

HOW CAMBODIAN PEDAGOGICAL REFORM
HAS BEEN CONSTRUCTED:
A MULTI-LEVEL CASE STUDY

By

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ABSTRACT

HOW CAMBODIAN PEDAGOGICAL REFORM HAS BEEN CONSTRUCTED: A MULTI-LEVEL CASE STUDY

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Reforming teaching practices is a challenging mission. This multi-level case study aims to explore the complexities inherent in a pedagogical reform by shedding light on the dynamics and tensions within and across communities of practice at three levels—international, national, and local—in the case of an on-going pedagogical reform implemented in Cambodia. I was particularly interested in the social process in which various actors take part in constructing and reconstructing this reform named Effective Teaching and Learning (ETL) that is based on the globalized student-centered pedagogies. Informed by social constructivist theory and vertical case study framework, I designed this research as a multi-level case study that focuses on communities of practice as the primary unit of analysis. I conducted interviews, observations, and archival search in Prey Veng province, Cambodia, from November 2012 until July 2013.

This research explores a puzzle, in which pedagogical reform fails to change teaching practices substantially even when teachers seriously and actively engage in it. I identified the nature of Cambodian pedagogical reform as follows: (1) it is a social practice where various actors with different backgrounds and interests actively construct and reconstruct the meaning, mediated by tools; (2) it is a reversible process that involves dynamics and tensions both within and across levels; (3) it is not just a pedagogical project, but it has political, social, and cultural facets that define its shape and scope. In particular, I found that policy messages were expanded, modified, and even transformed in the communities of practice at different levels, as a result of

actors' negotiation of meaning. It produced contradictions with ETL policy itself, and further facilitated local practices that strengthens—rather than changes—existing ideas about teaching and learning even though I did not observe any overt contestations.

These findings suggest the necessity to re-conceptualize a pedagogical change as a political, social, and cultural enterprise that requires us to revisit fundamental assumptions in education, ranging from the theory of knowledge, the socially appropriate relationship between teacher and students, to the purposes of education. The current reform, however, fails to address these assumptions with which pedagogical practices are governed and thus may not produce substantial changes at the classroom level.

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PREFACE

Because this study involved human beings, this study required approval from The Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board (MSU-IRB).

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| CFS | Child Friendly School |
| CITA | Cambodian Independent Teachers Association |
| DTMT | District Training and Monitoring Team |
| EFA | Education for All |
| ESWG | Education Sector Working Group |
| ETL | Effective Teaching and Learning |
| JICA | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| KAPE | Kampuchean Action for Primary Education |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MoEYS | Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports |
| NEP | NGO Education Partnership |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organization |
| PRK | People's Republic of Kampuchea |
| PTTC | Provincial Teacher Training Center |
| RGC | Royal Government of Cambodia |
| SIDA | Swedish International Cooperation Agency |

| | |
|--------|--|
| SOC | The State of Cambodia |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNTAC | United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| VSO | Voluntary Service Overseas |
| VVOB | Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Reforming teaching practices is a challenging mission. Cambodia has worked on this mission since the 1990's in order to replace teacher-centered teaching with more student-centered teaching, but it has been documented that teacher-centered practices are still prevalent at the classroom level (Courtney, 2008; Wheeler, 1998). My interest that guides this research emerged from a simple question: Why does such a persistent gap exist between policy and practice?

Research about student-centered reforms in the context of developing countries provides various explanations for the persistence of traditional practices, such as teachers' misunderstanding or inability to understand the policy, limited resources, and aspects of local culture that are incongruent with Western-origin pedagogies (Brodie, Lelliott, & Davis, 2002; Guthrie, 1990; Pontefract & Hardman, 2005). Another explanation for the gap between policy and practice is offered by a group of researchers who claim that local actors are not passive policy implementers but, instead, actively engage in applying, interpreting, and sometimes contesting the policy (Brook Napier, 2003; Cuban, 1998) and that we thus cannot assume that an education policy can and must be disseminated and implemented "as is" (Anderson-Levitt & Alimasi, 2001, p. 51).

Building on these existing explanations, my predissertation research explored what the series of student-centered reform has been about by examining the documents related to the reforms. I found that this series of student-centered reforms, which the Cambodian ministry of education has undertaken since 1996, involves contradictions in itself: the ideal

of teaching and learning advocated in the reform contradicts what it requires teachers to do. Overall, this reform is informed by a participatory model of learning on the part of both teachers and students, which replaces teacher-centered “chalk-and-talk” types of pedagogies with modern, student-centered and active-learning pedagogies. Teachers are supposed to learn the set of teaching strategies through monthly teacher meetings where teachers from nearby schools get together and help each other (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2007). But what this reform actually requires teachers to do is implement highly scripted tasks, based on which their performance is checked and evaluated (Bunlay, Wayne, Sophea, Bredenburg, & Singh, 2010). The pedagogical reform is thus informed by a participatory, bottom-up approach of teaching and learning but a paternalistic, top-down approach is taken to bring such changes at the local level.

Given these contradictions within the reform policy, it is no wonder teachers interpret and practice this reform differently from its original intentions. Anderson-Levitt (2003) has already pointed out that such contradictions, or conflicts, within a single education reform can be seen in many places, but few researchers have actually explored these contradictions as a possible factor that maintains or even widens the gap between policy and practice, or even more fundamentally, tried to identify why such contradictions exist in one reform. Therefore in this research, I investigate *conflicts within* Cambodian pedagogical reform in order to understand more fully the gap between policy and practice. More specifically, I want to explore the following two questions: 1) why contradictory ideas coexist in this reform; and 2) how various actors make sense of these contradictions and enact this reform, within the historical, cultural, and material contexts in which they

work.

In order to answer these questions, Cambodian pedagogical reform should be looked at from “both near and afar simultaneously” (Anderson-Levitt, 2002, p. 20). From afar, we must pay particular attention to the historical contexts that have shaped how current education system is structured and implemented in Cambodia. Such contexts have significant implications for what made Cambodia adopt student-centered pedagogies. We also cannot ignore the influence Cambodian education has received from global discourse about education, because student-centered pedagogies are some of the most widely circulated ideas in education world-wide (Ginsburg, 2009). Cambodian education also relies heavily on financial and technical assistance from various aid agencies (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000). Understanding the pedagogical reform from afar (both historically and geographically) guides us to explore how and why this reform was initiated.

At the same time, we cannot dismiss the importance of the cultural and material world in which the current pedagogical reform is implemented, together with active roles played by various actors—national policymakers, provincial and district education officials, school principals, and especially teachers—because they do not passively accept globally circulated practices (Anderson-Levitt & Alimasi, 2001). Rather, they actively engage in the construction of this reform by interpreting and enacting student-centered pedagogies.¹ Exploring contradictions involved in this reform will help us deepen our understanding about the complexities involved in the process of changing local practices in a globalized

¹ As Kim and Rouse (2011) lamented, the active roles of teachers have been particularly sidelined in Cambodia: teachers have been treated as employees at “relatively low education levels,” and they have “not been trusted to use their professional ability or discretion,” and thus need “further development and training” (p. 12).

world (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010).

The objective of this research is to understand better the complexities involved in reforming teaching practices through this exploration of the ongoing reform experience in Cambodia. I investigate how various actors from international, national, and local levels make sense of and enact a pedagogical policy reform, known as Effective Teaching and Learning (ETL), by examining, in particular, the contradictions involved in it. Reforming teaching practices is already a challenging task in itself. Difficulties and challenges involved in pedagogical reforms have been well documented from both an institutional perspective (Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1998; Kennedy, 2005) and the perspective of teacher learning and professional development (Cohen, 1990; Schwille, Dembélé, & Schubert, 2007; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006). Especially in the context of developing countries, existing research has reported economic and cultural barriers to expanding student-centered pedagogies (Brodie et al., 2002; O'Sullivan, 2002, 2004).

Although there exists extensive literature on the gap between written policy and its implementation, little is known about the process in which even conflicting ideas are absorbed in a single pedagogical reform and how various actors interpret and enact them. ETL is an exemplary case for this purpose because it is a relatively new policy (ETL was first implemented as pilot in 2002 and then expanded throughout the country in 2007) and is currently being undertaken. ETL is also good as a case to situate this process within a matrix of globalization and local diversification. Understanding how various actors in Cambodian education reform make sense of ETL and how the political/economic/organizational contexts shape the meaning of ETL will enrich our

knowledge about the dynamics that this pedagogical reform brings about. The current research is thus not to evaluate how extensively ETL is actually implemented as stated in the policy documents, but to understand the gap between the written policy and practice by focusing on why contradictions in this reform exist and how various actors interpret and enact a reform that contains contradictions within itself.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on a social constructivist perspective to explore the Cambodian education reform experience. How we conceptualize knowledge and the process of knowing have evolved in the twentieth century, and one of the biggest evolutions was a sociocentric perspective suggested by anthropologists and scholars in the sociology of knowledge (Soltis, 1981). According to Soltis (1981), from a sociocentric perspective, “knowledge must be viewed as both individual and social, personal and public constructions designed to make sense of and provide for effective action in a reactive, malleable yet independently existing reality,” and “knowledge cannot be separated from knowers, that human beings construct different knowledge systems, and that all knowledge is imbedded in the fabric of social life” (p. 98). This social constructivist perspective informs how I understand the knowledge I am trying to produce through this research, as well as how I try to understand a pedagogical reform in Cambodia and its contradictory ideas.

I conceptualize pedagogical reform as a complex social practice that is intended to foster pedagogical changes, in which various actors construct and reconstruct meanings of

teaching and learning.² A social constructivist perspective suggests that the meaning of a certain policy is not given, but it is shaped by the interaction among the written policy, people, and places (Honig, 2006). This perspective means that all actors actively construct the reform by interpreting and sometimes contesting the idea of student-centered pedagogies and enacting what they understand as the demands of it within the cultural, historical, social, and political contexts to which they belong (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Pedagogical reform is thus neither monolithic nor normative. Cognitive scientists also suggest that the policy message supplements rather than supplants agents' prior knowledge and practice (Spillane et al., 2006). Therefore different actors make sense of and enact ETL in totally different ways, even when they all actively engage in it.

