the situation of sexist stereotypes in society and at school, and the second part focuses on how to eliminate sexism from children's literature and school textbooks. In the first part, the author makes strong statements about sexist stereotypes, for in stance "sexist stereotypes of males and females tend to deny the worth of women and girls and to over-emphasize the importance of men and boys" (Michel 1986, p. 15). The author points out an important type of sexism, that is latent sexism, as opposed to open sexism. Latent sexism is described to occur mostly in social attitudes and behaviours which are adjusted according to the sex of the individual. Latent sexism is also present when one sex is portrayed to have only some restricted, specific qualities and roles (Michel 1986). The author gives one example of this phenomenon that women and girls are valued only in their emotional, maternal and domestic roles, which means that other social roles (professional and political) are closed to them.

The author presents an exhaustive summary of studies about gender stereotypes done in various countries in the world: Norway, France, Peru, Zambia, Ukraine, USA, and seven Arab states (Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Democratic Yemen). These studies cover textbooks at different levels of education, in different subjects: science, mathematics, language, history and literary. Sexist stereotypes in those textbooks have been detected in a wide range of aspects:

- under-representation of females,
- restricted female roles and role models for girls,
- narrowed career orientation for girls, higher education is reserved for males,
- lack of acknowledgement for women's contribution and works,
- women and girls are perceived as incompetent compared to males,
- biased personality traits attached to males and females,
- the home is described to be the women's domain,
- games for boys are shown as adventurous whereas girls are shown to play passive, or stereotyped games which resemble household tasks (playing with doll, teaset),
- in social positions, men are the leaders; important, tough jobs must be done by men, women in contrast hold subordinate jobs, women are shown as beaten or cheated.

These stereotypes are reported to exercise negative effects on the culture of the school as well as the community, shown as:

- strengthening the gender stereotypes about males and females, leading each sex to think in stereotypical way of the other sex; especially, it fuels the wrong notion that "boys are superior to girls".
- Discouraging girls to enter science and technology subjects in school, which later channel their career choices.
- The biased depiction of boy and girl's games damages men's rights and women's right by sending the wrong message of what men and women like to do, and can do.



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- Causing many girls to have "fear of success" as they perceive it is not feminine to be smart and successful.
  - Causing females to have a sense of inferior, low self-esteem in their self-perception.
  - As girls are convinced that they can only do well in "feminine" subjects, their academic performance in class is tilted away from science and all subjects that are labelled as "masculine".

The author also includes examples of biased and non-biased illustrations of males and females in the textbooks. From these pictures, readers can clearly see the contrast between stereotyped and non-stereotyped materials.

In the second part of the book, the author lists the signals when identifying sexism in textbooks. According to him

the first sign of sexism is the refusal to acknowledge social reality and the diversity of situations, resulting in a caricatural depiction of male and female roles. ... Second, sexism is also present in textbooks which merely show an existing sexist situation but neither criticize it nor offer any alternative. This amounts to a tacit acceptance of the inequalities and discriminatory behaviour afflicting girls and women in most societies today, and thus serves to strengthen them. (Michel 1986, p.48)

For Michel, the first sign of sexism is the presence of the stereotypes, and the second sign of sexism, which is more tacit, is the silence to stereotypes. While the first sign is more visible, and thus easier to detect, the second sign of sexism is about the lack of intervention, which can be often overlooked. It needs a constant alert mind to pick out something that is missing when it should be available.

The author later provides some criteria for evaluating how characters in textbooks are constructed and whether this construction involves any sexist stereotype. The first set of criteria are about social references to females and males, which include: marital status (married or single, etc), family status (women often describes as parents when men are not), level of employment (who is at work, who is at home), occupation (which jobs are described as typical for females and males).

Gender stereotypes are also present in the activities of males and females characters. For this aspect, Michel gives ten criteria for evaluation:

- domestic tasks carried out in the home (who do the housework)
- contributing to the education of children (who takes care for the well-being of the children and who helps them with studying)
- professional activities (who are in authority)
- political or social activities (who has the initiatives and responsibility)
- leisure activities (who are active and creative)
- hobbies and crafts (are they stereotyped)
- artistic activities (who are the performers, who are the spectators)
- games (who are daring and adventurous)
- exploration and adventure (who are the heroes)
- Sport (who are the champions)

Another set of criteria present in the book is about the social and emotional behaviour of male and female characters. There are three criteria: positive or negative emotions (are emotions attached to females and males stereotyped), resistance to social pressure (who resist/conform to pressure), and weakness and strength of characters (are these traits stereotyped). The author also analyzes the vocabulary and grammar used in the books, but as these features are not applicable to Vietnamese textbooks, I will not mention them here.

Towards producing non-sexist children's literature and textbooks, Michel suggests equal ratio of female and male characters, equitable distribution of roles between women and men in various aspects of life, equitable distribution of good and bad qualities between the sexes, and avoiding sexism in vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Michel also proposes actions to eliminate sexism within and outside of the school systems, with questionnaire and interview guides for teachers to evaluate the textbooks and their own teaching.

Undeniably, this book has many strong points. The criticism against sexism and a fighting spirit for gender equality is present throughout every single page of the book, which are persuasive and inspirational for the readers. The book, as can be seen from the very headline,

is a slogan urging readers to take action against sexism. The book is written based on a rich pool of empirical data from research all over the world, giving readers a sense of the big picture of gender stereotypes in textbooks. Michel has an excellent coverage of the issue when he considers sexist stereotypes in various aspects, with a smooth and logical transition from one aspect to another. Starting with the overview of the issue, the author explains how to identifying sexism and ending with actions to eliminate them. The sequence of the book contents keeps reader informed with thorough knowledge of negative effects of sexist stereotypes and how to wipe off them. One more good point of this book is its practical guidelines, which are made ready to use, promising high applicability. It is those criteria and guidelines that he proposes here that help me to build my own criteria for my analysis. Last but not least, the author sees a need for cooperation between the school, the family, the publishing house, the media and the wider society to create an effective remedy for gender stereotypes. It is more than true that gender stereotypes must be tackled from different aspects at the same time.

### **3.5 Summary**

In this chapter I have attempted to present several theories from different disciplines to roughly build up a picture about gender stereotypes and how they are embeded in teaching materials. In the next chapter, I would discuss about the methodology of data collection and analysis in this research.

## 4. Chapter 4: Methodology and Data Collection

### 4.1 Research design

In tailoring the methodology for my research, it is beneficial to refer back to the three research questions posed in the first chapter, which are:

- How are females and males depicted in the story textbooks? Are their images stereotyped?
- Is there a significant change in the amount of gender stereotypes in the newly-renovated textbooks, compared to the previous ones?
- How stereotyped are the teachers? How do they react to the gender issues in the textbooks in their teaching?

To answer these questions, I need to have an insight into the story textbooks. Therefore, my research is, first of all, a qualitative piece of work. It is qualitative in the sense that it requires exhaustive description of the female and male images in the textbooks. To do that, I need to analyze the meaning of words, images, metaphors, patterns of jobs, patterns of behaviours, etc. in the textbooks. I, as the researcher, am the most important research tool as I am responsible for understanding and interpreting the meaning of the stories in a fair, proper way.

As stated in the research questions, my research involves some comparison between the new textbooks and the previous ones. The judgment of the comparison however does not rely merely on numeration but also heavily on the intensification of level of stereotypes that I detect.

My research is also a case study as it is about a single subject (story reading), in a particular school level (primary school), in a specific country (Vietnam), and during a specific time period (before and after the latest textbook reform in 2002). I choose to focus on primary school level because Vietnamese primary school children have an age range from 6 to 10 years old, which coincides with the stage of ‘gender consistency’, i.e. “children have a full

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appreciation of the permanence of gender over time and across situations” (Banerjee 2005, p.159). Along with this consistency comes the more flexible attitude in cognition about the attributes of other people. Children start to rely more on input data about people’s personalities to make prediction about them rather than relying merely on knowledge about their sex. This phase can be seen as a chance to introduce non-stereotyped female and male images as well as unconventional behaviours. According to Zemore, Fiske and Kim (2000), early intervention in the development of gender stereotypes can save effort in reducing their negative impacts later in life of children. Therefore, it is advisable to start action when children are young. Also, I choose to focus my research around a critical time period of text book reform (2002), when the National Curriculum for Basic Education starts to be implemented in schools. As discussed previously in chapter 2, it seems like gender issues were not given due attention in the curriculum policies. Whether this void of gender concerns translates into a corresponding lack of awareness in gender equality triggers my curiosity to investigate how gender relations are actually portrayed in textbooks.

## **4.2 Sampling**

I choose purposeful samples of the story textbooks, particularly story textbooks of grade 1 - beginning of primary school, and grade 5 - the ending grade of primary school. This choice of sample aims at assessing the amount of stereotypes presented to children from younger to older ages. By including two grades at both ends of primary age range, I plan to see how consistent the amount of gender stereotypes exposed to the children is. Moreover, this selection of two different volumes of textbooks serves as a kind of material triangulation that may increase the credibility of my research.

The sampling procedure in my case concerns also the choice of textbook to analyze. I select story textbook purposefully due to its individual characteristic of carrying abundance of cultures norms and values including those about genders. These norms and values are transmitted both consciously such as in setting bright examples, or unconsciously such as in the usage of language by the authors. Additionally, story textbooks may have an impact upon children in the sense that they contain stories which are often appealing to young children and so might be read more often, hence leaving a deeper imprint on them. When conducting this research, I do not assume that the amount of gender stereotypes that I find in

the stories textbooks would be the representative for that in other textbooks or of primary textbooks in general. From the head master of one school, I learn that story reading is included as a component of Vietnamese Language due to the shortage of time for each and every subject. A teacher in another school explained to me the same thing when she showed me her Vietnamese textbook in which story reading takes only a small portion in the book. Story reading now is divided into three types: teacher tells a story to students in class, students tell a story that they have read or heard, and students tell a story they have witnessed or participated in. According to this teacher, the stories to be read in class by teachers are only in teacher's books and not in student's textbooks. When I mention the story textbook as a collection of stories which is available to both students and teachers before the reform, she explains that that such a textbook now is used merely as a supplement to the portion to be learnt in class, and are read by parents or students themselves. In this research, for the new version of story textbooks, I choose to analyze only the in-class portion, which is the component of the Vietnamese textbook.

The schools in which I carry out my interviews and observation include two schools. For convenience, both these two schools are in Hanoi capital. However, one of them is in a suburb area, and the other one is located closer to the center of the city. By making this choice, I assume that in the urban school there would be more students from well-off families than in the suburb school. I also wish to see if this difference in school location has any relation to the teaching methods in these two schools. The variety of schools in my samples serves as a kind of location triangulation, reducing the risk that the particular school I choose may carry more special characteristics than the average ones. Regarding teachers and students, my informants are convenient samples due to the difficulty of getting permission into the schools and accessing teachers and students.

### **4.3 Data collection procedures**

Data collection procedures formally consist of two parts: collecting data for the textbook analysis and collecting data about the teachers and students. The first part however is a simple procedure of buying the new textbooks that are available on sale and finding the old ones which are no longer in use. The second part involves interviews with teachers, students and classroom observations. Again, these two methods (interviewing and classroom

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observation) are highly qualitative. The use of interview and observation beside document analysis serves as a kind of method triangulation to increase the credibility of the research.

### **4.3.1 Classroom observation**

The guideline for classroom observation that I use is adapted from the 'Classroom Observation Tools' on the UNESCO Bangkok website<sup>9</sup>. Classroom observation is used to capture how teachers manage the class and whether they treat the stories in a gendered manner. Since classroom observation is less likely to reveal the research aim and more effective in capturing the natural daily interaction between teachers and students, it should always be used prior to interviews. During observation, I did not participate in any class activity, and tried to minimize the impact of my presence in the class.

My guideline for classroom observation consists of 13 questions (for more details, see Appendix 1). The first question investigates the ratio of girls over boys in the class. The second and third questions examine the seating pattern in the class (whether the students' seating is sex-segregated, and who might get more attention from teachers due to their seating). Question 4, 7 and 8 investigate the amount of interaction teachers have with girls and boys during the lesson. The fifth question aims to find out if posters and decorating pictures in the class room illustrate sex stereotypes. Question 6 and 12 focus on students' access to study materials and equipments. Question 9 and 10 investigate teachers' gender attitudes to students through the allotment of class room tasks and discipline. Question 11 and 13 is about teachers' treatment of the stories in the textbooks (their use of language and their reaction to the gender patterns in the stories).