Social constructivism informs how I see the roles of various actors and their interactions in the current Cambodian pedagogical reform. As stated earlier, social constructivism sees all individual actors actively engaging in constructing meaning. This perspective especially challenges the policymakers' common understanding about Cambodian teachers, who have been referred to as both instruments and obstacles to changing teaching and learning (Kim & Rose, 2011). In Cambodia, teaching has also been trivialized into techniques and, as a result, complexities and uncertainties inherent in teaching have been undermined in education policies. Instead, social constructivism suggests that teachers are the key agents who hold specialized knowledge and skills based on which they construct and enact the pedagogical reform. They are playing roles as

² Education policy researchers who have anthropological orientations have suggested that we should conceptualize education policy not as a normative text but “as a complex social practice, an on-going process of normative cultural production constituted by diverse actors across diverse social and institutional contexts” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 1).

important as donors, policymakers, and school administrators in constructing this reform.

Moreover, this co-construction of meaning should be understood as a social and situated process (Lave & Wenger, 1991) rather than as an individualized and isolated process. It is necessary to pay attention to the meaning constructed through interactions among various actors in order to understand the process through which ETL is interpreted and enacted. For example, donors negotiate the meaning of this reform in annual donor meetings, and ministry officials try to figure out what they want from donors and what donors want them to do in their business meetings. Cambodian teacher meetings at the cluster level are also an important mechanism to administer formal interactions among teachers specifically around this reform, aside from more informal interactions between teachers before or after classes, or during school-level meetings. These meetings and interactions among actors within and between different levels can be considered as a social setting where negotiations over the meaning of ETL could occur.

Thus, this research does not seek to reveal universal truth about pedagogical reform policies *per se*. Rather, this paper's aim is to uncover complexities and contingencies that a specific pedagogical reform entails in a specific time and place, involving specific individuals. We can better understand the complexities and possibly reveal patterns of pedagogical reform by accumulating this type of knowledge.

Conceptual Framework

There are several important concepts that should be explored.

Globalization in Education

The proposed research is informed by and intended to contribute to existing theories

of globalization in education because the current Cambodian pedagogical reform (ETL) is inspired by the idea of student-centered, active-learning pedagogy, which has been widely circulated across the globe.

As in other aspects of our social, cultural, and economic lives, globalization has brought many similarities in education across nations. World culture theory, or neo-institutionalist theory perceives globalization as a process in which principles, methods, goals, motives, and values become more pervasive and intense throughout the world (Boli, 1985). From this perspective, these world-cultural elements “are woven into the taken-for-granted fabric of everyday life, thereby becoming invisible” (Boli, 1985, p. 385) and homogenize the globe. Based on this perspective, proliferation of student-centered instructional reforms can be understood as a process in which student-centered pedagogies become an element of world culture.

Although world culture theory helps us capture the process of globalization in education, it fails to explain why certain ideas and practices, such as student-centered pedagogies, are legitimized and circulated more than others. In contrast to world culture theory, externalization theory more carefully attends to the semantic construction of the process of globalization from local perspectives. Its focus is on discursive space where transnational educational knowledge is filtered for selecting, channeling, and transforming it into a national meaning structure (Schriewer, 2003). Externalization is a reasoning characteristic in education literature, and Schriewer & Martinez (2004) identified two forms of externalization: “externalization to world education” and “externalization to tradition” (p. 31), by which people refer to foreign education and history/tradition respectively, as a filter

to legitimate or reinterpret urgent educational concerns.

Other researchers have paid close attention to the politics and conflicts inherent in the diffusion of a global model or models, which are silenced in world culture theory (Anderson-Levitt, 2002). Steiner-Khamsi (2000) suggested that we should distinguish borrowing, lending, and imposition, based on how certain educational ideas and practices are transferred. This is because educational transfer may involve “patronizing aspects” (p. 179) especially when it occurs from donors to developing countries. Therefore, as comparative education researchers, we must ask why, how, and by whom educational policies are transferred internationally (p. 164).

I am trying to understand globalization in education using Steiner-Khamsi (2000)’s theory of politics and economics of global circulation of educational ideas and practices. This is because in the case of ETL in Cambodia we cannot dismiss the influence of donors, most significantly from UNICEF, as well as internal pressures to adopt student-centered pedagogies in Cambodia. As I will discuss later, the current reform framework was first launched by UNICEF and many other bilateral aid agencies and local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken part in the effort to change pedagogies based on the student-centered principles. Cambodia also had a good reason to adopt student-centered pedagogies in the early 90’s. Politicians tried to use democratic connotations of student-centered pedagogies in order to appeal to the international communities by demonstrating that they made an effort, at least on paper, to build a modern, democratic nation after nearly 30 years of ideological disruption. Cambodian instructional reform is, therefore, a good case to explore “politics and economics” (Steiner-Khamsi,

2010) in the global circulation of educational ideas. However, a question still remains: why do contradictory ideas coexist in ETL?

Conflict Within

Anderson-Levit (2003) argued that education reforms are not necessarily led by coherent and uniform reform ideals. She claimed that although sociologists identify decentralization, teacher autonomy, and student-centered instruction as transnational reform ideals, anthropologists have found that there are other movements toward increasing national control such as standardized tests, control of teachers, and content-centered instruction within the same nations (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). These conflicts are explained either as a phenomenon of *conflict within* a nation and a group that promotes a single but inconsistent reform, or as *conflict between* “opposing groups of actors who are promoting competing reforms” (Anderson-Levitt, 2003, p. 15). *Conflict within* suggests inconsistencies in a single reform model, whereas *conflict between* implies multiple models of education reform. Although this point—whether there exist a single model or multiple models of education—is at the center of the current debate about globalization, I explore only *conflict within* here because my focus in this research is to understand the contradictions within one pedagogical reform.

Globalization literature helps us better understand *conflict within* with more concrete examples. Takayama (2010) extended externalization theory by revealing the conflicting discursive groups that promote single education reform. Based on the analysis of Japanese discourse about education reform, he discussed how two conflicting discursive groups, in this case progressives and conservatives, project their own political agendas on

the same construct, Finnish education, as a means of addressing existing educational concerns. Finnish education became a “multi-vocal symbol” (p. 67) that could be used by different groups, even though they actually used this symbol with distinctive meanings and projected different agendas onto it. This construct also highlights power dynamics and conflicting political agendas that are usually hidden and “naturalized” (Takayama, 2010, p. 53). Different actors can work together under the same reform even when their educational and/or political orientations vary because they may construct different meanings from the same symbol, such as Finnish education (Takayama, 2010). In the current case, ETL can be a *multi-vocal symbol* that allows actors at the international and national level to project their political, economic, educational, and/or cultural interests and work together without really agreeing on what ETL means. We can understand contradictions that appeared in ETL documents as an expression of multiple voices in this reform.

Therefore, in this research, I investigate what similar or different meanings ETL has for different people and how different meanings are negotiated and reified into policy tools, focusing especially on the contradictions involved in this reform. However, in order for actors at the local level to make sense of this reform, these contradictions within ETL may require them to interpret and negotiate the meanings in more overt ways. We cannot dismiss the active involvement of local actors, most significantly teachers, in this process in order to understand the complexities of pedagogical reform.

Policy Appropriation/Negotiation of Meaning/Sense-making

Steiner-Khamsi (2000) argued that we should investigate “how a borrowed policy has been locally recontextualized, modified, or indigenized” (p. 171), rather than assuming

that borrowed policies are embraced and implemented as is. Ethnographic policy studies offer epistemological and methodological accounts for the local agencies involved in the process of policy implementation, or what Sutton and Levinson (2001) called *appropriation*. Contrary to the traditional notion of policy implementation, by which we assume a dichotomous relationship between policy formation and implementation, with policy appropriation Sutton and Levinson (2001) tried to address simultaneously how a policy shapes practices and how practices shape the meaning of policy. Policy appropriation is a construct that is particularly useful to understand local actors not as passive implementers, but as active agents who apply, interpret, and even contest the policy in their institutional contexts (Sutton & Levinson, 2001).

The idea of policy appropriation suggests the importance of contemplating how certain policy is transformed when it is implemented in different institutional contexts. Brook Napier (2003), for example, tried to understand how "outcome-based education" is appropriated at global, national, provincial, sub-provincial, and school levels in South Africa. By shedding light on the interface between *reform as policy* and *reform as practice*, she found that "instead of trickling down, at every level ideas can be transmitted and sometimes blocked" (Brook Napier, 2003, p. 52).

In addition to these vertical comparisons,³ Anderson-Levitt and Alimasi (2001) address the necessity of examining how certain policy is transformed horizontally. By investigating actual meanings given to the mixed method teaching by actors in multiple

³ Vavrus and Bartlett (2009) criticized qualitative research in comparative education for not having paid enough attention to the influence from international and national levels on local educational practices. They contended that vertical comparisons are necessary to better understand the local practices.

layers at international, national, sub-national, and local levels in Guinea, they found that even actors within a single level, such as donors or teachers, were not monolithic in terms of how much they were motivated to embrace mixed method teaching.

Variations within the same level suggest the situative and social nature of policy appropriation. For example, by exploring how teachers collectively make sense of new state policies on reading instruction and how they implement them, Coburn and Stein (2006) revealed that teachers negotiated meanings of instructional policies with pedagogical assumptions and preexisting practices shared in the multiple professional communities they participated in, such as grade level groups, department within school, and study groups across schools. The process of policy appropriation, therefore, should be understood within multiple layers of context that affect how active agents make sense of policy.

Given that policies are appropriated by all actors, how can we understand the process in which actors negotiate meanings and construct somewhat shared understandings about a policy? How has the meaning of ETL been negotiated among donors and ministry officials while maintaining contradictions? Especially at the local level, when a policy involves contradictions in itself, like ETL, it is predictable that local actors will understand such policy differently from policymakers' original intentions. But how do the local actors react to the contradictions within ETL in the process of negotiating the meaning of ETL in the multiple "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998) to which they belong, such as cluster-level groups, their own schools, and more informal networks?

Review of Literature

The World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990,

was influential in expanding student-centered approaches in developing countries (Ginsburg, 2010). A document prepared in this conference referred to active and participatory approaches as “particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential” (Interagency Commission, 1990, Article 4), and various developing countries as well as aid agencies enthusiastically adopted student-centered pedagogies as a means to improve the quality of education. These countries include Namibia (O’Sullivan, 2002, 2004), South Africa (Brodie et al., 2002), Nigeria (Hardman, Abd-Kadir, & Smith, 2008), Cambodia (Bunlay et al., 2010; Kingdom of Cambodia, 2007), and more.

Globalized Student-centered Principles?

The fact that many countries across the globe have adopted student-centeredness invites consideration of what the common characteristics of this pedagogical approach are. Tabulawa (2003) identified the following characteristics: (a) more flexible and relevant curricula; (b) activity as the core of learning; (c) placing learners at the center of education; and (d) constructivist epistemology as the common principles that characterize student-centeredness. He further contended that aid agencies play a central role in diffusing learner-centered pedagogies in low-income countries and that aid agencies always have a hidden political agenda “to alter the ‘modes of thought’ of those in periphery states” so that they embrace democratic and neoliberal ideology (Tabulawa 2003, p. 10).:

... learner-centred pedagogy has social, epistemological and philosophical foundations. For this reason, the pedagogy is not value-neutral. It is a view about the world, about the kind of people and society we want to create through education. However, this nature of the pedagogy is often not recognised. This is because it is

often presented as if it were value-free and merely technical (Tabulawa, 2003, p. 9).

Similarly, neocolonialists critically examined the diffusion of student-centered pedagogies in non-Western contexts. For example, Guthrie (1990) asserted that it is problematic to transport student-centered approaches to low-income countries without having solid scientific evidence that shows such approaches produce higher cognitive achievement. Scholars have also warned that the “wholesale adoption” of Western-origin student-centered pedagogies may result in academic ineffectiveness and perpetuating the dependency (Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot 2009, p. 123). Although these neocolonialists are very critical about these phenomena, they suggest that there exists a kind of *globalized student-centered principles* at least on the policy level.

However, many studies that explored the impact of student-centered reforms in developing countries documented the persistence of teacher-centered, “chalk and talk” types of pedagogies. Major factors identified as constraints on these instructional reforms are (a) teachers’ lack of capacities to use new pedagogies appropriately (Brodie et al., 2002); (b) mismatch with local culture and physical conditions (O’Sullivan, 2002); and (c) lack of incentives to encourage teachers to use new pedagogies (American Institutes for Research, 2006). Based on her action research in Namibia, O’Sullivan (2004) further suggested that it is necessary to take “adaptive approach” that is to add changes based on the realities within which teachers work rather than expect teachers to implement the student-centered policy as it is (p. 599).

Other researchers, in contrast, especially those who explore local meaning, have reported that student-centered pedagogies are localized and contextualized rather than just

adopted as they are. For example, Vavrus and Bartlett (2013) found that although Tanzanian teachers embraced student-centered pedagogies, they held “a persisting sense of knowledge as something pre-determined to be ‘given’ or transferred from teachers (or books) to students” (p. 72). They unveiled the contingency of pedagogy to the cultural and material contexts in which teaching and learning take place. These findings suggest that *globalized student-centered principles* have impacts only on the policy level and local practices diverge rather than converge.

Research on Student-centered Pedagogies in Cambodia

Although there are only a limited number of studies available that explored the student-centered pedagogies in Cambodia, researchers and aid agencies reported mixed results on how extensively ETL has changed in teaching practices. Wheeler (1998) observed lessons taught by 212 teachers and found that only 4% of them (eight teachers) actually taught in a student-centered style, compared to 74% who taught in traditional teaching styles and 22% who taught using mixed approaches. In the academic year 2007/08, USAID project reported that 74% teachers demonstrated satisfactory improvements in their student-centered teaching (American Institutes for Research, 2008).⁴ Other researchers used teachers’ reflections as evidence of positive changes. These changes include increased use of active-learning techniques, increased use of cooperative learning, and increased

⁴ There exists a huge gap in the data on the popularity of new instructional practices in these studies. Possible reasons for this gap are (i) 10 years of time difference, during which donors and the ministry invested a great deal of resources, (ii) differences in purposes: the main purpose of Wheeler’s study was to draw implications for future projects whereas the purpose of USAID report was to evaluate their project, and/or (iii) different evaluation methods. Therefore, simply comparing the results of these two studies may yield inaccurate results.

knowledge of techniques for encouraging students (Bunlay et al., 2010). It has also been reported that traditional, teacher-centered “chalk-and talk” types of instruction are still prevalent in classrooms (Bunlay et al., 2010; Courtney, 2008). Courtney (2008) noted that teachers implement student-centered activities only when they are observed by inspectors.⁵ These studies indicate that we do not have rigorous comparable data to examine how extensively ETL has brought changes at the classroom level.

Within the limited range of research about cluster-level teacher meetings, researchers agree that these meetings have some positive impacts but these impacts are still limited. A researcher who conducted research at the very early stage of this reform saw the potential of these meetings: “Instead of always waiting for mandates from above to provide guidance, teacher collaboration stimulates a beginning sense of confidence that solutions can be found at the local level” (Wheeler, 1998, p. 15). However, he also noted that these meetings are often the place where traditional beliefs and practices are disseminated and reaffirmed, rather than replacing them with student-centered pedagogies (Wheeler, 1998). Other researchers who conducted research saw more positive signs recently, and claimed that teacher meetings are effective to disseminate knowledge about the student-centered approach throughout the country (Bunlay et al., 2010). But based on interviews with teachers, they also claimed that teacher meetings would have only minimum impacts on teacher learning and their professional development without more systematic and extensive follow-up support.

⁵ This suggests the importance in this study of setting up classroom observations very carefully in order to observe as natural classrooms as possible (See Chapter 2 for more discussion).

Only limited research has focused on the contradictions and inconsistencies within a pedagogical reform. Courtney (2008) reported that the materials used to promote and evaluate student-centered practices were inconsistent and misleading. For example, she pointed out the problems inherent in the checklist prepared by the ministry, with which school inspectors observe teachers' practices annually. This checklist approach only helps observers check which activities (group work, questioning, lecture, etc.) are implemented but does not allow them to see the quality of a lesson as a whole. Therefore, she argued, school inspectors would obtain only superficial understanding about instructional practices with this checklist. This study directly speaks to the issue of reification that hinders people from making sense of what this reform actually tries to do. Although her argument is persuasive, it remains unclear why there exist these contradictions and inconsistencies in the documents prepared by the ministry.

Another question that needs to be addressed is how local actors make sense of the contradictions within this policy. Local actors may not be aware of contradictions, or may not regard them as contradictions at all. Or they may be aware of and make use of contradictions in order to achieve their interests. Local actors do not passively accept ETL and follow what ETL tells them to do. Rather, they negotiate the meaning of ETL or even reject ETL. But it is still unclear how local actors make sense of contradictions in ETL and react to them.

Questions to Be Explored

The aim of this research is to better understand the gaps between policy and practice by focusing on the *conflicts within* an ongoing Cambodian pedagogical reform. Because

various aid agencies have significantly influenced this reform (ETL), I situate this research in an axis of global-local, and explore the process in which conflicting ideas are absorbed in a single education reform policy at international and national levels, and how local actors appropriate this policy. My overarching research question is: How is the idea of student-centered pedagogies (ETL) constructed by local, national, and international actors engaged in education reform in Cambodia? I divided this question into two parts.

- I. At the international and national levels, how are conflicting ideas put together in ETL?
 - (a) How similarly or differently do donors and national policymakers interpret and rationalize ETL?
 - (b) How are the different meanings negotiated?
 - (c) How are the negotiated meanings reified in ETL-related policy tools?
- II. At the local level, how do actors react to ETL?
 - (a) How do they make sense of ETL? Do they see the conflicts within ETL as conflicts at all?
 - (b) How are these meanings negotiated mediated by policy tools?
 - (c) How are the negotiated meanings expressed in practice?
 - (d) How do political/economic/organizational contexts shape the meaning of ETL?

Structure of the Thesis

My dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the whole research, explains theoretical and conceptual frameworks I draw on, explores the existing literature, and concludes by presenting the research questions to be explored. In Chapter 2, I explain methodologies employed in this research and provide a brief

introduction to the research site and participants.

Findings of this research are presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Chapter 3 situates Cambodian pedagogical reform in its historical, social, and political milieu as well as in the context of globalization that shapes how the current formal education system is structured and operated. Looking at the pedagogical reform “both near and afar simultaneously” (Anderson-Levitt, 2002, p. 20), in terms of both temporally and geographically, helps us understand what pushed Cambodia to adopt globalized student-centered principles.

In Chapter 4, I discuss how the meaning of ETL is constructed by various actors. I particularly focus on the mechanisms through which different actors (or stakeholders) negotiate the meaning of student-centered pedagogies and develop ETL policy, especially at the international and national levels. Also, by analyzing two policy tools, I identify contradictions, twists, and paradoxes involved in the policy tools. I also examine how these tools mediate local actors’ understanding and practice of the ETL policy, and present local meanings made from the policy tools.

Chapter 5 investigates the underlying “logic” that governs Cambodian pedagogy. This involves exploring how Cambodian people, especially local actors, talk about knowledge, teaching and teacher development, and teaching conditions, as well as examining actual practices. Based on the observation and interview data, I argue that *paccekteeh* (techniques/technical) plays the central role in governing how Cambodian education should be organized and operated.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I present the whole picture of Cambodian pedagogical reform by synthesizing findings presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, and discuss how my findings

could further contribute to the literature that this research draws on, both theoretically and methodologically.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

Just as a theory shapes how things could be understood, so does a methodology. As discussed in the previous chapter, this research is primarily based on social constructivist tradition with which I aim to understand how Cambodian pedagogical reform is constructed by various actors and situated in contexts. Methodologically speaking, this research is informed by a great deal of comparative education literature. Most significantly, a book titled *Critical Approaches to Comparative Education: Vertical Case Studies from Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas* edited by Frances Vavrus and Lesley Bartlett in 2009, provided me with a compass with which I could see where I stood in the middle of the process.

In this chapter, I discuss how I designed this multi-level case study by building on the vertical case study framework. But before starting to discuss methodological details, I first want to provide an overview of the setting in which this research was conducted. Finally, I want to discuss methodological efforts I made in collecting and analyzing data.