If allowed, I plan to video-record the classroom activities during one period of story reading lesson, which lasts for 45 minutes. I understand that as access to school itself can be a troublesome process, I may not be allowed to record the lesson or to attend the lesson at all. I therefore assume that the above guideline is the general frame within which there should be room to fit in flexible classroom patterns and the limited access to lessons in reality. It is acceptable that not all of the above questions will be answered, and some subordinate aspects of classroom activities can be overlooked to make space for the more important ones.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/appeal/gender/Classroom%20Observation%20Tools1.doc](http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/appeal/gender/Classroom%20Observation%20Tools1.doc)

### **4.3.2 Student interview**

The guideline for interviewing students is adapted from the guidelines in the book “Down with stereotypes! Eliminating sexism from children’s literature and school textbooks” (1986) by Andrée Michel, UNESCO. This guideline serves in my semi-structure interviews as students are free to exceed the boundary of the above questions if they have more to tell me. The guideline consists of two parts. The first parts are some personal information about the students which I can partially fill in by myself (e.g. sex, grade). Names of the students are not included to keep them confidential. The second part consists of 4 clusters of questions, aiming at measuring how big influence the textbooks make on students, how critical students are toward the textbooks and how stereotyped they are themselves (for more details, see Appendix 2). As the target students are relatively young, the interviews are short and simple, ensuring that the students can maintain due attention during the interviews.

I plan to have 2 student interviews in each class, with similar number of female and male informants. The choice of student informants from the class pool is random. The interviews are only conducted under the approval of the teachers.

### **4.3.3 Teacher interview**

The guideline for interviewing teachers is adapted from the guidelines in the book “Down with stereotypes! Eliminating sexism from children’s literature and school textbooks” (1986) by Andrée Michel, UNESCO. This guideline serves in my semi-structure interviews as teachers are free to exceed the boundary of the above questions if they have more to tell me. This guideline is also divided in two parts. The first part is the personal information of the teachers, the school and the students in his/her class. Names of the teachers and the school will not be noted down to keep them confidential. The second part consists of 15 clusters of questions. The first 8 clusters assess how unconsciously stereotyped the teacher is in his/her daily interaction with the students in relation to tasks for females / males; physical beauty; cross-sex behaviours; sex segregation; and ideal traits for males and females. The next 3 clusters assess teachers’ attitude about gender and education, expressed through their perception of suitable subjects for each sex, the preparation that education provides for each sex’s future roles. The last 4 clusters relate to the teaching of the textbooks, in which I investigate whether teachers are informed about the state of gender stereotypes in the



textbook, their comparison of the old and new textbooks, their attitude of gender stereotypes and possible remedies for the gendered parts in the textbook, and also their understanding of some ambiguous points in the stories (for more details, see Appendix 3).

As can be seen above, the teacher interview are longer and in much further details than in the students interviews. It is expected to be the most secured means of yielding data about the students as a class, the teacher and the teaching of story reading. For the teacher interview, I can not preselect the sex of the informants. I can only interview teachers who I have access to and best of all, who allow me to observe their lessons.

## **4.4 Analysis methods**

To analyze my data, I use chiefly discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis. This choice is made on the basis that the major part of my data is the textbooks, which are printed in Vietnamese and with the target readers as Vietnamese primary school students. Among these two methods, I use discourse analysis for treatment of raw data in the initial or first round of analysis. After that, I use qualitative content analysis for eliciting the results of the research.

### **4.4.1 Discourse analysis**

I was rather confused when reading about theories of discourse analysis. Some of the works are better suited for linguists, others do not really show me the concrete steps of how to process the amount of data from my stories. However, I choose discourse analysis as it is the method for analyzing texts which carry in them a power relationship. Also, my data requires a thorough study and understanding of the language with a native insight into Vietnamese norms and culture.

To apply this method, I view the relationship between genders as a relationship of social power between men and women. I agree with DeFrancisco (1997) who confirmed that the gender issue in language is not merely the differences in speeches of women and men but rather a constructed complexity of social practices, specified in each and every community. These practices relate to power relations, but in varied and subtle ways. This nature of the power relations therefore calls for a qualitative, context-based research. I, as an “insider” of

my own culture, would want to make use of my native experience for understanding and reading between the lines texts which might not be so thoroughly “felt” and interpreted without a native insight.

I choose to apply discourse analysis to the initial phase of analysis. From the various gender literatures, I build up a list of criteria for picking out gendered details from stories for ease of further categorizing in the next round. This list of criteria consists of 15 items as below.

### **Box 1. Criteria for Textbook Analysis**

#### **1. Title of story:**

- Mentioned male: title includes words identifying male(s), or male proper name(s)
- Mentioned female: title includes words identifying female(s), or female proper name(s)
- Unspecific: title includes no words about gender, words which are gender-neutral (which readers can not decide which gender is being referred to), or includes both genders equally.

#### **2. Author of story:**

The gender of the author can only be guessed basing on the provided names, and therefore is only probably correct. In case of folk tales, it is common that authors are anonymous.

- Male

- Female

- Unspecified: names of authors are gender-neutral, which can apply to both female and male; authors are anonymous.

**3. Focused relation:** the centered relation in the story among/ between characters, which governs the happenings of events. E.g. mother - child

**4. Theme of story:** the general topic of story or the area which the story/ message of the story belongs to. E.g.: family relation

**5. Occupations of characters:** reports the occupations/roles assigned to females and males in the story. This criterion allows me to see if the occupations are gender-conventional or

cross-gendered.

**6. Status of characters:** distinguish whether the characters are ordinary people or people with special status (famous figures; holy characters – saint, fairy, lord; upper-class – king, queen, mandarin; hero/heroine, etc). This criterion allows me to see which sex is more often described as having special status.

**7. Setting of story:** the main setting(s) where the story takes place. When settings cover a wide range of regions or locations with no particular focus on any of them, it is labeled “varied”. When setting is not mentioned or described, it is labeled “unspecified”.

**8. Genre of story:** roughly classifies the type of stories.

- *Vietnamese folk tale:* stories about imaginary characters in Vietnamese history and/or culture.

- *Vietnamese tale:* stories about real Vietnamese celebrities/ famous people/ heroes in the history.

- *Contemporary:* stories about people (Vietnamese or foreigners) in recent history or present time; stories written by contemporary authors.

- *Old tale/ Legend:* stories about unreal, imaginary characters, teaching a moral lesson or explaining the origins of things.

- *Fable:* stories in which characters are humanized animals, teaching a moral lesson, mostly by anonymous authors.

## **9. Characters:**

A person or a group is considered one character when they appear as one entity in the story. The number of characters is counted by their appearance in the story, not by the quantity of individuals in the group. E.g. “villagers” as one group is counted as one character, regardless of the actual number of people in that group.

*Number of characters:* Basing on this way of counting, the total number of characters is counted, as well as the number of female, male and/or gender-unspecific characters. Gender-

unspecific characters are those whose gender is not mentioned in the story (e.g. Brown Bunny, people, citizens, villagers) or when both male and female is counted together as one entity (e.g. the couple).

**10. Main character:** is the centered character in the story, in many cases the story can be viewed through the eye of the main character. This criterion allows me to see which sex is often described as the main character.

**11. Illustrative pictures:** are picture(s) that go along with the story. The picture illustrates the main characters in the story, describes their appearance, postures, and actions. This criterion gives additional information about how a female or male should look and behave.

**12. Actions of characters:** are mostly described by the verbs in the story. But as actions are not always expressed in form of verbs by the characters, expressions which embed actions by characters are also acknowledged qualitatively by me.

**13. Attributes of characters:** are the personal traits, emotions, appearance, etc. (other than actions) which portray the images of characters. In this part, I also make inferences about characters and how they are portrayed in the story, and note down the cultural assumptions which are entitled to characters.

**14. Dichotomies:** while the above criteria help describes the details of the story, this criterion focuses on the relation between male and female characters in the story.

Dichotomies help to show male and female characters in a simplified, reduced form of contrasts. The dichotomies I use here are:

- **Active – Passive:** basing on the amount of actions each character makes in criterion 12
- **Inside – Outside of home:** this dichotomy reflects how deeply each character is in the private/social sphere
- **Strong – Weak (physically):** this dichotomy measures how much force characters invest in their actions, whether they are seen as strong or weak, physically able or merely nice-looking.

- **Positive – Negative (mental features):** this dichotomy reflects the qualities, and/or virtues the characters possess, from which I can make inference about which metal values are seen as desirable for each gender.
- **High – Low (status):** the status of characters distinguishes whether they are leader/pioneer or follower; dependent or independent; authoritative or submissive, sometimes the status can be expressed implicitly as about who asks question and who answers.
- **Have – Have not (property):** this dichotomy simply assesses whether it is female or male who is described to have the hold of more property.

**15. Note:** Beside all the above 14 criteria, I save the final space for extra comments on the unique features of each story. One of such features is the family pattern available in the story, whether it is single-parent family, extended family, or nuclear family with/without children.

As every story is different, it is possible that not all of the above criteria will be applicable for each single story. It is acceptable that some criteria may be left blank. Basing on this list of criteria, I analyze the stories line by lines, reconstructing the stories from a gender viewpoint. In this initial stage of analysis, I read and filter the gendered details in Vietnamese. The main parts of the initial analysis are the characters, actions of characters and attributes of characters. These parts build up the images of females and males in the stories, attach to them qualities and personal traits that are supposed to be desirable, typical or undesirable for each sex. Other important criteria are occupations, status of characters, and the dichotomies in which females and males may be put at opposite ends. With the result of this initial analysis, it is already possible to see how much stereotyped each story is as the depicted images of females and males in the story may be much more conventional than in reality. For example, in the old version of Story textbook for grade 1 (1999), I did not see any role model of women entering males' occupations. Such depiction of females' occupation is apparently not true compared to reality where there definitely are females working in conventional 'males' jobs'.

The initial stage of analysis, however, only detects stereotypes at the story level and not yet at the textbook level, hence the necessity for the second method, qualitative content analysis.

#### 4.4.2 Qualitative content analysis

Content analysis is often thought of as a quantitative method, in which counted frequency of categories or patterns in the texts matters the most. I, however, would want to use content analysis qualitatively in my research.

Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) when compare this method in quantitative and qualitative research pointed out that while the procedures may be similar, the difference lies in the analysis phase. According to them, the result of qualitative content analysis need not be expressed through statistics but rather in the form of interpretation and hypotheses. And these results should be viewed in connection to both the context in which the texts were produced and the context in which the texts are interpreted. Also, the texts can be analyzed from different perspectives, each perspective may develop new interpretations and hypotheses.

In accordance to this idea, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) see content analysis not only as “a device for extracting numerical data from word-based data ... (but also a way to describe the relative frequency and importance of certain topics as well as to evaluate bias, prejudice or propaganda in print materials”.

For this reason, I choose to apply qualitative content analysis for analyzing both the story textbooks and the transcriptions of my interviews and observation description. Also, the nature of this method allows the later comparison between the old and new textbooks, basing on similarly developed sets of categories.

As stated by Gall, Gall and Borg (2003), the procedures of quantitative and qualitative content analysis in general are similar. Therefore I adopt the 11 steps of content analysis by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 476-483). From step 1 to step 5, it involves defining the research questions, population for sampling, samples, context of the document and the units of analysis. Step 6 and 7 involve deciding the codes and constructing the categories for analysis. Step 8 and 9 are about conducting the coding, categorizing and analyzing the data. Step 10 and 11 involve summarizing and making speculative inferences.

It is worth noting that in step 9, the authors questioned the implication that frequency equals significance, and asserted that “frequency does not equal importance, and not saying

something may be as important as saying something” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007, p. 481). This means in the summary of the analysis, a feature which is not reinforced by significant frequency may still be regarded just as (or possibly more) important than features which are repeated throughout the texts.

In all, I would like to stress again that both analysis methods are highly qualitative since they base on the meanings (both explicit and implicit), assumptions, inferences, structures, patterns, etc. in the texts. Both of them involves many multi-facet interpretations and re-analyses before the final results be yielded.

## **4.5 Ethical concerns**

When choosing to do research in and about my own country, I am aware of the risk that I am an ‘insider’ and may not be as objective as a foreign researcher. Having grown up, having part of my gender cognition shaped in the Vietnamese culture, and having read most of the stories in the old textbooks myself during my school life, I may take some gender issues for granted. Nevertheless, I try to take advantage of my native insight to investigate and interpret issues which are not so obvious to an outsider’s eye.

I also want to stress that this research is conducted with full respect to my informants and textbook authors. I do not intend to make criticism about teachers, students or authors personally. I try to ensure that my research is free of prejudice, given that my informants (teachers and students) and textbooks authors may hold different opinions about gender issues from those of mine. Before conducting interviews and observation, I was granted permission from the school headmaster and the teachers to access the class and the students. I also made clear to them the objectives of my research and the research methods to be conducted in their schools. I asked for permission from teachers and students to interview them, and to tape record or take note of what they said. They were also promised that their identity and opinions are treated confidential and would be used only in my research and would not be exposed to anyone else.

Lastly, I choose to carry out this research from my personal expectation that I can make a small contribution to improve the life of women around me by making a change in perceptions about them. I hope these methods would assist me to accomplish this goal.