Research Context

As discussed, this research about the case of ETL is designed based on vertical comparison across international, national, and local levels. I want to introduce Cambodia and its education system briefly and explain basic characteristics of each level, so that I can set the stage for this research.

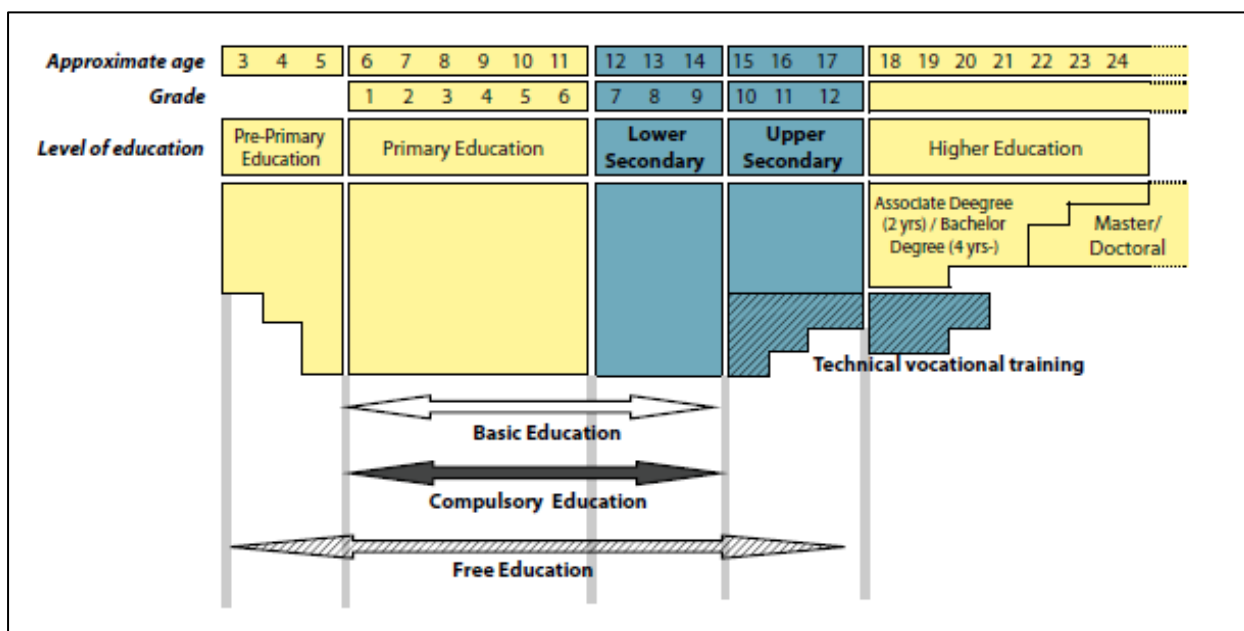
Cambodia and Its Education System

The Kingdom of Cambodia is a country located in Southeast Asia, surrounded by

Thailand to the northwest, Lao PDR to the northeast, and Vietnam to the east. Nearly 15 million people inhabit its tiny area of about 70,000 square miles. More than 90% of its population engage in farming, but they have recently been experiencing rapid economic growth (7.3% in 2012), according to the World Bank (2013). Aside from Khmer, Vietnamese, and Chinese, there are ethnic groups called Khmer Loeu, the majority of whom live in the mountainous areas located in the northeast part of the country. Khmer is the official language and has strong Sanskrit and Pali influences.

The current education system took its form in 1996, when it was divided into four levels: pre-school education, primary education, secondary education (lower and upper), and higher education. Six years of primary education and three years of lower secondary education constitute the country's basic education cycle, as shown in the Figure 1 (UNESCO, 2008). Having financial and technical support from international aid agencies, the Cambodian Ministry of Education (known as Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, MoEYS) has set three priority areas in the education sector: 1) to improve access to education, especially to ensure nine years of basic education to all children; 2) to improve the quality and efficiency of the system, especially to reduce dropout and repetition and improve transition rates from primary to lower secondary schools; and 3) to strengthen the capacity of educational administrators and staff (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2010).

Figure 1. Structure of Cambodian Education System



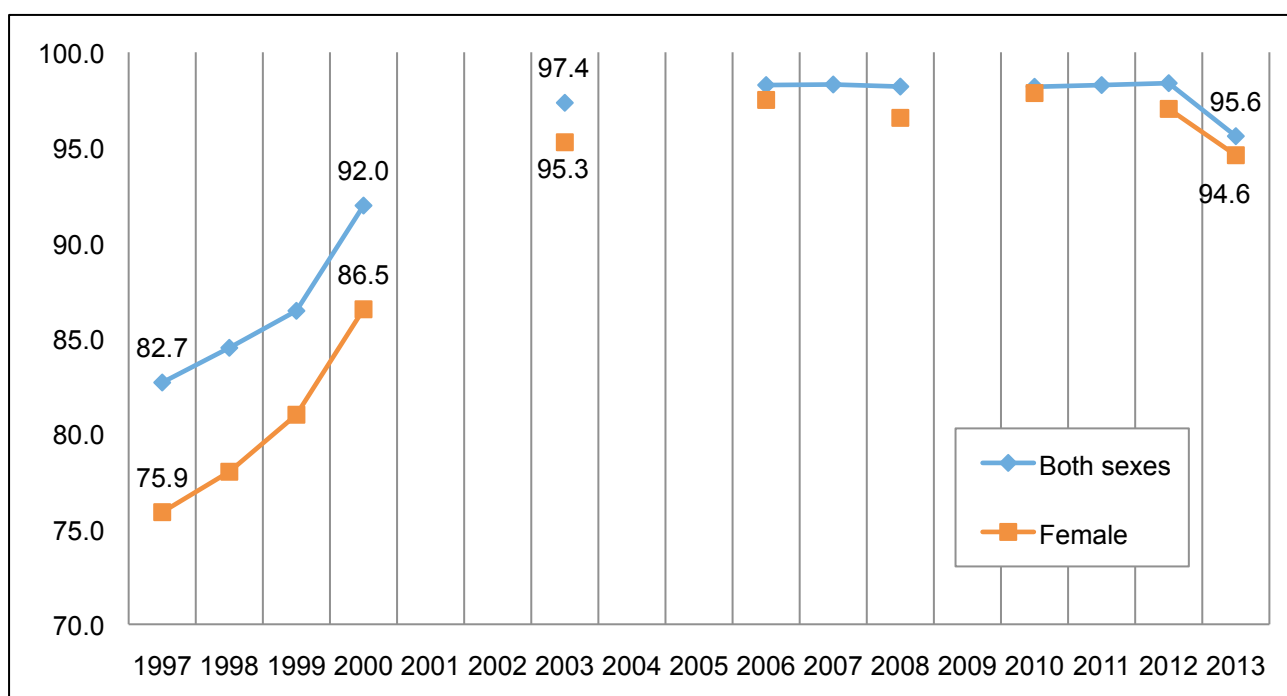
Source: UNESCO (2008). Secondary Education Regional Information Base: Country Profile—*Cambodia*, p.2

Quality Issues in Primary Education

This research is concerned about the second priority, i.e. quality and efficiency, because the current pedagogical reform, in particular, is expected to address issues of quality (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2007). Figure 2 shows how access to primary schools was improved over 20 years, but challenges still remain in retaining students in school: on average, more than 10% of students actually do not complete six years of primary education and this figure is worse (nearly 18%) in remote areas (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014). One of the important factors that severely affects high dropout rate is repetition, especially in lower grades, because those students who repeat grades often become fourteen or fifteen years old, which is regarded as old enough to start working, when they are still in primary school. As of 2013, nearly 28% of primary school students

were over-aged, which means older than 11 years old. These students are at high risk of dropping out.

Figure 2. Net Enrolment Rate, Primary Education (%)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2013).

Issues of quality are not limited to student retention, but recent assessments revealed that students do not really learn the content that they are supposed to be taught. The results from Khmer and Math assessment conducted in 2006 for sampled Grade 3 students were particularly shocking: students answered correctly in only 40.4% of the items for Khmer and 37.5% for Math, which require only minimum skills that should be acquired by the time they enter Grade 3. In contrast, Grade 6 students responded to nearly 70% of the items correctly in Khmer and 53% in Math in another survey conducted in 2007. This gap suggests, according to MoEYS, that students in Grade 6 are those who could survive and

thus become a more selective group than those in Grade 3 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2008a). It implies that primary education especially before Grade 3 does not succeed in equipping students with necessary knowledge and skills to survive in primary schools.

Challenges Related to Teachers

It was similarly very troubling in the 2006 assessment that teachers who taught in Grade 3 had only limited pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in Math. In the assessment, teachers were asked to answer the same items to which their students responded as well as additional items that asked teachers to analyze examples of students' errors and diagnose problems. It turned out that most of the Grade 3 teachers had lower-order knowledge (they answered correctly on 90.1% of the items), but their PCK level was assessed as 3.4 point on average out of maximum 6 point. More than 10% of them could not provide any responses. Although the research found only small correlations between teachers' PCK and students' test scores, these results ended up posing critical questions about the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Recruiting and retaining good teachers is another big issue. The current education system offers teaching certificates for the primary level to those who complete two years of training at Provincial Teacher Training Centers (PTTC), but the preparation focuses primarily on upgrading student-teachers' content knowledge that they are going to teach. This means that primary school teachers basically have content knowledge up to upper secondary level when they start teaching. A survey also revealed that teacher training is not necessarily the favorite option for many students in teacher training programs. Actually,

most of the student-teachers come to teacher training only because they have failed university entrance exams (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008).

Retaining qualified teachers is probably more difficult than attracting students to the teaching profession, mainly due to low teacher salaries with a starting salary as low as US\$50 per month. To put this amount in context, an individual needs US\$19.5 just each month to purchase the absolute minimum food to meet basic calorie requirements. It is impossible to make ends meet if he/she has two or more family members and has to pay living expenses. As a result, many teachers have second or even third jobs to maintain enough income, or they just try to seek other employment opportunities. According to a recent survey that explored demographic characteristics of pre-service and current teachers, there was a significant portion of teachers who try to get bachelor's degree, not for their professional development purpose but for seeking a chance to get better jobs (Williams & Kitamura, 2012). After the Khmer Rouge period, failure in retaining qualified teachers has resulted in maintaining nearly 10% of “contract teachers” who are un- or under-qualified in order to address the chronic teacher shortage (Geeves & Bredenburg, 2005).