## **4.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have explained about the methods I use for collecting and analysing my data. My data comes from two sources: the story textbooks (which are used formally in class) and information from the primary school teachers and students. The methods for data collection involve buying the textbooks, classroom observation, and teacher and student interviews. For analysing the data, I use discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis. The successful use of these methods enables me to answer the three research questions guiding this research. In the next chapter, I would present in details the result of my fieldwork in Vietnam and the findings of my textbook analysis.



## 5. Chapter 5: Findings

### 5.1 Findings from my fieldwork

#### 5.1.1 Fieldwork description

The very initial impression that hit me at the beginning of my fieldwork was that gaining access to the school was far more difficult than my expectation. It was not about showing the school principals the permissions or introduction papers I had; it was about me being a total stranger to them, asking for their cooperation and by somehow disturbing their everyday routine. The time of my fieldwork in Vietnam coincided with the time of Teaching Contests for teachers in Hanoi city, therefore all the schools were rather busy and fitting me in as another issue on their calendar (and which did not bring them any extra profit) was not their preference.

Given such a circumstance, I was lucky to finally be welcomed into one public primary school in the suburb of Hanoi (from here on it is labelled the suburb school), and be able to access another one in a more urban part of the same city (from here on it is labelled the urban school). Although I was able to elicit more complete data from the suburb school, contacts with teachers and students in the urban school also provided me with many interesting data and the basis to generate similarities between the two schools.

The suburb school is situated in a quiet area. The school has slim fencing, allowing much integration into the surrounding environment. The school is well-built and well-equipped with colourful drawings and posters on the walls. Glancing at these decorations, I recognized a balance in the number of female and male figures presented. The headmaster of this school is a middle-aged lady. As I followed her along the corridors, I glanced through the classroom windows and saw that most of the teachers there were females. The school-yard is constructed so that a large area is a playground with various facilities for physical games. Another corner is made into a small green park, with benches for anyone who might need some quiet, relaxing time.

The urban school is also well-built, but with high surrounding walls, separating the school from the residential area around. The school faces a fork-junction at which noisy traffic goes on all the day. Unlike the suburb school, the urban school does not have many pictures or decoration on the walls either inside or outside of the classrooms. There is a big slogan on the side of the building block, which says "Thầy mẫu mực, trò chăm ngoan" (Teachers set good examples, students study hard and docilely). The word "thầy" (teachers), however, refers to males. Most of the teachers I met in this school were also females. This school has a big yard with some green and some facilities for games though not as well constructed as the suburb school. I had a little more time to observe the school-yard during break time in this school. It was of course a very noisy and active time for the pupils. I saw that by nature, boys and girls were playing mostly in same-sex groups, but I also saw some groups in which boys and girls were playing together. Girls seemed to have more physical contact with girls (e.g. holding hands, walking arms in arms) than with boys. The boy groups involved more play-fighting, tumbling activities, but girls also ran a lot and took part in energetic activities.

### **Description of class observation**

I only had the opportunity to observe class lessons in the suburb school and I observed one story lesson in a grade 5 and one story lesson in grade 1.

The first observation was in a grade 5 class. When I arrived at the class room, it was just after break and the monitor, who was a boy, called the class to stand up for greeting me and the teacher. The teacher who taught the story lesson also taught other subjects to the students. She was the form teacher<sup>10</sup> who was in charge of this particular class. In this class, I saw that the total number of students was 29 and there were more boys than girls in the class. The students were seated in pairs. I saw that most girls were seated beside boys. As there was not enough girls to accompany boys, some boys were seated together in pairs. There seemed to be no sex segregation by seating in the class. There were in fact slightly more boys than girls in the front row (which were the closest seats to the teacher) perhaps also due to the bigger ratio of boys over girls. However, I observed that the teacher paid attention not only to those at the front but all over the class. I observed that all students had

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<sup>10</sup> In Vietnam, the form teacher is the teacher in charge of a particular class. The form teacher teaches, organizes and manages class activities. She/He is also the messenger between the school and the students in her class as well as between the school and the students' parents.

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notebooks, textbooks and other study equipments. My time at the school had to be booked in advance and was limited, so I did not have a chance to familiarize myself and my camera to the students before the observation. Some students recognized that they were being video-taped and sometimes they stared at my camera with curious eyes.

The lesson was about telling stories that the students had read with the theme "For the happiness of people" so it involved several stories told by students about some good deeds. Five stories were told by three boys and two girls in front of the class which had the contents as below.

The first story was told by a boy about his grandmother. In his story, the grandmother had a talent at cooking and considered her family's appetite her happiness. "She urged others to eat the good food whereas she herself did not eat much." It was obvious that the high-lighted values of this grandmother were her ability to provide food and physical care to her family and also her spirit of sacrifice for others.

The second story told by a girl was about a famous Vietnamese male doctor. This doctor was described to be kind-hearted, have good conscience, overcome hardship to cure his patients and did not pay attention to his own benefit or fame. In the story, one female patient was sick and eventually died when she was out of care of the doctor. The dichotomy between male as celebrity and help-provider versus female as anonymous, helpless victim was obvious.

The third story, told by a boy, was about a male jewellery shop-owner giving a poor little girl an expensive pearl lace out of his kindness and generosity. In this story, although both the female and male characters were described to be kind-hearted, the male was with much property (owning a jewellery shop) and at the position of the giver, whereas the female was at an inferior footing (a small girl, with little property – only a handful of coins) and at the position of receiving mercy from the male. In this story, again women were described as victims and physically weak (both the little girl's mother and the man's fiancée were dead).

Next, a boy told a story about an ethnic minority male as a hero in his village. This farmer found the water source and dug tunnels to bring water to his village. He also taught his villagers about cultivation and assisted them in getting rid of poverty. In the story, his wife and children were briefly mentioned as helpers for him while digging tunnels but in the end

this farmer appeared as the sole hero and all the praises and merits poured upon him. His wife never had a share. Female were severely underrepresented in this story as the wife was only once mentioned, and played only a subordinate role as an assistant to her husband. In the glorious success of her husband, her effort even went unrecognized.

The last story was told by a girl with the title "The magician" (who was also a male). This was the first story in which a male was described as physically weak (Their dad was in hospital). The male and female characters in this story equally provided help to each other, however, the male –the magician was the creator of amazements and admiration. Also, the adult female (the mother) was described in traditional role (Mum was cooking dinner, offered tea) which entailed that she was more attached to her position within the house and the kitchen rather than outside.

In all the above stories, regardless of whether the teller was a boy or a girl, female characters was described in highly traditional roles, in inferior position and underrepresented. While male characters were mostly in the center of the stories as heroes, celebrity, doctor, etc and taking actions, having initiatives; the identity of females was not pronounced. The female teacher throughout the lesson did not have any opposing ideas against the patterns of male and female characters in her students' stories. Neither did she raise any question challenging the position of these characters. She, in general, reinforced the messages of the stories, praising the qualities and the good deeds of the characters, most of whom were males. It seemed to be a high consensus between the teacher and the students in taking the gender issues in those stories for granted.

My second class observation was in the grade 1 class and also with a female form teacher. In this class, there were also more boys than girls so the seating was similar to the grade 5 class. During the lesson, I observed that boys and girls sat and worked together in groups with at least one girl per group. I observed that both boys and girls made noises and the teacher reminded both boys and girls about discipline. Both were active, raised hands, sometimes did some private chatting, and lost concentration in class. I saw no sex difference in seating or the way the teacher treated boys and girls.

The lesson was about listening to a story told by teacher in the class, so this time there was only one story. This particular story which I had the chance to observe had a neutral topic about two mice. In the story, the sex of the two mice was not specified, but the teacher

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referred to them by a male word "chú" (literally means "uncle"). In Vietnamese, this word is used to indicate all individual animal in a nice way. Interestingly, I saw that 3 boys and 1 girls when re-telling the story addressed the mice as "two sisters" which means they regarded these mice as females. Since the nature of the story was neutral and the teacher and students worked solely on this story, most gender-related issues available in this lesson came from teacher's class management which would be discussed later in the section Findings of class observation.

## **Description of interviews**

### *Students' interviews*

I had 6 interviews with students: 4 individual interviews (with grade 1 and grade 5 students), 1 group interview (with grade 4 students) and 1 class interview (with grade 5 students). In the individual and group interviews, I had the similar number of girls and boys as informants. For 2 individual interviews, I tape-recorded the students, and the rest of the interviews, I took notes of the answers due to noisy surroundings. Initially, I did not plan to have group and class interviews, but when I entered the class, the teacher introduced me to the whole class and announced that I had some questions for them. The interview had unexpectedly turned into a class interview with the presence of the teachers which obviously intimidated the students to some extent. The teachers appointed some of the students to answer my questions when there was no volunteer. But in general, when asked for their own opinions, students were very excited and eager to answer. I recognized that at some points, the students seemed to answer in the way that they thought the teachers expected them to say. For example, they said that female teachers were kind-hearted and gentle to students; or that the lessons were very interesting and useful and taught them lots of information.

The group interview I had was with 5 students from grade 4 (they were selected by the teacher and were convenient samples as I wanted to involve in my samples as many primary school students as possible). There were 2 boys and 3 girls in the group. We were outside of the classroom and without the teacher's supervision, so the students were somewhat more comfortable. However, it seemed that they kept in mind their status as students and regarded me somewhat as a teacher (I was introduced as a teacher), plus the fact that we were at their school where they knew they were expected to say proper things. All of these factors together could exercise some influence on their answers.

These two interviews, though were carried out not exactly as planned, yielded rich and interesting data. One distinctive feature between these two interviews was that before my interview, the grade 5 students had just learnt one lesson about gender equality in the textbooks. During the class interview, one boy surprised the teachers slightly when he claimed that women could do all the jobs just like men because of the gender equality. In the group interview with grade 4 students, I saw much stronger sex-typed opinions from both boys and girls. One explanation could be that they had not been taught about gender equality like the grade 5 students.

### ***Teachers' interviews***

I had in total 3 interviews with teachers. Two teachers are from the suburb school and the other is from the urban school. All of my teachers are females and in their 20s and 30s. To my knowledge, one of them is unmarried and at least one is married. All of them have teaching experience with both the old and the new versions of story textbooks.

The first teacher I interviewed taught in grade 5 in the suburb school. I met her briefly once before the interview when I was introduced to her by the school headmaster. My interview with her was the longest one (which lasted about 1 hour) among the three interviews. After I observed her class and conducted interviews with 2 students from her class, we arranged to have the interview in another room. The room which we used for the interview was a quiet one, therefore I could tape record her answers.

The second teacher I interviewed taught in grade 1 in the suburb school. Before the interview day, I met her only once when I went with the head master to her class. The interview with the second teacher was also conducted after the class observation and students' interviews. However, we had the interview right in the classroom. As it was the end of the school day, students were leaving for their homes, and many parents were waiting outside to fetch their children, the surrounding was rather noisy. The teacher agreed to remain in the class for a while to answer my interview questions, but clearly she did not have a lot of time for a long interview. I chose to take notes of her answers as the noisy surrounding did not allow tape recording.

I had the third teacher interview on the phone. This teacher is from the urban school and I met her several times before the interview. When I visited this school, I did not have the

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chance for observing any class, but I got her telephone number. So I conducted the interview with her when she was at home. For this interview, I also used note taking.

### **5.1.2 Findings from class observation**

Both the classes I observed, though they are at different grades (one in grade 5 and one in grade 1), had more boys than girls. The seating of students was decided by the teachers, however, there was no sex segregation in the seating patterns. Rather, the teachers often arranged purposefully girl-boy pairs in the class. The reason for this mix-gender seating in fact was not meant to promote understanding between boys and girls. When I interviewed the teacher in grade 5, she explained about the seating pattern:

We often have seat switching in class. As for my class, we have up to 10 times of seat switching so far. As soon as I see students speaking privately in class, I change their seats. But whenever I need to change students' seats, I need to think carefully about it, because we have so many boy students in my class (17 boys versus only 12 girls). So there are not enough girls to form boy-girl pairs. I still need to let boys sit beside boys, but I arrange the well-behaved boys to sit together with the naughty boys. When it comes to competition between groups in the class, those good boys will talk to the naughty ones and ask them not to make trouble and lower the competition score of their group.

The other teacher also had similar ideas about the seating pattern in her class. The absence of sex segregation in seating was due to disciplinary reasons. The teachers assumed that girls and well-behaved boys can act as remedy to calm down over-active boys and to reduce their private chatting in class. This method of maintaining discipline in class actually reflects the teachers' belief that girls are more obedient, quiet and docile than boys. There was no sex discrimination in class but sex stereotyping seemed to be present in teachers' thinking.