The current pedagogical reform is implemented in this context and expected to address issues of quality that are directly linked to teaching and learning. However, problems that it needs to address have been changing over time as people (mainly in aid agencies) keep discovering new problems as discussed above. In this sense, actors involved in this reform need to keep shaping and reshaping its meaning to address and respond to new problems, and this is where we can observe macro-micro dynamics.

Research Design

As discussed, this research tries to explore the gap between a written policy and practice. There are many ways to tackle this question, ranging from an empirical approach to assess how a written policy is implemented, to a more explanatory approach to understand why a gap exists. Given that my interests are about the processes in which a policy-practice gap emerges and that this research is informed by social constructivist theory, I employ an explanatory approach and trace the policy from international to local levels.

Vertical Case Study

In the field of comparative education, understanding the dynamic interplay between macro and micro is a relatively new approach. There has been a growing concern about the validity of the nation-state/country as the sole unit of analysis in educational research, as the border between one education system and another became more blurred under globalization (Arnove & Torres, 2003; Carney, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). Identifying countries of origin of certain education policies and practices also became more difficult, because many of them are circulated across the globe at least on the surface. The enormous influences of globalization on local educational practices are now widely recognized by comparative education researchers, who started to think that exploring only macro or micro would not be sufficient to understand either of them. In this context, Vavrus and Bartlett (2009) proposed vertical comparisons across micro- and macro-levels as an essential approach to understand local educational practices in relation to the broader contexts.

Vertical comparison. Local practices are of particular significance in this research

because its aim is to explore a pedagogical reform in which teachers are the most important actors. However, as Vavrus and Bartlett (2009) warned, “there has been a tendency to take the macro for granted and focus exclusively on a single-site locality rather than carefully exploring how changes in national and international institutions, discourses, and policies are influencing social practice at the school level” (p. 9) Understanding the dynamics or tensions between macro and micro in the process of pedagogical reform provides us with a better sense about why local practices take certain shapes. Vertical case study is defined as “a multisited, qualitative case study that traces the linkages among local, national, and international forces and institutions that together shape and are shaped by education in a particular locale” (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2009, pp. 11–12). Such an approach allows me to compare vertically—international, national, and local—the sensemaking of participants in an ongoing pedagogical reform in Cambodia, which, in turn, helps me understand how the dynamic interplay among different levels shapes local practices that are somehow different from the original intentions of this reform. This approach further enables me to avoid overestimating national and international forces as determinants of local practices or underestimating them merely as contexts. Rather, by shedding light on the relationship across vertical levels, I can examine the reciprocal relationship between global-local and national-local. In other words, I can go beyond examining the impact of national and global discourses and trends on local practices and think about how local educational practices shape policies and discourses.

Horizontal comparison. As Vavrus and Bartlett (2009) contended, vertical case study also allows us to compare horizontally across sites through multisited research.

Various authors have pointed out the importance of horizontal comparison. For example, a study conducted by Anderson-Levitt and Alimasi (2001) revealed that even actors within a single level, such as donors or teachers, were very differently motivated and committed to implementing a globalized pedagogy, and that such differences were brought by both personal background and social contexts. In this study, horizontal comparison is particularly important to explore how ETL is variously understood and how such diverse meanings are negotiated within each level.

Horizontal comparison should not be limited to “research through” multiple sites on a particular case, but it should be open to comparison “through the juxtaposition of cases that follow the same logic to address topics of common concern” (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2009, p. 14). My current research involves horizontal comparison across sites (such as schools) within the case of ETL, but I do not intend to compare across cases (such as other student-centered reforms).

Multi-level Case Study Focusing on Communities of Practice

I design this research as a multi-level case study about an ongoing pedagogical reform in Cambodia. Although my current research is strongly informed by the idea of vertical case study, I tried to go beyond it. Critical ethnographies, through which Vavrus and Bartlett (2009) understood the macro-micro dynamics, have contributed a great deal to the advancement of comparative education. For example, in an ethnographic study on the career choice of lower class youths, Willis (1981) vividly illustrated how schools reproduce social class even when lower class youths themselves resist such school culture. MacLeod (1995) also explored a low-income neighborhood in the US and found that the students in

this neighborhood did not hold high aspirations and that these students were “not making it” in their later lives. These ingenious studies shed light on the relationship between individual agency and the social structure, but too often these studies emphasize the limitation of individual agency within the larger processes (such as capitalism). The vertical case study approach has its strength in the capacity to illuminate the interplay between individual agency (micro) and broader contexts (macro).

This current research, however, does not draw on this critical perspective. Instead, informed by social constructivist theory, this research focuses on the communities of practice where multiple actors work together to change (or not to change) pedagogies. With a social constructivist perspective, agencies can be understood not only as individual but also as social: social processes, such as schooling or pedagogical reform, are constructed, changed, contested, or rejected by professional communities as well as individuals. Communities also need to be conceptualized in a more flexible ways because, in reality, individuals belong to multiple communities with different people and in different social settings. Vertical case study tends to, as it is practically inseparable from critical ethnography, assume the dichotomy between the structure and agency and rarely pays enough attention to the communities of practice within which individuals make sense of and react to certain things, e.g. education policy.

In order to overcome these limitations of vertical case study, this research is designed as a multi-level study that focuses on communities of practice at different levels. Communities of practice offer a more practical unit of comparison than individual agency and are more tangible than the social structure. They are also more open to the possibilities

that an actor can belong to multiple communities at different levels (such as an official from a donor agency belonging both to the donor community and the local teacher community). Comparing the meanings made in different communities of practice helps us understand better the processes in which a written policy is appropriated and transformed by various actors.

Case: An Ongoing Pedagogical Reform

The case I am exploring in this research is an ongoing Cambodian pedagogical reform called Effective Teaching and Learning (ETL), currently being implemented, especially at the primary education level.⁶ ETL is a part of Child Friendly School (CFS) models that are based on globalized student-centered principles. CFS framework was originally developed by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and more than 50 countries across the globe as well as many Southeast Asian countries have adjusted and implemented CFS models. Cambodia also made some adjustments to CFS framework and included six dimensions that cover "all parts of school work including school management, health and safety, gender, school-community relationship and support for education system" (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2007). Table 1 below summarizes six dimensions of CFS, in which ETL is the second dimension and the main focus of this research.

⁶ CFS was originally started in primary education, but it was expanded to lower secondary level in 2013.

Table 1. Six Dimensions of Child Friendly School

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Dimension 1 | All children have access to schooling (schools are inclusive) |
| Dimension 2 | Effective teaching and learning |
| Dimension 3 | Health, safety, and protection of children |
| Dimension 4 | Gender responsiveness |
| Dimension 5 | The participation of children, families and communities in the running of their local schools |
| Dimension 6 | The national education system supports and encourages schools to become more child friendly |

Source: Kingdom of Cambodia. (2007). *Child Friendly School Policy*, pp. 5-6

I particularly focus on ETL, the second dimension of the Cambodian CFS model, because this dimension directly touches upon how teaching and learning should be conducted inside classrooms. It is not only the place a lot of researchers and practitioners have found the most difficult to change, but also where we can observe the dynamics brought by globalized student-centered principles at the local level. In Cambodian context, the second dimension is the most important in terms of quality of education (one of the priority areas in education sector, as I discuss later). At the same time, however, there is yet to be agreement on what effectiveness means and how it should be measured. Therefore, setting ETL as a case of vertical comparison makes it easier to trace the linkages between different levels and help achieve the goal of this research, which is to understand better the complexities involved in the process of pedagogical reform.

Levels

As I discussed in Chapter 1, I conceptualize ETL not as an object but as a practice (Sutton & Levinson, 2001), which is socially conducted and situated in specific contexts. Therefore, I identified social settings—or communities of practice—where actors negotiate

the meaning of ETL at different levels: donor communities at the international level, ministry working group and committees at the national level, and District Training and Monitoring Team (DTMT) and cluster-level teacher meeting at the local level.⁷

International level. There are a variety of donor agencies, ranging from United Nations organizations, international NGOs, to bilateral international cooperation agencies, which engage in the current pedagogical reform. Donors (or Development Partners, as they are called) form communities such as Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) and EDUCAM, where they discuss a wide range of issues in education sector and make policy recommendations to the MoEYS. ESWG meetings are held once every three months with relatively bigger development partners (such as UN agencies, bilateral agencies, and representative of NGOs) whereas EDUCAM meetings are held monthly with smaller partners such as NGOs. These communities work as platforms that facilitate interactions among different development partners. Although ETL is not the only topic of discussion in these two communities, these mechanisms to some extent facilitate negotiation of meaning over ETL among participants.

National level. At the national level, there is the CFS national steering committee and several working groups that work on pedagogical reform. The national steering

⁷ I should note that boundaries between levels are not so clear and simple. Although not many researchers have pointed out its challenges, it is very difficult to define levels as the basis for vertical comparison because many actors move across levels. For example, there was an actor who basically belongs to the donor community but stays in schools and regularly joins teacher meetings. This kind of difficulty remained until I finished analyzing data, but as can be seen in later chapters those actors who belong to multiple social settings at different levels have hands-on experiences working in the dynamics between levels.

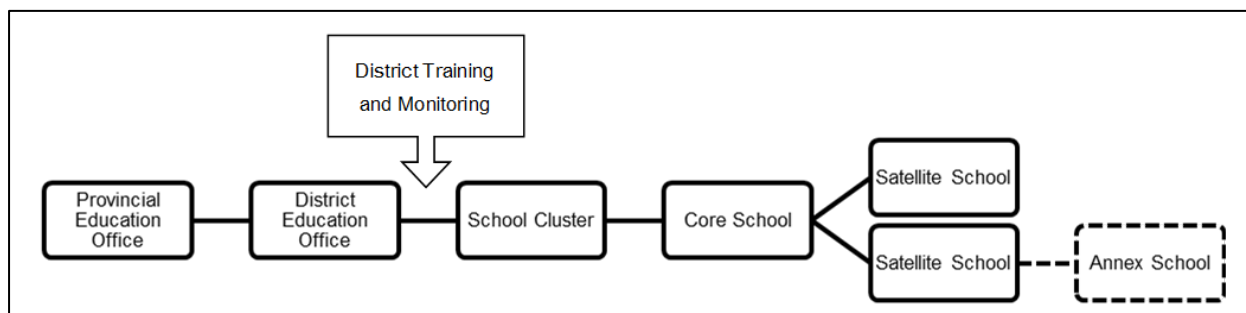
committee, led by the minister, holds meeting twice a year. Working group meetings, which are led by the director of General Education Department, are held more frequently to discuss specific issues. Representatives from four departments mainly take part in these communities: Primary Education Department, Teacher Training Department, Curriculum Department, and Education Quality Assurance Department. These are an important mechanism to adjust new policies like ETL to the existing policies and plans. In this sense the meaning of ETL is negotiated in these communities within the ministry.

Local level. The main focus of this research is on the local practices that shape and are shaped by the discourses at the international and national levels. For local practices, I am particularly interested in understanding how local actors, including teachers, school principals, and district and provincial education officials negotiate the meaning of ETL and implement it.

There are three sub-national bodies that administer public primary schools under MoEYS. These are provincial education offices, district education offices, and school clusters (Figure 3). Due to the recent movement toward decentralization, district education offices and school clusters play more and more important roles in the whole education system. Currently, around 7,000 primary schools are grouped into 1,200 school clusters across the whole country (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014). Each cluster has one core school, which is usually the biggest one, and five to eight satellite schools with annex schools in some cases. Schools in a cluster share resources, hold professional development sessions, and organize monthly teacher meetings. In the cluster, representatives of school principals and district education officers organize a District

Training and Monitoring Team (DTMT), which monitors and evaluates teaching practices and school management, and reports it to the province. The negotiation in these communities have direct impact on how teachers are told about ETL and evaluated.

Figure 3. Administrative Structure at the Local Level



Source: Developed by author based on Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2008a).

The monthly cluster-level teacher meeting is regarded as a platform where all teachers in the cluster get together on the last Thursday of every month. A typical meeting is organized in the following schedule: 10-30 minutes information sharing in the whole group; grade-level small group meeting for 90-120 minutes; and 10-30 minutes of wrap-up in the whole group. In the grade-level small group meeting, teachers who teach in the same grade are supposed to share their experiences and struggles with each other and jointly prepare lesson plans (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, n.d.). Under these administrative bodies, actual teaching and learning take place at the school level.⁸

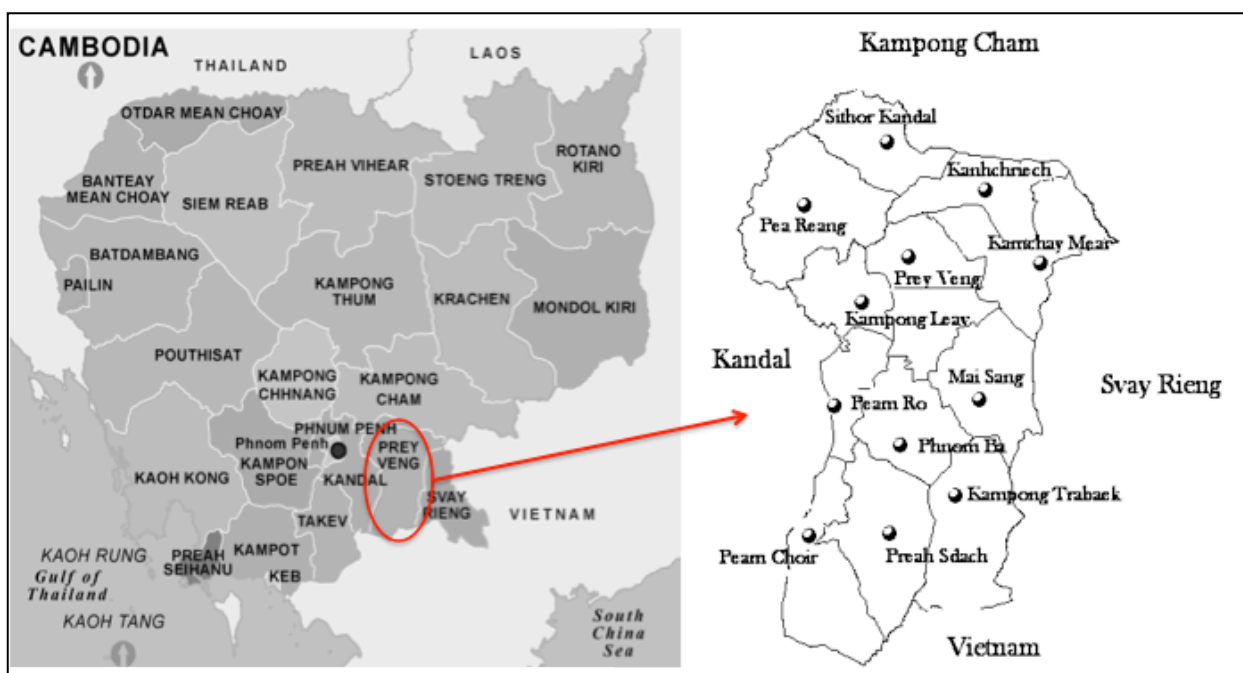
Locale

Because the purpose of this research is to reveal the dynamics brought about by ETL to the local level, I chose one of the six provinces where CFS model was piloted

⁸ Although in principle a school-based meeting is also held every month, the focus of this type of meeting is more on administrative information sharing rather than discussion about teaching and learning.

directly by development partners as a locale of the vertical comparison. In particular, I selected Prey Veng province, which is located about 90 miles away from Phnom Penh, surrounded by Kampong Cham, Kandal, Svay Rieng provinces and Vietnam to the south (Figure 4.). Having nearly 950,000 population in its 1,885 square miles area, Prey Veng is one of the most populated provinces in Cambodia. Most of the population engages in agriculture and fishing in the shore of Mekong River, and the province is a part of what is called the “great green belt” of Cambodia. The province has worked closely with UNICEF since the 2001/02 academic year, when UNICEF launched a CFS pilot project in three out of 12 districts in this province. It achieved 100% coverage of CFS in its public primary schools in 2009, just two years after the CFS policy was issued.

Figure 4. Map of Cambodia and Prey Veng Province



Source: Maps Open Source (n.d.) and WebKyom (2011), retrieved in June 2014.

Out of 34 clusters in the province, I selected Prey Veng cluster in Prey Veng district, which is the provincial capital. I selected this cluster because it allows me to conduct horizontal comparison due to the diversity it entails. Although the cluster is located in the capital, it consists of 10 primary schools that represent a wide range in size from a city school with nearly 800 students to a remote school with little more than 100 students. As can be seen in Table 2, schools also vary on how well they accept and retain students. These variations within the same cluster, which shares resources and administration in principle, are the key to understand the divergence in local practices.

Because of the huge geographical area covered by this cluster, schools are divided into two sub-clusters. Schools #1 to #5 are in the group where School #1 is the core school, and schools #6 to #10 are in a group headed by School #6. Cluster-level teacher meetings

are held in two different locations, but both of them are taken care of by the same District Training and Monitoring Team. Although School #1 plays a role of core school in the first sub-cluster, this school gets fewer students than before and school facilities are not as good as School #6. Similar to the situation in the whole country, all of the schools except School #6 operate a double-shift, which means that students come to study either in the morning or in the afternoon and spend only four hours in school per day. Such double-shift operation was introduced in order to meet the rapid expansion of primary school enrolment with limited classroom capacities and number of teachers. As far as I observed, however, some schools open only in the morning because they do not have such a large number of students. School #6, which offers classes the whole day, is thus regarded as the most advanced school in the cluster.

Table 2. Basic Characteristics of Schools in Prey Veng Cluster, 2012/13

| | Location ¹ | Teachers | Students | Intake ² | Repetition ³ | Dropout |
|----|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| 1 | City | 6 | 105 | 20% | 6.4% | 1.7% |
| 2 | City (PTTC) | 12 | 293 | -- | -- | -- |
| 3 | Remote | 10 | 297 | 89.4% | 14.1% | 0% |
| 4 | Rural | 6 | 121 | 100% | 6.6% | 2.5% |
| 5 | Remote | 6 | 182 | 100% | 0% | 26.6% |
| 6 | City center | 23 | 788 | 99.2% | 6.4% | 0.4% |
| 7 | City | 10 | 203 | -- | -- | -- |
| 8 | Rural | 8 | 206 | 93.8% | -- | -- |
| 9 | Rural | 12 | 298 | 140% | 6.4% | 1.7% |
| 10 | Remote | 8 | 277 | -- | -- | -- |
| | 144 | 101 | 2770 | -- | -- | -- |

Note: 1) Location is divided based on the accessibility. City schools are located within 10 minutes drive from the city center, where it takes less than 30 minutes to get to rural schools from the city center, yet more than 30 minutes to remote schools. School #2 is located inside Provincial Teacher Training Center where student-teachers observe classes and practice teaching. 2) Intake rate is the percentage of newly enrolled students out of 6-year-old children in the school district. School #1 achieved only 20% intake rate probably because either 6-year-old children chose other schools or not to enroll. 3) Repetition rate and dropout rate are calculated based on the number of students repeated or dropped out during the academic year out of the number of students enrolled in each school.

Source: Data obtained from Prey Veng District Education Office.

Research Procedures

Drawing on the vertical case study in the case of ETL, I set my overarching research question as follows: How is the idea of student-centered pedagogies (ETL) constructed by local, national, and international actors engaged in education reform in Cambodia? This question is divided into two parts based on the levels.

II. At the international and national levels, how are conflicting ideas put together in ETL?

- (e) How similarly or differently do donors and national policymakers interpret and rationalize ETL?
- (f) How are the different meanings negotiated?
- (g) How are the negotiated meanings reified in ETL-related policy tools?

III. At the local level, how do actors react to ETL?

- (a) How do they make sense of ETL? Do they see the conflicts within ETL as conflicts at all?
- (b) How are these meanings negotiated and mediated by policy tools?
- (c) How are the negotiated meanings expressed in practice?
- (d) How do political/economic/organizational contexts shape the meaning of ETL?

I collected and analyzed data in the way that allows me to compare within and across three levels.