In both classes, I saw very few posters on the walls. Posters were used as illustrations for lessons and not as decoration for the classroom. On the wall of the school buildings, there were also pictures for decoration but in those pictures, female and male characters were in similar number. In general, females were not underrepresented in posters and illustration. However, these pictures mainly illustrated females in traditional roles and occupations. I did not see illustration of females entering males' domains.

There was no difference in the way teachers disciplined girls and boys in class. On the play ground and school yard, I observed that the school and teachers did not label any area to be

'boy area' or 'girl area'. In fact, there were a good number of boys and girls playing together even without adult's supervision. Once I saw a group of children having a running competition on the school yard. A girl was racing against a boy and both of them tried hard to win. I observed that both girls and boys in this school had equal access to the school library, as well as other academic and entertaining resources of the school.

In the observed lessons, the teacher did not downplay either female or male gender by their use of language. However, in their interaction with boy and girl students, I saw some differences. During the two lessons, teachers showed attention and interaction with boys much more than with girls (for more details, see Table 1.). Counting activities such as checking students' books, standing close to, addressing, talking to students during the lesson, teachers interacted 20 times with boys and only 11 times with girls. For other verbal activities such as calling students to go to the front of the class, asking for comments, asking students to read aloud, asking for answers, and reminding students of discipline, teachers addressed boys a total number of 42 times and addressed girls only 27 times. In sum, the total number of times teachers interacted with boys is 62 times; with girls, this number is only 38 times. Among these interaction, teachers addressed girls and boys for discipline equally.

One of the most challenging tasks for students in the story lesson is going to the front of the class to re-tell the learnt story or to tell their own stories to the audience. The story-teller must be confident and able to express the different shades of emotion in the stories. When assigning for this task, teachers chose 10 boys but only 5 girls. Although by voting from the audience and the teacher, female story-tellers were more successful than male story-tellers, the fact was that by the quantity of being addressed, boys were given far more attention and were brought more often into focus than girls.



*Table 1. Findings from Class Observation in Grade 1 and Grade 5 (2 Lessons)*

<b>Categories of activities</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
T checking St's book		1
T going near/ stop by St	11	14
T addressing St		2
T talking to St		3
T asking St to go to front	5	10
T asking St to give comment	2	8
T asking St to read aloud	3	5
T asking St to answer	16	18
T reminding St of discipline	1	1
<b>Total times</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>62</b>

Looking at the above table, it is obvious that within the same category of activities, teachers paid more attention to boys. The number of boys asked to go to the front of the class to tell stories is twice as much as that number of girls (although it was voted that girls did this task better than boys). And when asking students for comments, teachers involved boys 4 times as many as girls. It is notable that these two activities are those that involve some measure of power and authority. Basing on the significance of boy's overwhelming, it can be inferred that when it comes to power and authority, teachers, consciously or not, assumed boys to need more training in this aspect than girls do. Also teachers interacted with boys in more activities than with girls. While teachers checked boys' books, addressed boys and talked to them in class, they did none of these activities with girls. While these two teachers generally believed that boys create more disciplinary problem, in fact they reminded girls and boys of discipline with equal frequency.

The feedbacks to the stories came from both students and teachers. They commented on the virtues of the characters (who were mostly males) as being kind-hearted, talented, understanding, bringing happiness to others, good at generating incomes, helpful to others, affectionate for children, good-natured. The teacher of grade 5, when summarizing the messages of the stories, praised the male character for his "dare-to-think / dare-to-do" spirit; his achievements of changing the backward farming practice of the region, making his family rich and bettering the life of the whole village. The teacher also reinforced that students need to learn from the determination of this male character. The described good traits of men involved both those emphasizing people relation (such as being kind, understanding, affectionate) and those putting men in the pioneer, independent positions. Since the Vietnamese culture appreciates community values, traits which promote people relation are considered desirable for both men and women. This may explain why male characters also possess traits which are seen as "feminine" by Western standards. As mentioned previously in the description of class observation, teachers when exposed to gendered text did not question or challenge the gender relation. Rather, they accepted and took it for granted. As males were often the main characters and set examples of good deeds in the stories, the teachers even reinforced these traits of males without paying attention to the under-representation of females.

Putting all these numbers and factors together, it is obvious that although the school created equal opportunities for students, teachers have stereotypical thinking of boys and girls and that belief was reflected in their behaviours with students.

### **5.1.3 Findings from interviews**

#### ***Findings from teachers' interviews***

Although my data come from 3 teachers in two different schools, I see no major differences among their answers either in their treatment with students, their attitudes to gender issues, or the characteristics of their students.

When describing the family background of their classes, the teacher from the urban school said that her students mostly came from medium-income to well-to-do families, though not necessarily very rich ones. According to her, most of the parents are office workers with decent incomes which enable them to support their children's education sufficiently.

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Although most of the students have general good life, there are still up to 3 or 4 students in her class with financial difficulty, or suffering from parents' divorce, or the loss of a parent. In the suburb school, basing on the dressing of the students and the way families cared for their children, the teachers anticipated that most students came from middle-income and poor-income families. There are also several cases of students who lost their parents, whose parents divorced or not living together. These children often live with their mothers or with their grandmothers. The teacher explained to me that this suburb area was generally not a wealthy area in which many residents did not have stable, waged occupations. Many people do petty trade or sell things in the open-air market. For some cases, the fathers are drug addicts, or imprisoned, and the mothers do petty trade. Students coming from such families suffer from especially difficult economic situation.

Describing the personalities of their students, most teachers emphasized that as there were more boys than girls in the class, the boys were more active and were more of trouble-makers than the girls. The teacher of grade 1 class described the girls as more talkative than the boys. But in the grade 5 class, the teacher claimed that girls in her class were a little too docile, too quiet, some were even very quiet and shy. She observed that unlike the girls from other class who were noisy, active, running, playing and having fun during breaks, girls from her class preferred to sit inside, playing quietly with some dolls, making clothes and dressing up some teddy bears. This teacher mentioned that she intentionally applied some measures to encourage and train these extremely quiet and shy students to be more confident and assertive.

When it comes to choosing the monitors of the classes, most teachers made the choice by themselves or latently directed the student's voting towards the students which teachers assumed to be suitable for the post. Teachers chose class monitors by themselves as they assumed primary school students were too young to make good decisions. The teacher in grade 5 explained:

Of course sometimes children vote for the proper person, but sometimes they vote according to their personal preference. If they like someone as a friend, they will vote for that person, but that person may be, in fact, incompetent. So, we need to be tactful, directing them into voting for those with competence.

The class monitors are often responsible for organizing the class when lining up, ordering the class to stand up to greet teachers, manage and keep an eye on the class when the teacher

is busy or absent, reporting to the teacher if problems occur. In the grade 5 class, the monitor also makes speeches and summarizes competition results among the groups in the class. Among the classes of these three teachers, two classes have female monitors. The teachers when choosing a class monitor based on criteria such as high academic ability, good ethical behaviours, class management ability, verbal fluency, and intelligent looks. No teacher mentioned gender as a criterion for choosing a class monitor.

Regarding to class activities, the grade 1 class is an exception as the students are too young to do any work. Thus, the teacher only requires them to do very simple tasks like cleaning and tidying up their own desks. The labour then is the same for both boys and girls. However, in older classes, teachers have different tasks for boys and girls. In one class, boys are supposed to manage the heavier jobs such as moving the furnitures, while girls do lighter jobs such as washing the board cloth, or cleaning the chalk board. In the other class, boys are requires to do jobs outside of the classrooms such as picking up litter on the school yards, taking care of the plants and flower beds, picking up grass. The girls are asked to do jobs inside the classroom such as cleaning the furnitures, the floor, the chalk board and windows, etc. The teacher of grade 5 became excited when she described to me how her allotments fit the boys' nature. "The boys, they are excited as they can go around. They are active so they don't like to sit in one place, they like to walk around on the school yard." Similarly, the girls are situated to work inside the classroom as they are more docile. When the boys finish their work, they come upstairs to help the girls with the cleaning and heavy jobs such as carrying water buckets<sup>11</sup>. Although the teacher observed that the boys also enjoyed the cleaning task when they assisted the girls, the teacher saw the girls as the main cleaners, and the boys only followed them.

It is obvious that classroom tasks involve sex-segregation of the students. Assigned tasks are to match with the assumed gender stereotyped characteristics of male and female students. Males are assumed to be physically stronger, so they are given the heavier jobs. Males are also thought to be more active and suitable for outdoor activities. On the other hand, females are seen as quiet, physically weak and docile. They are assumed to be suitable for indoor

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<sup>11</sup> In Vietnam, the usual procedure of cleaning classroom often involves filling buckets with water in the toilets, then carrying these buckets to the classroom. Students clean surfaces with a cloth then wash this cloth in the water. When the water gets dirty, students carry the buckets back to the toilets to discard the dirty water.

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tasks and tasks which do not involve much spacial movement. Their tasks, however, tend to require carefulness and attention to minor details (such as cleaning). These students by doing tasks in school would learn about conventional roles expected for them in the future. If they are boys, they will grow up to range and dominate the outdoor world, carrying out the heavy tasks. They may sometimes help the females but their roles indoor should remain as subordinate only. If they are girls, their place is indoor, minding the details and cleanliness of the interior. Girls would also learn that heavy jobs are beyond their capacity, and that they should refer to males for help. The teacher does not want to address the fact that the boys, as she describes, are just as interested in the cleaning jobs as wandering on the school yard. It is, in fact, possible to rotate the tasks between the boys and the girls, or ask them to share the same task together. Obviously, the teachers does not attempt to make a change because these tasks go along with what feels right for males and females rather than what students can actually do.

When asked about the appearance of students, all of the teachers claimed that they did not praise or make good examples of nice-looking students in front of the class. Rather, teachers appreciate hard-working, good-natured, and successful students. But two teachers, when asked about appearance, mentioned girls and not boys. It can be infered that they assumed girls to be more connected with physical beauty than boys.

All teachers reacted strongly when asked about cross-sex dressing or behaviours. All of them agree that it is necessary to make correction if students have any behaviours deviating from their gender's norms. One teacher mentioned that there was one boy in her class with similar problem. According to the teacher, this boy has a girlish voice and seldom plays with other boys. Sometimes he brings the dress-making game to class and play with girls. When he gets things not as he wants, he can cry easily. The teacher has attempted to 'correct' this boy's behaviours by encouraging him to mingle more with other boys, and asking his parents to dress him with extra-masculine clothes. She adds that this boy's problem is not a serious one, but anyway she finds it necessary to make 'correction'. Teachers' 'correction' measures often involve verbal encouragement that children should spend more time with their same-sex peers, and play games suitable for their sex. They tell the boys that these girl's games are feminine and are not for boys. Boys should be stronger and thus should play boy's games. For girls who like to play boy's games, teachers would say that these games can be dangerous (perhaps physically) to them. Their main concern is that these cross-sex games

can influence children's gender thinking in the future. Therefore, teachers all think 'correction' measures are for the benefit of the children.

When I assess student's activities that teachers consider inappropriate to their gender norms, I see that these activities do not necessarily pose any harm to the gender development of children. Activities such as boys playing with dolls and teddy bears, making clothes, crying easily, having unmasculine voice, or girls playing tumbling and rough action games, can be normal personal preferences and characteristics of individual children. The teachers assume that boys' masculinity and girls' femininity will be damaged if children involve too much with cross-sex games and peers. At this point, I see the traditional Vietnamese concepts of masculinity and femininity as the incentives for teachers' 'corrections'. In the Vietnamese eyes, masculinity does not include showing care for maternal entities (baby dolls), doing conventional female work (making dresses), and having soft personalities (crying, having girlish voice). Similarly, femininity does not involve harsh physical actions. Thinking about these children later in their adulthood, I wonder how men can be active in childcare when they are taught earlier in their life that childcare is against their masculine identity. Childcare is, of course, only one example of the so many options closed before males and females just because these options do not fit the conventional masculinity and femininity concepts. Is it now the time to start new concepts of masculinity and femininity in Vietnam, concepts which do not deprive males the right to be caring and females the right to be strong?

Furthermore, the teachers' encouragement of sex-segregation in playmates can actually deepen the existing gender stereotypes. Children are driven away from their chances to develop understanding of the other sex. As stated previously in the theory chapter, gender stereotypes are more rigid among males than among females. Mingling only with boys is the perfect situation for male stereotypes to escalate. Males, in fact, fall victims of their own self-expectations.

Teachers' reference to 'gender thinking' induces me to think further about homosexuality. Although homosexuality is now more accepted in many societies, it remains a controversial issue. In Vietnam, homosexuality is still prone to much social condemnation. It is understandable that teachers feel responsible to navigate their students away from homosexuality. The point is that their 'correction' efforts should not leave a feeling of being

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discriminated in students. In any case, students should not be stigmatized for their differences.