Data Collection and Participants

In order to explore the above questions, I made three trips to Cambodia to collect data in the period of November 2012 to July 2013. In these trips, I (a) conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers, school administrators, district and provincial education officials, NGO officials, ministry officials, and donors, (b) observed cluster-level monthly teacher meetings in both of the two sub-clusters in Prey Veng cluster, (c) observed classroom practices of Grade 1 and 2 teachers in the cluster, and (d) collected artifacts such as meeting minutes, policy tools, reports published by donors and NGOs, and lesson plans and teaching aids used in the classes observed.

The first visit took about three weeks in November and December 2012, when I

conducted a series of interviews of international actors from major donor agencies and to do archival search at the National Archives of Cambodia and Hun Sen library at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, where major historical and current policy documents are archived. The second visit was from January to March 2013, when I mainly interviewed ministry officials and familiarized myself with the local community in Prey Veng province. During the second visit, I started visiting 10 schools in the cluster and interviewing school principals and teachers. After one month I went back to Prey Veng province for more comprehensive data collection at the local level. I spent three and half months from mid-April to July 2013 and observed classes almost every day in different schools. Even when I collected data at the local level, I made several trips to Phnom Penh to interview ministry officials or informants in donor agencies.

Interview. Interviews are one of the important sources of data for this research. In order to explore similarities and differences of actors' perceptions toward ETL, I conducted semi-structured interviews with officials from major donor agencies, ministry officials, provincial and district education officers, school administrators, and teachers in Prey Veng school cluster. I developed a set of questions (see Appendix A) to be asked to actors from all levels around the following themes: (i) their understanding about ETL and Child Friendly School (CFS), (ii) perceived roles they play in this reform, (iii) their perceptions about conflicts within ETL, and (iv) their evaluations of ETL and CFS. I also interviewed teachers several times in order to get a deep understanding about the logic with which teachers make sense of ETL. For this purpose I also developed an independent interview protocol that included more specific questions about eight areas of ETL and about actual

teaching practices (see Appendix B). I occasionally changed and/or added questions in Interview protocol B based on the previous interviews and observation. In total, I interviewed 59 participants from three levels (21, 4, and 34 from international, national, and local levels respectively). The summary of the participants can be found in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. Research Participants

| Level | Category | Affiliation | # |
|---------------|----------------------|---|-----------|
| International | Multi-lateral (3) | UNICEF | 1 |
| | | World Bank | 2 |
| | | UNESCO | 1 |
| | Bi-lateral (3) | US Agency of International Development (USAID) | 1 |
| | | Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) | 3 |
| | | Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB) | 1 |
| | NGO (4) | World Education | 2 |
| | | Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) | 2 |
| | | Save the Children | 1 |
| | | Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Cambodia | 1 |
| | Consultant | -- | 2 |
| | Total | | 21 |
| National | Ministry (4) | Primary Education Department | 1 |
| | | Teacher Education Department | 1 |
| | | Curriculum Department | 1 |
| | | Education Quality Assurance Department | 1 |

Table 3 (cont'd)

| | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|--|----|
| | Total | | 4 |
| Local | Provincial | Provincial Education Office | 2 |
| | | Provincial Teacher Training Center | 1 |
| | District | District Education Office | 1 |
| | | District Training and Monitoring Team (DTMT) | 8 |
| | School director | -- | 10 |
| | Teacher | -- | 13 |
| | Total | | 34 |
| Grand Total | | | 59 |

I conducted most of the interviews with actors at international and national level in English, while I used Japanese with native Japanese speakers (especially those in JICA) and Khmer with actors at local levels. On two occasions when I interviewed the director of provincial education office, a Cambodian friend of mine from local NGO accompanied me and helped translate some of the questions. But in other cases I conducted the interview on my own.

Participant observation. In order to understand how various actors actually negotiate the meaning of ETL, I observed meetings where multiple actors get together and discuss issues related to ETL. Although I first planned to observe ESWG and EDUCAM meetings, it turned out to be quite difficult to arrange without special permission from the minister. Instead, I ended up collecting meeting minutes of these meetings. But I did observe three monthly teacher meetings in Prey Veng cluster. Also, in order to understand how the negotiated meanings of ETL are expressed in practice as well as how practices

shape the meaning of ETL at the local level, I observed Grade 1 and 2 Khmer and Math classes (at least one from each school in the cluster).⁹

Teacher interactions. I conducted participant observation in cluster-level teacher meetings every month as well as school-level meetings in each school. Observing both cluster- and school-level meetings allowed me to get a better sense about how teachers negotiate meaning of ETL in multiple professional communities (Coburn & Stein, 2006). My predissertation research experience suggested that teachers discuss different topics in these meetings—mainly about student affairs in school meetings and more about teaching and learning in general in cluster meetings—and this observation was confirmed in the current research. Therefore, I focused more on cluster meetings. In cluster meetings, when teachers were divided into grade groups, I stayed in either Grade 1 or Grade 2 groups.

Teaching practices. In order to understand how negotiated meaning is expressed in practices, I observed teaching practices of teachers who taught in Grade 1 and 2 in the cluster. Based on the lesson plans and ETL tasks listed in a checklist (see Chapter 4), I mainly explored the following questions: (i) how similarly or differently teachers implemented ETL tasks; (ii) what and how ETL philosophy and tasks in general were incorporated in their daily teaching practices; and (iii) to what extent cultural and material contexts matter in implementing ETL. I used descriptive observation instruments focusing on the eight areas represented in ETL documents (Appendix C, Observation rubric). I also conducted 5-10 minutes short interviews before and/or after the class in order to ask questions about the particular lesson I observed. Because some teachers allowed me to

⁹ Khmer and Math classes consist of 20 hours out of 25-30 hours of instruction per week.

observe their classes several times, I could observe 32 lessons taught by 13 teachers from all of the 10 schools in the cluster (Table 4).

Table 4. Number of Lessons Observed

| | | |
|---------|-------------|----|
| Grade 1 | Khmer | 14 |
| | Mathematics | 1 |
| Grade 2 | Khmer | 13 |
| | Mathematics | 4 |

Documents. In order to explore how various actors represent ETL similarly or differently, I collected written documents, such as policy papers and reports written by donor agencies, policy related documents written in both English and Khmer, and agendas and materials prepared for/in meetings. Some official reports written by major donor agencies, such as UNICEF and USAID, are available online, but information available only in Khmer was particularly useful to understand better how the ETL and CFS framework have been translated. Also, in order to situate ETL in historical contexts, I collected a series of policy-related documents that have been published since 1996, when Cambodia first approved an education reform based on student-centered approaches. At the local level, I collected artifacts prepared for teaching, such as lesson plans, teaching aids, posters, and so on. These documents were very useful in understanding the ways in which the meaning of ETL was “reified” through negotiation (Wenger, 1998, p. 58).

Methodology of Data Analysis

The primary method of data analysis for this study is comparative and interpretive. Comparison can be a tool to understand the context rather than abstract from it (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010) and interpretive analysis allows us “to find constructs, themes, and

patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon” (Gall et al., 2006, p. 466).

Before analyzing data, I transcribed all of the interview data. This process of transcription was a major challenge in this study, because I used three languages—Khmer, English, and Japanese—in data collection. Because I am less fluent in Khmer, I had to first transcribe every single word in Khmer and check it with a native Khmer speaker, then translate everything into English in order to make it easy to handle. But there exist concepts and words that cannot simply be translated. In these cases I just left such concepts in Khmer and used them as they are in this dissertation. In total, it took me nearly three months just to get everything transcribed.

My data analyses went through three phases—horizontal comparison, interpretation, and vertical comparison. Using Dedoose, an online qualitative data analysis software, I first analyzed data from each level (international, national, and local) horizontally in order to explore similarities and differences within levels. More specifically, at each level, I coded interview transcripts from the common protocol and explored the patterns (such as what themes many people frequently discussed and what they did not). I also coded notes and minutes of meetings of different communities of practice, so that I can see how actors discussed ETL similarly and differently. This process was essential to understand the diverse meanings made and negotiated. I also analyzed artifacts and documents produced in each community in order to understand how various meanings of ETL are reified. Together with pre-defined codes from policy documents (such as eight areas of ETL) as well as from literature review (such as Shulman’s categories of teacher knowledge), 81 codes emerged

from my data set.¹⁰ After repeating the coding process several times, I grouped the code set into 20 larger categories (see Appendix D).

Building on the code set and categories I obtained in the first phase of analysis, I moved on to interpret what ETL means at each level. For each of the three levels, the categories were mapped out in order to identify key themes which appeared in my data set. At this point I devoted a lot of time and energy to understand local meaning. First, I conducted a descriptive analysis of quantitative data, which was collected with classroom observation rubric (Appendix C), and identified what typical teaching practice looks like. Next, I analyzed and compared observation notes and transcripts of in-depth interview data. This was done for the purpose of both exploring the underlying “logic” of teaching practices and checking the reliability of my interview data. I identified seven themes at the international level, seven themes at the national level, and eight themes at the local level (see Appendix D).¹¹

For the last phase of data analysis, I conducted a vertical comparison across levels. More specifically, based on the themes that I obtained in the second phase, I identified the following five cross-cutting themes that commonly appeared in all of the three levels: (1) politics within and between communities; (2) learning achievement; (3) teachers, teaching, and professional development; (4) theory of knowledge; and (5) centrality of materials. By

¹⁰ I started data analysis from the international level, where I first completed data collection. I applied the same code sets to national and local data, and some codes were added and changed in the process. In the end, I got 81 codes as my code set.

¹¹ In order to confirm the importance and relevance of these themes in the current pedagogical reform, at the end of my fieldwork I brought up these themes in the conversation with some of my participants and got feedback. I also discussed my findings with some of the participants over phone and email after I left Cambodia.

comparing the excerpts of each theme, I aimed to understand how similarly or differently each theme appeared in three levels. These five cross-cutting themes are of particular significance in this research, because I organize the discussion in this dissertation with themes instead of levels.

Challenges in the Process

This research involved several challenges that needed to be confronted. These include issues of positionality and reactivity, which I now turn to discuss.