Although teachers have strong opinions and reactions in some gender aspects, they have similar general expectations for both boys and girls. They expect both to be well-behaved, diligent, helpful to others, obedient to teachers, innocent, reasonably active, intelligent, academically successful and set good example for others. For the ideal girls, beside the above traits, teachers add optional traits such as good-looking, well-dressed and verbally fluent. Teachers however stress that these optional traits are not important and not essential in evaluating girls.

When asked to match some traits to suitable gender, most teachers agree that both sexes can possess most of these traits. However, boys are seen to be more suitable for being independent, sloppy dressing and having leadership quality. One teacher adds that "boys accomplish quicker and better the given tasks". Girls are seen as more suitable for being dreamy, sensitive and competitive. One notable feature of this interview question is that it induces informants to think about gender equality. As teachers are aware of the necessity for girls and boys to be equal, it is not surprising that they give answers promoting equality. Still, there are traces of gender stereotypes in their answers, especially about the younger students.

When asked to evaluate the subjects in the school curriculum, most teachers agree that all the subjects are necessary for both sexes as they provide the basic knowledge. One teacher, however, says that it is a bit too difficult for boys to learn sewing and doing needlework, while it is a bit too difficult for girls to make assembling technical parts. She explains that needlework and sewing requires patience and skillfulness – qualities which are not available in every one, even girls. So she suggests that boys learn assembling parts and girls learn needlework because these tasks are "more suitable for their natures".

Of course, now it's equal between males and females. Males should also know how to sew a button, but it should go only as far as sewing a button. Asking them to learn even sewing is a bit too difficult for them. There are many good male tailors but not all the males like that job. ... It's also difficult for girls to assemble parts. In that period, they have to ask boys for help. There, boys and girls help each other during pairwork, or boys bring the assignment home to ask their mothers or sisters to help. So, it's just unavoidable. They can't do it by themselves.

This teacher shows that she is on the side of gender equality. Still, her suggestion points out that the equality that she supports should not surpass the traditional gender norms. This kind of 'half-way' equality may be the convenient excuse for perpetuating gender stereotypes.

When asked about anticipating future jobs of the best boys and girls in class, teachers assign them for jobs with equal status, such as: software programmer, engineer, or holding key positions at work for boys; teacher, doctor, lawyer for girls. It is understandable that teachers often want their students to achieve highly. Teachers also observe that in the current circumstance of Vietnam, both women and men actively participate in the labour market.

All the teachers strongly assert that family and career are equally important and inter-dependent on each other. They claim that it is imbalanced to emphasize one over the other, and that they direct their students into appreciating both. For them a person can not be considered successful if they do not have a happy family. However, one teacher says that it is difficult to achieve both successful family and career. When asked what if a man has to make a choice between these two, the teacher anticipates from her own viewpoint that the choice for a man would be career.

All the teachers claim that in teacher training there is no part concerning the images of females and males. One teacher suggests that perhaps there is a lack of concern about female and male images since primary school students are still too young to learn about them. Another teacher mentions the only part concerning females and males are about the psychology and physical differences in human body.

When asked about the difference between the old and the new textbooks concerning female and male images, no teacher pinpointed any concrete difference. One teacher asserts that there is no difference between these two versions of textbooks. She further comments that the images of both sexes have encompassed all the necessary qualities as examples for the students. Another teacher mentions there are some differences but these differences are not concrete. Another teacher sees that as females and males are now equal, there is no need to mention female and male images. Also, no teachers propose any change in the textbooks concerning female and male images. One suggests that maybe female and male images will be more clear-cut in the secondary school, but for primary school it is not yet necessary to separate those images. She claimed that secondary school would be a more suitable time to introduce changes regarding female and males images, if any action is to be done at all.



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Among the three teachers, one says she does not discuss about female and male images to her students, one says she does discuss and the last one says she discusses with students about the equality between men and women. For those who mention gender images, I see that while asserting women's equal positions to men, teachers agree totally with the textbooks and reinforce the messages of stories in the textbooks. There is strong consensus among the teachers that the new textbooks are rational and convenient to use. All the teachers are loyal to the content of the textbooks and do not have any questions or challenges against the textbooks.

For the last question about gender-unspecified characters, all teachers assert that they keep the characters as they are and do not give them a specific gender. However, one teacher adds that by observing the real life, students often think of "soldiers", "enemy", or "mandarin" as males. For animals, normally they see them as gender-unspecified characters.

The interviews with teachers lead me to some conclusions. On the bright side, all the teachers try to treat boys and girls as equal as they can. None of them exercise any discrimination or hold sex-based prejudice against their students. In class, they are aware of the necessary of gender equality and preach about examples of women having high status and holding key positions in the society. However, they still hold on to gender stereotypes, especially those concerning masculinity and femininity of students. All the teachers are not aware of the gender stereotypes present in the textbooks, and thus they never question or challenge the description of females and males in the stories. Rather, they are loyal to the content of the textbooks and reinforce these stories. The lack of critical attitude to the textbooks may be the reason why teachers do not see any concrete difference in gender issues between the old and the new textbooks.

### ***Findings from students' interviews***

My students informants have the age range from 6 to 11 years old. All the students say that they like the stories in the textbooks because they are interesting, having useful information, have similar contexts to reality. I see that no students suggest that they do not like the textbooks, maybe because they assume good students can not criticize the textbooks. Three students (two boys and one girl) mentioned the story "Louis Pasteur and the child" as their favourite story. They say they like it because it tells about the kindness of Louis Pasteur in saving the life of the child. Both Louis Pasteur and the child are male characters. Another

student mentioned the story "The hunter and the deer" in which the main character, the hunter, was also a male.

When asked to compare the characters to real life people, students give different ideas. Some students (both males and females) say that the characters in the stories are similar to real life in the sense that some are kind and some are cruel, just like real people. A boy adds that the settings of the stories are similar to the real circumstances. All students in general agree that there are some points in the stories that are not similar to real life. These points include the personalities of characters (however, they can not explain further which personalities these are). Students generally agree that one clear difference is in the fairy tales in which there are a lot of miracles and humanized animals. Apart from this obvious point, students find it difficult to pinpoint why the stories are different from real life. Giving explanation is especially challenging for younger students who think simply that stories are different from real life just because they are different.

When asked about their future jobs, students became very interested and excited. Some started to smile when describing their favourite jobs. I see that even in the class interview, students see that this question does not relate to their lesson so they have more freedom to give their own answers in front of the teachers. A lot of arms are raised to answer my question and students seem much less timid than in the previous two questions. Many jobs are proposed by boys and girls which can be summarized as followed.

- **Boys' jobs:** doctor (to cure diseases for parents and siblings), engineer (to build house for parents), office worker (to work in offices and to be able to travel a lot as he will go on business trips), computer programmer, policeman (to catch criminals).

- **Girls' jobs:** business person (to have money), policewoman (to fight with criminals), journalist (can learn about lots of things and ask questions to foreigners), diplomat (to make relations and transactions with other countries and widen her knowledge), foreign expert (to have money to help parents and siblings), fashion designer (as she loves fashion and has sense of beauty), study abroad in English, translator, shop-keeper (because her mother is also a shop-keeper).

I see that while boys stick to the conventional male jobs, many girls express their wish to enter male's occupational domains. As both boys and girls see that conventional male's jobs

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tend to possess more privileges and prestiges (financial security, travelling opportunities, knowledge gain, status of actors), most of them opt for jobs in this range. I also see that even for very young children, their observation of the world has an impact on their career choice. A grade 1 girl chooses to be a shop-keeper as she observes that her mother is a shop-keeper. Role modelling obviously has an influential effect on this girl. This finding induces me to think that if we try to expose children to a world free of gender stereotypes as much as we can (may it be literatures, storybooks, classroom tasks, etc), we can make some positive effects on their thinking.

When asked about what jobs women and men can do, I see that students think quite seriously when giving answers. For grade 5 students, they have just had a lesson about gender equality recently, so some of them seem to recall what they are taught and give answers accordingly. Students come up with a list of jobs for women and men that they think suitable for each sex.

### ***Women's jobs***

- Teachers – both girls and boys agree that women should be teachers because women are kind-hearted, have more patience for young children and can easily convince stubborn students. As there were three teachers standing in the class interview, I suspected that students said so partially to please them.
- When a teacher asked about other jobs that women can do besides being a teacher, a boy asserts that women can do all the jobs as men do. He gives examples of policewoman, engineer, accountant and he reasons that now men and women are equal to each other. Following this idea, a girl said that women can do all men's jobs but they should avoid "too heavy" jobs because they need to do work at home too and that they are weak.
- A grade 5 girl does not give a concrete job but says that women can do whatever jobs they want to. She explains that women who get good education can work in big companies and can take jobs with much responsibility.
- Singer – both boys and girls suggest that women can be good singers because women's voice is better, clearer, softer and smoother than men's voice. A girl adds that women's voice does not get coarse during puberty. One boys gives a counter comment that boys in his class have better voice than girls. However, he does not take his own comment into account and also support the idea that women make better singers.

- Other jobs proposed for women: Air hostess, fashion model, tailor, cook, doctor, dancer (due to women's more beautiful figures).

### ***Men's jobs***

- Doctor – men can think quickly which medicine to give to patients. But boys add that male doctors should not make operation because their hands are too stiff. Girls add that men should be doctor as they do not get scared, and that they have keen eyes and ears. Boys sum up that in general men are more intelligent and better than women so they should be doctors.

- Pilot – men can control airplanes because their hands are strong and that controlling airplanes require accuracy. The girls who proposes this idea also adds that women have weak hands and implies that women therefore can not do this job as well as men can. When I ask them if women can be pilots, they say 'yes, but only seldom'.

- Other jobs proposed for men: Policeman (because men are strong), businessman, waiter (this job is proposed by a girl), football player, sportman (because men are strong), chief director and vice director of company (because men can do management job), artist, musician (because men can write music and have rich imagination), architect, work in construction area, teacher.

When I ask students about some unconventional case in which men work as nurses or women as policewomen, some students say "it is not very nice" for a man to be a nurse, and they add "it's okay, maybe later this male nurse can become a doctor." When I ask if a female nurse can become a doctor as well, they say "yes" and explain that anyone can be successful and promoted if they do a good job whole-heartedly.

After comparing the number of jobs proposed for women and those for men, I see that the number of concrete jobs for men outnumber those for women with the ratio 11/8.

Furthermore, most of the concrete jobs proposed for women have lower status, basing on some physical features such as body figures or voice (singer, dancer), or are extension of housework (tailor, cook). These jobs mostly do not require much knowledge and high education. When assigning jobs for women, students base heavily on conventional feminine traits such as gentle, connected with children, weak, having good figures and voice, taking care of others' needs. Although some students argue that women can do jobs just like men, they assume housework is still mainly women's responsibility. It is the case that women are

welcomed to step into males' domains but males are not willing to do the same into women's domains and share housework. In this case, with the newly-gained 'equality', women double their workload.

Most of the proposed jobs for men, on the other hand, are of high status, requiring physical strength or much education and training. These jobs reflect intensively the conventional norms that males are fast-thinking, brave, creative, accurate, intelligent, better than women in high-responsible positions, stronger, businesslike, good at sport, having leadership and management quality. When assigning these jobs for men, some students make their choice on the basis that men are superior and more respectful than women. This attitude is expressed straightforwardly and from both boys and girls. It is worth noting that when comparing the amount of sex-typed attitude, I find that grade 5 students have the highest awareness of gender equality. I also see a connection between their gender attitude and the curriculum because in grade 5 they have one lesson about gender equality and paying respect to women. The textbook obviously can make a major impact on students' thinking, even with merely one lesson.

After reviewing students' answers, I see a contradiction in girls' favourite future jobs for themselves and the suitable jobs they propose for women in general. Thinking about themselves, most girls are willing to do male's jobs with high income and social prestige. But when thinking about women as a group (at this point I see that girls normally exclude themselves from this general mass), their gender stereotypes come into rule. The proposed list of women's jobs are by far inferior and more conventional than the favourite job list. Boys, in both lists, give similar answers, which indicates strong stereotypical attitudes in both self-expectation and gender beliefs. By putting these two job lists together, I mean to show how stereotypes of women can distort children's thinking, especially female's thinking. Despite of the wish to maximize their own potentials, most children still view the occupational world through gender-stereotyped lens in which men are superior to women.

## **5.2 Findings of textbooks analysis**

### **5.2.1 Description of story textbooks**

The stories that I analyze are from both story textbooks of grade 1 and 5 and stories from Vietnamese language textbooks for grade 1 and 5. Before the textbook reform, students read stories from the story textbooks which are collections of more than 30 stories per textbook. After the reform of textbook and teaching methodology, the story reading section is merged into the Vietnamese language textbook. Now the stories are scattered in the textbooks. I see that in general, the new stories have more simplified and shorter content than those in the previous version. Some stories in the old version are also present in the new version. But most of the stories in the new version are new ones. For my analysis, I choose 10 stories in each textbook as my samples. The total number of my stories for analyzing is 40 stories including:

- 10 stories in old story textbook 1
- 10 stories in old stories textbook 5
- 10 stories in Vietnamese language textbook 1 (new)
- 10 stories in Vietnamese language textbook 5 (new)

### **5.2.2 Findings of gender patterns in old and new textbooks**

The findings of gender patterns in textbooks are presented in Table 2 as followed. The findings are based on the criteria for textbook analysis. The criterion 'Actions of Characters' will not be present in this finding list as this criterion is for detecting the amount of activeness and types of activities characters involve in. The result of this criterion is merged into the result of 'Attributes of Characters' and 'Dichotomies'. As results for 'Dichotomies' are more complicated than those of other criterion, I present them in a separate table.

**Table 2. Findings of gender patterns in old and new textbooks (40 stories).**

Categories	In Old Textbooks		In New Textbooks	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Titles of stories</b>	3	4	0	4
<b>Authors of stories</b>	2	5	1	3
<b>Focused Relations</b>	daughter – step mother; about a male celebrity (4); son(s) – parent(s) (3); boy – holy figure; male friend – male friend; male teacher – male students; husband – wife (2); mother – children; king – male citizen; brother –brother; animal – animal (2); daughter – mother; male human – demon		male hero – enemy; about a male celebrity, American male soldiers – Vietnamese citizens; professor – students; human (hunter) – animal; male doctor – male patient; male country leader – officers; male military general – king; female monitor – male classmates; friends – friends; teacher – student; tyrant (predator) – ordinary animals (prey); brother - brother	
<b>Themes of stories</b>	Family relation (8); Social relation (8); About celebrity (4)		Social relations (12); Country defense (3); Vietnam war; Nation building; Family relation; Protecting the environment; Healthcare	
<b>Occupations of characters</b>	doing countryside chore, petty trade seller, shepherd, making garment.	king, mandarin, scholar, professor, student, farmer, charcoal-burner, labourer, prince, carpet-weaver, military student, scientist, teacher, merchant, writer, medical	teacher, student, class monitor, game referee	revolutionary activist, coal picker, soldiers, war veterans, pilots, medical professor, medical student, king, mandarin, monk, hunter, doctor, scientist, party leader, petroleum seller,

		practitioner, hunter, warrior		judge, thief, millitary general, shepherd, warrior, farmer
<b>Status of characters</b>	High status (fairy, princess)  Low status (villain, ordinary people)	High status (king, celebrity, prince, leader, holy lord, hero, mandarin)  Low status (ordinary people, villain)	High status (class monitor, judge)  Low status (victim, ordinary person)	High status (national hero, rescuer, king, celebrity, mandarin, country leader, famous millitary general, saint)  Low status (ordinary person, victim)
<b>Settings of stories</b>	countryside, palace, school, house, village, robbers' den, university, forest, sea, mountain, island, battlefield, field		house, rice field, forest, village, battlefield, garden, island, pasture, countryside region, mountain, medical institute, office, open-air market, mandarin's office, palace, school, playground	
<b>Genres of stories</b>	Vietnamese folk tale, Vietnamese tale, Old tale, Contemporary, Fable		fable, old tale, Vietnamese folk tale, Vietnamese tale, contemporary	
<b>Number of Characters</b>	23	50	11	47
<b>Main characters</b>	3	13	1	12
<b>Attributes of characters</b>				
<b>Good traits</b>	hard-working, docile, beautiful, love and respect parents, not be defeated easily, kind-hearted,	loyal, (teacher) love students, simple, modest, caring, keeping dignity, calm, attached to friend,	affectionate to child, gentle, care for emotion of others, hospitable, hard-working,	patriotic, quick-witted, clever, intellectual, overcome hardship and danger, protective, brave,



	<p>good-natured, intelligent, love, support and connect to children, love labour, having awareness of equality, modest, straightforward, emotional, respect son, caring, gentle and responsible for children, graceful</p>	<p>happy to find friend, tactful, grateful to friend, affable, have self-respect, decisive, not attracted by benefit and fame, upright man, generous, docile, respect others' property, impartial, educated, helpful to friends, trustable, attached to teacher, honest, love reading, talented, have passion in scientific research, wise, gentle, respectful, know right and wrong, obedient to mother, help mother, responsible for family, overcome class difference, patient, skillful, lucky, quick-witted, respect wife, caring for others, love and respect parents, hard-working, helping parents, thirst for studying, intelligent, excellent student, creative, successful, intellectual, promoted, awarded, patriotic, have important contribution to the nation, famous for academic</p>	<p>intelligent, careful, neat, understanding, up-and-coming, respected</p>	<p>strong-willed, respected, straightforward, artistic (can play musical instrument), affectionate, powerful, have conscience, enduring, determined, decisive, talented in science, responsible, gentle, tactful, has initiatives, clever, ingenious, have supernatural force, care about the welfare of common people, put aside personal hatred for the benefit of the nation, have piety to parents, sincere, modest, caring for friends, understanding, honest, impartial</p>
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		result, genius, wide knowledge, experienced, strict with son, strong-willed, diligent, good at generating income, economical, wealthy, responsible for children, fit, appreciate labour, proud of son, optimistic, confident		
<b>Bad traits</b>	spoilt, good-for-nothing, cunning, weak, passive, sneaky, envious, cruel, can murder, liar, stupid, indulge and spoil children, mean, calculating, do not have as good personalities as husband, look down on poor people, do not appreciate friendship, cruel-speaking, disrespect husband's friend, show anger explicitly, be annoyed, grumble over husband, inhospitable, disrespect husband, unbearable, do not correct her mistake, insult husband and husband's friend,	weedy, hated, greedy, impatient, disobedient, disrespectful, punished, not deserve to be human, naughty, bully others, ugly, bad handwriting, lazy, spoilt, stupid		violent, cruel, cold-hearted, slow, nitpicking, talkative, sloppy, careless, have rude manners, cunning, fierce, stupid, greedy

	emotionally weak, pessimistic, dependent on husband			
<b>Personalities &amp; Emotions</b>	scared, easy to cry, listen to others, do not brainstorm, naïve, like dressing up, feel sorry for themselves, do not want children to undergo hardship, submissive to husband, demanding, has some power on son, listen to male, do not care adequately or discover son's talent, remorse	want to be fit and handsome, feel sorry for himself, pitiful, indignant, physically strong, sad, angry, remorseful, neatly dressed, separate himself from family due to his own wish.	thin, small, short, quiet, sweaty	quiet, persistent, can appreciate beauty, small, shy, confused, fast, physically strong, proud, self-confident, satisfied, sweaty, thirsty, hungry, happy, furious, quick, frustrated
<b>Situations &amp; Activities</b>	orphan, older women have more power on younger women, victimized, do housework, do petty trade, make food, manage household, at home, provide drinks, receive guest, maintain relation, having private property and these property becomes her husband's after she gets married, is the one to pull family back together	luxurious, high-ranking, thin, sturdy, bearing big responsibility, in charge of educating talented people for country, become rich, put much effort into writing books, has lots of property, be closest friend, orphan, be famous scientist, discover talent in nephew, eldest in the village, has magic, inherit fortune, have power over wife and children,	victimized, shot, and killed, wounded, attached to maternal roles (breastfeeding, pregnant), be the judge, not involve in playing game, feel sorry for others	be famous doctor, have respectful behaviours and manners, considered saint, leaders of army, victimized, are close friend, manage nation's matters, lord over others, challenge others, change opinions

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		have ambition in son, engaged in leisure activities, come from poor family, sick, hungry, has authority, rich, worry for friend, powerful, have leadership power, the maintenance of the male's leadership (e.g. kings passing on the throne to the eldest son) is supposed to be a honourable tradition, male is the head of household therefore the family has to follow male, the fate of family depends on the fate of male, in charge of supplying main resources for family (food, shelter), generate work for family member, at pioneer position		
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### ***Some points for discussion***

Looking at table 2, I see that among the 26 focused relations, there are 15 relations focusing solely on males. Only 3 focused relations are mainly about females (daughter-mother; daughter-step mother; mother-children). Compared to the old textbooks, the focused relations in the new stories are more various, reflecting the more contemporary society with a range of different occupations and human relations involved in those occupations. The new stories also cover more themes reflecting the complex life of modern society. Themes like environment protection, healthcare, Vietnam war are contemporary issues which are not available in the ancient time.

About occupations of characters in the old textbooks, male characters obviously have a significant wider range of occupations than female characters. Males' occupations allow them to traverse away from home, penetrate into social arena and also relate much more to education, social status, finance, physical strength, craft skills, and creativity. Most of females' occupations revolve around the household and are extension of conventional housework. Looking at these occupation patterns of male and female characters, students learn that most women are without an occupation or work in very restricted range of jobs. Men, on the other hand, have many more and better career options to choose from. In the new textbooks, despite the fact that more stories are about modern and contemporary society, females' occupations are still severely underrepresented. Although female are not described in conventional occupations, their occupations are tightly restricted compared to males'.

Regarding status of characters, I see that the number of high status that female characters possess is fewer and less varied than the status of male characters. Also, some high status of females are earned through the connection with males (an ordinary girl gets married to a prince and becomes a princess). These women have an up-lift in their position as benefit from their dependence on males and not from their own merit. In the new textbooks, although females are described in both low and high status, they are outnumbered by males by the high status males possess. Males are generally in higher status than females and males' high status are more various than females'.

When it comes to genres of stories, I see that many stories in the new textbooks are about animals, a topic and genre which is often gender neutral and time-unspecific. There are more stories about contemporary periods in the new textbooks than in the old ones.

In the old textbooks, the number of female characters is actually less than half of the male characters. In most individual stories, I also see that the number of female characters are usually less than that of male characters. In some stories, there is an absolute void of female characters. However, in the new textbooks, the number of males is actually more than 4 times that of females. Obviously, females are severely underrepresented in these 20 new stories.

Although not all stories have a main character, I count the number of male main characters in the old textbooks is 13. The number of female main characters is 3. This imbalance between males and females as main character shows that most stories are told from male's perspective, centering on males, and for males' benefit. The situation is even worse in the new textbooks. Among these 20 new stories, the number of female main characters is 1. The number of male main characters is 12. This sole female main character exists because among the 20 new stories, there is one about gender equality and this story asserts that girls can be good and respectable class monitors just as boys. This shocking imbalance between the number of female and male main characters points to fact that the slogan for gender equality is present in the curriculum, but its actual support is not there.

In the old textbooks, female characters are described with more bad traits than male characters. These bad traits involve their negative personalities and their negative attitudes. Especially, many of their bad traits are negative attitudes toward their husbands and husband's friend. In these stories, women are judged basing on their relation with others, particularly with their husband. Their situations and activities also revolve around only conventional housework. In one story, the woman's private properties automatically become her husband's belongings after their marriage. In this same story, this woman is depicted as a bad character for disrespecting her husband and her husband's friend. It can be read between the lines that a woman is perceived negatively if she does not show submissiveness to her husband despite that she has shared ownership of her property to him. Females are also described to depend heavily on males (e.g. husband) for their survival. In one story, when the husband was exiled to a deserted island, the wife was automatically exiled together with

him. This detail shows clearly the assumption that the wife (as well as children) have to follow the husband and share his punishment even if the wife has done nothing wrong herself.

On the other hand, male characters possess far more good traits and far less bad traits than female characters. Their good traits, situations and activities reflect their authority both inside and outside of their family, their mental qualities and talents, and high social status. None of their activity involves participation in housework. Males are described as doing important tasks, having much responsibility at national level. Women are in charge at household level. In the difficult situations, males are the ones to have initiatives and take the pioneer action, whereas females are the followers. Males are described to be brave and optimistic while females are scared and pessimistic. A male in a story can freely break away from the family by his own wish. His wife, on the contrary, is the one to ask him to come back. The attributes attached to male and female characters in the 20 stories of the old textbooks show strongly stereotyped gender patterns which favour males and downplay females excessively.

Female characters in the new stories are described with no bad traits. Males are described with both good and bad traits but the good traits clearly outnumber the bad ones, and also outnumber the good traits of females. In all categories, females are described with less detail than males. The personalities and situations of females are also not as positive as those of males.

### ***Findings of gender patterns in 'Dichotomies'***

Although dichotomies do not apply to all 20 stories (e.g. some criteria may not be present in some stories, or some stories have only male characters/gender-unspecific characters and can not form dichotomies between males and females), I summarize the findings of dichotomies in Table 3 as followed.

**Table 3. Dichotomies in Old and New Textbook (40 stories)**

Dichotomies	In Old Textbooks		In New Textbooks	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Active - Passive</b>	Active + Passive (3); passive (3); make less action; less active	Active (6); make more action (2); more active; make less action but active	Passive (2); less active (3)	Active (4); more active
<b>Inside - Outside</b>	Inside + outside (2); inside (5); more inside (2), outside	Inside + outside (2); outside (8); more outside	Inside (2); outside (3)	Outside (5)
<b>Strong – Weak (Physically)</b>	Beauty	Carry out heavy manual labour, supernatural strength	Weak, not mention physical strength	Strong, fast, disable
<b>Positive – Negative (Mental features)</b>	Positive (5) Negative (4)	Positive (10) Negative (3)	Positive (4)	Positive (4) Negative (3)
<b>High – Low (Status)</b>	Lower (ordinary people, obey males, depend on males for survival, take advice from males)	Higher (king, prince, mandarin, celebrity, hero, make decisions, give orders, give advices)	Higher (monitor) Lower (victim, ordinary)	Higher (rescuer, hero, famous scientist); Lower (ordinary students)
<b>Have – Have not (Property)</b>	Less property or money	More property and money	Have house, ice-cream, baby	Have weapons, aeroplanes, documents, laboratory, house



### *Some points for discussion*

#### Active – Passive:

In the old textbooks, females are generally described to be more passive than males. In 3 stories, females are described in some part as active and in some part as passive. In those cases, females can make significant amount of actions; however, if these actions do not come from females' own opinions but rather from the influence or impact of others, they are still regarded as passive actions. In other stories, females are described to be only moderately active and while females occasionally have their own initiatives, the amount of actions they make is much less than that of males. In 3 stories, females are clearly passive compared to males. In 6/20 stories, there is no female characters or the female characters are so subordinate that none of their action is described.

The male characters are described to be more active than females. When both males and females play active roles in the stories, the males are often more active than the females. More males' actions are described than females' actions. Even when males make less actions, they are still more often in the actor's role (making their own decisions, not be influenced by others) than females.

In the new textbook, females are described to be both passive and active. But compared to males, the amount of actions females make is still much less than that of males. Males in general are portrayed to be active and more active than females.

#### Inside – Outside:

In the old textbooks, in most stories, females are described to be within or around the house, or spend more of their time indoor than males. Males, on the contrary, are described to be significantly outside.

In the new textbooks, females are portrayed as spending more of their time outside than inside, which is a positive feature. Their locations outside the house include: school, playground, and medical institute (mother taking son to see the doctor). I see that young females are described to enjoy more freedom from the stereotypical obligations than older females. However, males are still described as spending most of their time outside of the

home. Although now females, especially the young ones, have stepped out of the house, males are not yet ready to step in and share housework.

Strong - Weak:

For females in the old textbooks, their emphasized and praised physical feature is the physical beauty. No female characters are described with significant physical strength. Males' physical strength is, on the contrary, mentioned repeatedly. Their fitness is reflected through the heavy manual labour that they carry out, or through outright praise and description of male heroes' supernatural power.

Females in the new textbooks are still viewed in the conventional way as physically unfit and still stay out of physical games and sports. Males are clearly still described as the stronger sex, although now it is accepted that there are exceptional cases of imperfect males' health.

Positive – Negative (mental features):

In the old textbooks, while the negative features of females and males are approximately the same, males are described with twice as many good mental features as females. This dominance may lead readers to generalize that males in these stories are superior to females mentally.

In the new textbooks, females are described without negative features. Males are described to possess both negative and positive features though the good features outnumber the bad ones.

High – Low (status):

When comparing the status of male and female characters in the old textbooks, I see that in general males have higher status than females. Males' superiority may manifest in the form of social class (males as prince/king/mandarin/celebrity – females as ordinary people), in physical strength (males as hero), authority (males make decisions/orders – females obey), generating livelihood (females depend on males for survival), wisdom (males give advice – females take advice).

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However, there are also a few cases when males and females are at equal positions. In those situations, females escalate from the position of ordinary people to be queens/ princesses/ fairies. In another story, the wife has most of the property in the household, and therefore she has some power over her husband. In another case, the woman is at a lower social class than the man but she does not see it as an obstacle and considers herself as equal to the man. Also, in 2 stories, the females has some power over males when they are the mothers of these males.

In the new textbooks, females, in general, are still at lower status than males. However, females start to be recognized occasionally in higher social position than males, which is a good signal.

Have – Have not (property):

In the old textbooks, females characters usually possess less property or money than the male characters. In some stories, while males are described with property, females' property is not mentioned. One woman' property even automatically becomes their husband's after they get married. In one story, the female's property is given to her by her husband. Compared to females, males possess more property and produce more property by themselves as well. Males' property is mentioned with higher frequency in the stories. It is also a fact that as males are often the breadwinner and heads of the household, therefore they are often the owner of the household property. In Vietnamese culture, although managing the family matters and keeping tract of expenditures is often women's responsibility, making important decisions and ownership of the property is the men's monopoly. Males also appear more often in high positions which ensure the possession of significant property (king, prince, mandarin).

I the new textbooks, females still tend to have less property than males and these property are conventional and of less financial values than those of males. Males' properties, furthermore, show their high academic and social status.

***Some extra notes about the old and new textbooks***

I realize that the stories in the old textbooks depict a variety of family patterns: separated parents with children, single-mother with children, nuclear family with husband and wife, nuclear family with parents and sons, orphan son, single men, orphan girl and step-mother.

Among these family patterns, I see that women often appear in the role of wives and mothers. Vietnamese culture values highly the role and values of family, thus most characters are seen in their family relationships. Yet, some men appear as bachelors. No story among these 20 ones is about a bachelor woman.

The stories in the new textbooks cover the following family patterns: bachelor man, nuclear family with parents and a child, nuclear family with husband and wife. There is still no description of a female bachelor.

As many stories depict animals, males are described as the representative of human race in contrast to animals. This false description has ignore completely women as half of the human race. In a story about country defense, the male character is also portrayed as the representative of national defending force. In fact, Vietnamese women always have an active role in any struggle and uprising in the history. Stories like this one has, by some way, denied the important contributions and sacrifice of Vietnamese women in the cause of nation defense and building.

When describing the humanized animal world, the fierce predators and strong, leader animals are always depicted as males. Such a gender-labelling obviously leads students to believe that males are always the stronger and leading ones. Gender-labelling of animals may therefore fuel the development of gender stereotypes in students.

### **5.3 Summary**

The 20 stories of the old story textbooks are highly stereotyped against women both quantitatively and qualitatively. Women are underrepresented in stories and when they are present, they are depicted mostly in conventional ways and at lower positions than men. There is a complete void of female role models in male's domains as well as males participation into unconventional tasks.

The new story textbooks are indeed even more stereotyped quantitatively than the old textbooks. Females are severely underrepresented and are almost invisible as the main characters. Many stories have a complete void of female characters. In most stories, events revolve around the males, about the males and are for the males. The new textbooks focus

more on recent history and are concerns more with contemporary social issues. As gender equality is one of the highlighted contemporary matters, the textbooks do attempt to address women's increasing social status. Women are described more outside of the house, and occasionally holding unconventional positions. However, as gender issues include both males and females, attention has been paid only to women's entering the public sphere and penetrating males' conventional domains. Males' participation into the private sphere of the home and childcare is left untouched. This imbalanced approach of promoting gender equality eventually does more harm than good to women. It does not solve the problem of women's underrepresentation and even puts more work burden on women's shoulders.

## 6. Chapter 6. Conclusion

I would like to refer back to the three research questions posed at the beginning of this research.

- How are females and males depicted in the story textbooks? Are their images stereotyped?
- Is there a significant change in the amount of gender stereotypes in the newly-renovated textbooks, compared to the previous ones?
- How stereotyped are the teachers? How do they react to the gender issues in the textbooks in their teaching?

After analyzing the old and new versions of the story textbooks, conducting class observations and interviews with teachers and students, I am now able to answer these above questions.

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

Both males and females are portrayed in highly stereotypical ways in the story textbooks. Females are underrepresented and attached to conventional tasks. They are also positioned at lower status than males. Males, on the other hand, are described in far more details and to have a much wider range of occupations. In both the new and the old textbooks, males are the representatives for human in contrast to the animal world. In the animal world, the strong, dangerous, leading animals and predators (e.g. tiger, lion) are described as males. Such gender stereotypes in the metaphoric level can teach students to make generalization through the gendered lens. They therefore carve deeply into students' mind.

Regarding the cause of gender stereotypes, I see that the textbooks, particularly the old ones, reflect strong Confucian ideologies. Confucian teachings correspond with features such as: women belonging to the private sphere and remaining within the home; women being the ones to take care of family members and doing housework; women being unable to manage important tasks; women deserving condemnation and punishment for being unsubmitive to husbands. The reason for this compliance with Confucianism may lie in the fact that most

stories in the old textbooks are about ancient and feudal time – the period when Confucianism dominates.

However, in the new textbooks, where many stories are about the contemporary society, the situations for females are not much different. Confucianism may not be the only culprit for gender stereotypes in the textbooks. Regarding the discourse theory, males are constructed as the "self" and females as the "other". As seen in both the old and new textbooks, the number of male main characters significantly outnumbers female ones. This dominance shows that stories are written more from males' perspectives, and for males' benefit. As the 'self' often favours his 'in-group' and downplays the 'other', males are often depicted as the 'agents' while females are the 'victims'. This is true for both the old and new textbooks in which males hold prestigious and key positions (e.g. king, hero, celebrity) while females are often portrayed as victims (e.g. scared, wounded, killed, inferior to males). As males are the center of the stories, they have the freedom to dominate the public sphere whereas females are locked inside the private sphere of the home. The remedy may be addressing females more as the 'self', putting them more at the focus of the stories and increasing the number of females and female main characters in the stories. By viewing the stories from female's perspectives, females' identities and benefit will get more attention and appreciation.

There are some differences in gender patterns in the new textbooks compared to the old ones. However, I can not claim that the new story textbooks demonstrate less gender stereotypes than the old ones. In fact, by quantity, females are underrepresented twice as much as in the old textbooks. In the old textbook, the ratio of females over males is twenty three over fifty, which means the total number of females is half that of males. In the new textbooks, this ratio drops to eleven over forty seven, which means the number of females is only less than one fourth that of males. In the aspect of female's representation, the new textbooks are even more stereotyped than the old ones.

Another difference between the old and the new textbooks is that while the old stories are mostly about the ancient time, the new stories are more about the contemporary time. Characters in the old stories live in more traditional society while those in the new stories live in more modern society. Therefore, females in the new stories are described to step outside the home and participate into the public sphere. However, while female characters make this progressive move, males characters still remain in the conventional positions.

Males are still mostly outside of the home and do not activate their roles inside the home nor do they contribute to the housework and childcare. Females therefore are now expected to manage both household matters and social work to support the family. The amount of work for females indeed has doubled. In short, while Confucian influence in the new textbooks has diminished, females are still perceived as the 'other' and males as the 'self'. The only difference is that the 'other' now has even more burden on her shoulders than before.

I find that teachers do not discriminate students basing on their gender. Teachers see boys and girls as equal and have similar expectations for both of them. However, teachers still have stereotypical thinking, especially when it concerns students' masculinity and femininity. Having clear ideas of what it means to be boys and girls, teachers see it as a red flag and attempt to make 'correction' when students go across the dividing line of the conventional norms for their sexes. In delivering the lessons, this stereotypical thinking clearly affects the way teachers treat boys and girls. Boys receive much more attention, and are more often assigned with power-related tasks.

According to Hewstone (1989), the first method of changing stereotypes is the individualization technique – which focuses on the individual characteristics of each outgroup member. When appointing students to leadership positions, teachers take into account students' individual personalities and academic performance, not their gender. Teachers also do not praise openly students for the advantage of their sex (e.g. physical beauty). This indicates that teachers, in general, have understanding of students in their class as individuals with unique qualities. Therefore, teachers are doing well in the first method of reducing gender stereotypes.

However, for the second method – the contact hypothesis, which advocates increasing direct contact with outgroup members (Hewstone 1989), teachers seem to go against reducing stereotypes. In assigning labour tasks, most teachers deliberately separate girls and boys. Tasks are allotted basing on the assumed gendered personalities of boys and girls (e.g. boys are active and physically strong whereas girls are docile, quiet and weak). As a matter of fact, not all boys are more active or stronger than girls, and not all girls are more passive and weaker than boys. But somehow, through the assignment of tasks, girls and boys are pressed to conform their self-perception to the conventional assumptions. Regarding the contact hypothesis, this sex-segregation in tasks takes away chances for students to develop



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understanding of individuals from the opposite sex.. Furthermore, it is likely that students observe teachers' behaviours and internalize teachers' stereotypes into their own thinking.

The third way to reduce gender stereotypes is to convince people that they will benefit more by going against the traditional norms (Hewstone 1989). Teachers, in fact, are doing the opposite. They believe that students benefit more from conforming to the traditional norms. For example, teachers encourage boys to play boy's games and mingle with other boys. When correcting students' cross-sexed preference or behaviours, teachers give the reason that the 'correction' is for students' own benefit. Teachers, however, do not see that forcing students to suppress their own preferences and personalities or building stereotyped images of females and males are unbeneficial to students.

I also find out that teachers are without critical attitudes to the textbooks and are not aware of the gender stereotypes in the textbooks. Instead, they adopt the approach of being loyal to the textbooks. None of the teachers in my research intend to challenge or question the textbooks. For them, the textbooks are like the Bible which is always right. Consequently, all teachers agree with and reinforce the messages of the textbooks. Even though the stories carry such an enormous amount of sexism, teachers are silent to the existing stereotypes.

When interviewing students, I realize that they (especially the younger students) hold strong stereotypes about men and women. Some boys and girls even pronounce frankly that men are superior to women. It is apparent that students need some help to reduce their own sexist stereotypes which they carry from home to school. Unfortunately, they will not get much assistance from either the textbooks or the teachers. Although the time line of gender development points out that it is best to combat gender stereotypes at young ages, none of the teachers in my research see it as necessary to block gender stereotypes in primary school age. They claim that secondary school would be a more suitable time, if any action is to be done at all.

In all, the old textbooks are strongly stereotyped. The new ones, given the circumstances of the modern Vietnamese society and the international commitments to provide gender equality, still fail to free themselves from sexism. Gender stereotypes in the new textbooks do not decrease but rather transfer themselves into more complex and perhaps more serious forms. Both the teachers and students have stereotypical thinking and believe that there is no need to make changes. All the findings indicate that there is a serious problem with gender

stereotypes in the story textbooks for grade 1 and 5. Teachers' uncritical acceptance of the textbook content is just the signal showing that changes are desperately necessary, and urgent actions are needed.

## **6.2 Implication for Policy Change**

As mentioned previously, Michel (1986) states that the first sign of sexism is the presence of stereotypes, and the second sign of sexism is the uncritical attitude to the stereotypes. These two signs are present in both the textbooks and the teachers in my research. Consequently, gender-related improvements are needed in both textbooks and teachers. The textbooks as well as the teacher training will be the key factors in combating gender stereotypes. As both teachers and students follow the textbook strictly, the textbooks can re-direct their thinking in a gender-progressive direction. This research finds that students can have significantly less gendertyped attitudes after they are exposed to the ideas of gender equality. Therefore, the textbooks will be an effective tool in reducing gender stereotypes if they free themselves from gender-typed stories and, furthermore, teach students to be critical to gender stereotypes.

For the teachers, it is not easy to change their attitudes. When people have grown up with some fixed concepts of what men and women are supposed to be, they can not shake off these beliefs overnight. The teachers need some assistance to reduce their own gender stereotypes and learn to adopt a fighting spirit for gender equality which benefits both themselves and their students. I assume the teacher training would provide such assistance. Since the textbook reform is to meet the requirement of Education For All and the commitments for gender equality, it should manifest a sense of gender equality in both the textbook contents and the teacher training. In reality, teachers report that gender issues are completely absent in their training to teach the new books. The lack of attention to gender issues is definitely the missing link in this textbook reform.

## **6.3 Implications for future research**

Gender stereotypes require males and females to comply to the traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity which no longer fit in the modern Vietnamese society. Therefore,

new research is needed to construct Vietnamese new concepts of masculinity and femininity which are suitable to the Vietnamese social contexts. These new concepts should allow and encourage both females and males to freely develop their potentials and personalities. In these new concepts, males should feel their masculine side in caring for their family members and sharing housework. And females should be respected and encouraged to strive for high social positions. Vietnamese culture originally has matriarchal elements and in the history there are many examples of Vietnamese heroic women and even female warriors and queens. Undoubtedly, there are abundant materials for creating a new gender picture in which Vietnamese women are at an equal footing with men. Eliminating Confucian ideologies which downplay females as well as constructing females as the "self" also help to bring female's identity and perspectives into focus. As the Vietnamese society is changing, it is the natural law that backward attitudes are discarded and replaced by progressive ones.

This research is limited in the aspect that the scope of my study is restricted within the boundary of the story textbooks. I also only focus on two grades (grade 1 and 5) as my samples for textbook analysis. Therefore, I can not make generalization about the general situation of gender stereotypes in Vietnamese textbooks in primary school. Furthermore, the time for my fieldwork in Vietnam was constrained and data resources were limited. I could not have many class observations or interviews with teachers and students in many schools. In future research, these limitations can be overcome by increasing the research samples (in textbooks, schools, teachers and students). A larger sample would allow the researcher to see if having strong gender stereotypes is the general case of all Vietnamese textbooks.

Since this research has pointed out the missing link in the textbook reform, the future research would explain why this reform fails to eliminate gender stereotypes in textbooks. The future research task would be tracing up to the agents who conduct the textbook reform, who compile and edit the new textbooks, as well as those who are in charge of teacher training. Interviews with these reformers may address the need to introduce critical thinking into the textbooks for both teachers and students.

To make a reform is a difficult and complicated task. To make a reform in people's deep-rooted stereotypes is even much more challenging. Even the textbooks and teachers themselves may not be enough to steer students against the gender stereotypes which are so prevalent in the society. As it has been said, it takes the collaborated efforts from the school,

families, media, policy-makers, etc. to effectively combat gender stereotypes. However, I believe that education can play the key role in this battle. Education can bring about enormous changes in the young generations' gender cognition by equipping them with awareness of gender issues. I hope that my research is beneficial to the Vietnamese education by identify the weak point of Vietnamese textbooks. A small contribution may it be, I believe gender research is a step which assists Vietnam to move forward to a future free of gender stereotypes.

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## Appendix 1

### Guidelines for Classroom Observation

This guideline is adapted from the Guidelines for How to Conduct Classroom Observations from a Gender Perspective on the UNESCO Bangkok website<sup>12</sup>. The classroom observation is used to capture how teachers manage the class and whether they treat the stories in a gendered manner or not. Since classroom observation is less likely to reveal the research aim and more effective in capturing the natural daily interaction between teachers and students, it should always be used prior to interviews.

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- How many students are there in the class? How many girls? How many boys?

Draw a map of the classroom with labels of doors, windows, and chalkboard.

Label girl = +; boy = 0; teacher = X.

- Where do the girls and boys sit? Are their seats fixed or flexible as they choose to? Is the seating pattern sex-segregated?
- Count 10 students sitting closest to the teacher. Are they more boys or girls? (the students sitting closest to the teacher often get more attention from him/her )
- When the teacher walks around the classroom, does the teacher walk near, stop to talk to boys and girls equally? Draw pencil lines of teachers' walk, draw an arrow to the students teacher talks to. Count the number of arrows after class.
- Look at the pictures / posters on the walls. Do they show equal number of females and males? Do they show female doing things in male's domains? Do they show females and males in conventional activities? If not sure about the sex of a figure, ask students what they think the sex of that figure is.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/appeal/gender/Classroom%20Observation%20Tools1.doc](http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/appeal/gender/Classroom%20Observation%20Tools1.doc)

<i>Female pictures</i>	<i>Male pictures</i>	<i>Total pictures</i>

- Does every child in the class have textbooks, pens, and exercise books?
- How many times does the teacher call / address girls and boys during the lesson?  
How many times do girls / boys go to the chalkboard?

	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Teacher calls</i>			
<i>Students go to board</i>			

- How many times does the teacher give feedbacks to boys and girls? What are those feedbacks?
- What are the tasks / responsibilities of boys and girls in class?
- How does the teacher discipline girls and boys?
- Is the teacher's language gendered?
- How do boys and girls access to study equipments and toys?
- How does the teacher treat a gendered text? Reinforce the stereotypes? Ignore it? Reduce the impact of the stereotypes? What are the strategies the teacher uses to reinforce / reduce the stereotypes?

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## Appendix 2

### Guideline for Interviewing Primary School Students

#### 1. Personal information: (can be filled partially by me)

Sex: .....

Age: .....

Grade: .....

Address of school: .....

#### 2. Questions:

- (1) Do you like to read this story textbook? Why / Why not?
- (2) Do you think the images of female and male characters in the stories match those in the real world? If no, what is the discrepancy? In your opinion, what should be done to make them match better?
- (3) What kind of job do you want to do after finishing school? Why do you choose that job?
- (4) In your opinion, what kind of work should females / males do? Please give reasons.



**Notes:**

The above guidelines are adapted from the guidelines in the book “Down with stereotypes! Eliminating sexism from children’s literature and school textbooks” (1986) by Andrée Michel, UNESCO. This guideline serve in my semi-structure interviews as students are free to exceed the boundary of the above questions if they have more to tell me.

- The personal data helps me to roughly distinguish among the students that I interview in terms of their age, grade, sex, and the school they study. All of these factors may have impact on their gender stereotypes. The names of the students are not noted down to keep them anonymous.
- The first question assesses the general impact the story textbook may have upon the students.
- The second question assess if the students are critical about the female/male images in the textbooks. And if they are, the questions should find out what their criticisms are.
- The third and fourth questions assess how gender-stereotyped the students are.

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**Appendix 3****Guideline for Interviewing Primary School Teachers****1. Personal information:**

Sex: .....

Age: .....

Duty of teacher: .....

Teaching in grade: .....

Name of school: .....

Type of school: .....

Location of school: .....

Type of students in her/his class (rich, poor, urban, rural, family pattern, etc): .....

.....

**2. Questions:**

- (1) Who are the class monitors? How are they chosen? What are their duties / What do you expect them to do in class? Please give reason for such expectation from them.
- (2) What is the labour division among the students when there are some tasks for the whole class (physical tasks such as cleaning, decorating classroom; class activities such as performance, trip, preparation for parents meeting, etc.)
- (3) If you need help with class paperwork, which student(s) do you often call for help? Is that a girl or a boy? Why you choose that student?
- (4) Who is the most nice-looking student in your class? Is it a girl or a boy? Do you think he/she can sometimes be a good example for other boys/girls to follow? Why?

- (5) If you recognize any student in your class that have cross-gendered dressing or behaviours, do you think it is necessary to correct it? If yes, how would you correct her/him? Why?
- (6) Do you consider making a boy sit next to a girl as a punishment? Why?
- (7) Describe the traits of your ideal female / male student.
- (8) Match the following traits to the sexes that you find most agreeable:

*Docility    independence    thoughtfulness    dreamy nature    sloppy*  
*appearance    self-confident    sensitiveness    quality of leadership    ambition*  
*competitiveness*

Female	Male	Both sexes

- (9) Do you think some subjects are boys' subjects and some are girls' subjects? If yes, what are they?
- (10) Think of the top 2 girls and 2 boys in your class, what jobs do you think they can do after finishing education? Why?
- (11) Do you think it is more important to prepare boys for a successful career than a successful family life?
- (12) Do you get any teacher training/guidance relating to female/male images in the textbook? If yes, what is the training/guidance?
- (13) Do you have experience teaching both the old and the newly-renovated story textbooks?
  - If yes, do you recognize any change in these 2 textbooks in terms of female/male images?



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- If yes, can you describe briefly such changes?
  - If no, do you think such kind of changes should take place now? What changes do you think are urgent? Why?
- (14) Do you discuss your own opinion about female/male images in story textbooks with your students? If yes, what are your opinions? What are their attitudes concerning this issue? Do you think such discussion is necessary? Why?
  - (15) Do you see the unspecific characters in the story textbook (mandarin, soldiers, wolf, etc) as male or female? Why?

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### Notes:

The above guideline is adapted from the guidelines in the book “Down with stereotypes! Eliminating sexism from children’s literature and school textbooks” (1986) by Andrée Michel, UNESCO. This guideline serves in my semi-structure interviews as teachers are free to exceed the boundary of the above questions if they have more to tell me.

1. Personal information gives information about the teachers and the schools which may have an impact on the way teachers behave to her/his students.
2. The first 8 questions assess how unconsciously stereotyped the teacher is in his/her daily interaction with the students. The second and the third questions assess if teachers think about female/male’s tasks in conventional ways when it comes to a range of various tasks in the classroom context, from physical tasks to clerical tasks.
3. The fourth question assess if teachers have a link between physical beauty and gender, e.g. it is more important for females to be beautiful than males.
4. The fifth question assesses teachers’ reaction and attitude toward cross-gendered cases.
5. The sixth question assesses teachers’ attitude toward sex segregation, an act which may reinforce gender stereotypes.

6. The seventh and eighth questions assess teachers' perception of ideal traits for females and males, which may cause teachers to impose such perceptions upon his/her students.
7. Question number 9, 10, 11 assess teachers' attitude about gender and education, expressed through their perception of suitable subjects for each sex, the preparation that education provides for each sex's future roles.
8. Question 12, 13, 14, 15 relate to the teaching of the textbooks, in which I investigate whether teachers are informed about the state of gender stereotypes in the textbook, their comparison of the old and new textbooks, their attitude of gender stereotypes and possible remedies for the gendered parts in the textbook, and also their understanding of some ambiguous points in the stories.