Positionality

The issue of positionality was one of the biggest concerns throughout the process of collecting and analyzing data and writing up. Especially in the field, I needed to be very strategic in constructing good research relationships with participants due to my age, gender, marital status, nationality, and all other aspects of who I am. When I chatted with local teachers, one of the comments that I most frequently got from them was I was too young to travel by myself. As soon as people knew my nationality as a Japanese, some of them assumed that I was a JICA officer who visited Prey Veng to select project sites, and pleaded with me for facilities and school materials. Others asked me to donate money to the library that was under construction. Although I made a small contribution, I had to explain to them that I was just a student who conducts research and was not able to make any significant monetary contributions.

In the process, I learned that talking about my own teaching experiences was very helpful to put myself in the similar position as Cambodian teachers. I talked about my struggles to manage a class with 25 Japanese kids when I was teaching Grade 3, and

teachers started to share their struggles as if I was their colleague, or to ask questions about how teaching in Japan is different from that in Cambodia. Such conversation worked as an icebreaker and I could smoothly move on to explain purpose of my research and get consent.

Even when teachers accepted me to take part in casual conversations, they sometimes did not agree to be observed. I learned that teachers were usually observed by DTMT members and school principals only for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation. They also knew that I had an approval letter from the minister to conduct research in schools, and thus they thought I was an external evaluator sent from the ministry. Therefore they felt uncomfortable when I observed their classes without giving them any feedback. As a result, when I was asked to give feedback, I first explained that evaluation was not the purpose of my research, and tried to talk about the strengths of his/her teaching practice.

Making three trips to Cambodia with a short break also worked positively in strengthening good relationships with the participants. Every time I went back to the province and visited schools, teachers welcomed me by saying “We had lots of visitors who said they would come back, but you are the only one who actually came back to us!” My participants saw how serious I was about this research based on the fact that I went back to the same sites.

Reactivity

I needed to pay close attention to the reactivity in Cambodian school contexts. As Courteny (2008) warned, teachers may have implemented ETL only when they were observed. In order to observe as natural teaching practices as possible, I explained clearly to

teachers that my observation was not for evaluating or reporting their practices and that it was very important to observe their daily practices for the purpose of this research. In addition, I did not notify them of the specific date and time when my observation would take place, so they could not prepare anything special beforehand. I simply asked permission each time just before class began. Still, there was an occasion when a teacher suddenly asked students to form small groups as soon as I went into the classroom. She started an impromptu game that was not directly related to the content she was teaching. Although this was an exception to the more common experience I encountered, the issue of reactivity was unavoidable to some extent.

In order to address this issue, I went back to observe several lessons taught by the same teachers. Although there were some teachers who refused to be observed more than once, I was able to observe two or more classes for five teachers. By repeating observation, teachers as well as students got familiar with my presence in class and teaching and learning seemed to get closer to “normal.” Also, I found that observing non-normal teaching practices could be a window through which I could understand the kinds of teaching and learning teachers thought good to show to an outsider.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I aimed to set the stage by introducing how this research is designed and conducted. This research is based on a multi-level case study of an on-going pedagogical reform implemented in Cambodia. Prey Veng cluster in Prey Veng province is the locale in which I explore how local practices are shaped by and shape the reform that is based on globalized student-centered principles. I explained the methods of data collection

and data analysis, and discussed issues of positionality and reactivity.

CHAPTER THREE: SITUATING PEDAGOGICAL REFORM IN CONTEXTS

Introduction

The meaning of education is not static across time and space. In Cambodia, which experienced both flux and reflux over time, education has strongly reflected political circumstances of the times. Education as a human right is a very new idea: it was, and still is to a significant extent, a privilege that cannot be enjoyed by the majority of the population. In such context, we need to closely look at how basic assumptions about education—its purposes, organizational structure, and of course pedagogy have changed (or not changed) over time. At the same time, given the fact that Cambodian education to a significant extent has been financed by external support, the influence of the international development agencies as well as the global development agendas such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) cannot be dismissed.

The goal of this chapter is to situate Cambodian pedagogical reform in the historical, social, and political milieu as well as in the context of globalization that shape how the current formal education system is structured and operated. Looking at the pedagogical reform “both near and afar simultaneously” (Anderson-Levitt, 2002, p. 20), in terms of both temporally and geographically, helps us understand why Cambodia “imported” the globalized student-centered policy. In particular, I argue that Cambodian student-centered reform, by replacing the basic assumptions about education, reflects desires to create a democratic society.

History of Education in Cambodia

The history of Cambodian education can be understood in five different stages. During the first stage, there were no formally operated schools although informal educational venues were there even before the sixteenth century under the Angkor. These informal educational venues played key roles to perpetuate Angkor kingdom through an educated population. The second stage is during the French colonial period from 1863 to 1953, during which Cambodian formal education system (education in public schools) was established. In the process of building the state after the independence, the education system was developed and expanded, and then largely destroyed. I put this dramatic period (1953-1975) as the third stage of Cambodian history of education. From 1975 to 1993, until the Paris Peace Agreement was declared, Cambodian education system experienced reconstruction and rehabilitation after the devastation brought by the Khmer Rouge. Following this fourth stage, Cambodian education finally reached the development stage, in which the current education system was introduced and access to primary education shows rapid growth.

Based on this dynamic history, Effective Teaching and Learning (ETL), which this study tries to explore, has been developed and implemented as a way to change not only education but also the society as a whole. In the sections that follow, I discuss how education has been associated with the social and political circumstances in each of the five stages and how it is connected to the desires to change the society.

Before the French Came (-1863)

There are few resources available that I can draw on to discuss how education has

traditionally been organized and functioned in Cambodia, but it is clear, there was no formal education system in Cambodia before the French colonial period. The only educational opportunities people had access to were those provided in Buddhist temples called *wat*, and there were even limited to boys. In temple schools, monks taught educational poems and proverbs for the purpose of the children's moral and spiritual development rather than pragmatic skills such as literacy and numeracy.

As Ayres (2000a) pointed out, temple schools played the central role in perpetuating the monarchic hierarchy with the God-King on the top, monks in the middle, and peasants (who constituted more than 90% of the population) at the bottom. It was done through concentrating knowledge in temples: only written texts were considered as knowledge and written materials were stored in temples. Monks transmitted such written knowledge orally to be memorized by heart. By doing so, temples monopolized knowledge and determined “what texts were worth knowing” (Ayres, 2000a, p. 14). Oral transmission of knowledge also defined the proper teacher-student relationship as the storyteller and the audience (Needham, 2003), in which the audience was expected to listen to stories quietly and recite information correctly. A great deal research has illuminated the continuities of the Buddhist tradition in the current educational practices in both tangible and intangible ways (Needham, 2003).

Before Independence (1863-1953)

Cambodia was under French protectorate for about a century from 1863 until 1953, and it was the French who brought the structured “modern” public education system. But it was not exactly mass education that was open to the general public, because the French

largely ignored the peasantry. French schools catered to the royal families, Chinese merchants, and Vietnamese government officials to educate their kids to serve in the administration in Cambodia. In contrast, temple schools were still operated to cater for the children from the peasantry. The Governor-General of Indochina approved temple schools (*école de pagoda*) as public schools in 1906 (Sasagawa, 2010). In temple schools, boys over aged eight were taught by monks, who got trained and officially employed as teachers, but the focus remained moral development rather than academic subjects.

Behind such dual education system, the French protectorate government made a big shift in its approach to govern the Indochina area. At first, the French tried to introduce all over its Indochina colonies and protectorates the same education system that is identical to the one in France. In this assimilation approach, the French tried to deny the legitimacy of the monarch system by replacing all the temple schools with French schools. Their intention failed because they met a lot of protest from both elites and peasants whose social world was so fundamentally defined by monarchic hierarchy. Ayres (2000a) argued that the French failed to acknowledge the cultural and geographical diversity in the area. They gradually changed the approach and tried to introduce French system building on the local systems and ended up maintaining traditional temple schools and reforming them instead of replacing them with French schools. But the dual education system actually worked as a mechanism through which the French could stratify students into those who would govern and those who would be governed (Sasagawa, 2010). Nevertheless, nearly a thousand schools were opened by 1939, which accelerated the expansion of access to public education.

The dual education system during this period created a social contradiction between embracing modernity and maintaining tradition, in which elites enjoyed the fruits of modernization and development while at the same time they also benefited from traditional patron-client relationship (Ayres, 2000a, p. 186). It created the social divide between the “modern” elites who were educated in French schools and the general public (“traditional” peasantry) who got only temple education or no education at all. The divide has long-lasting implications both for the education system and for the Cambodian society as a whole. Modern elites actually utilized such divide to legitimate traditional patron-client relationship in local communities that have been maintained since Angkor period. This patron-client relationship is one of the many things that the French first tried to terminate but failed. Such “traditional” social hierarchy was associated with the great Angkor Empire and was idealized as a symbol of Khmer nationalism. Interestingly, however, it was “modern” elites who revived and exploited the hierarchy after Japan took over the Indochina area from the French occupancy.

From Independence to the Khmer Rouge (1953-1975)

After achieving independence in 1953, the Cambodian education system saw a great development under the strong initiative of Prince Norodom Sihanouk and Prime Minister Lon Nol (Maeda, 2003), although these two leaders took very different approaches to educational development with opposite ideologies. In both cases, however, education policies and practices in this period did not successfully respond to the goals of both nation-building and individuals’ social mobility.

Sihanouk tried to modernize Cambodian education by building on the “modern”

system that was introduced under the French protectorate. He showed strong commitment to education by investing around 20% of the GDP to the education system, and he gradually replaced temple schools with formal primary schools. The number of students who were enrolled in some form of formal education in 1969 was 1,160,456, whereas only 432,649 in 1956 (Ayres, 2000a). Such rapid growth in the education sector produced large number of unemployed graduates, who thought they were entitled to get “modern” jobs instead of farming. One of the failures of Sihanouk’s approach was that he failed to respond to the desire of newly educated population for social mobility.

Another failure was due to the contradiction between the modernization ideology based on the French system and the reorientation toward rural economy in the curriculum that Sihanouk’s government developed. On the one hand, Sihanouk and his government could not get away from modernization ideology (i.e. colonial education system) because to do so would undermine their legitimacy (Ayres, 2000a).¹² On the other hand, they had to emphasize “practical activities” in policies and curriculum in order to prepare educated population who work in the agriculture sector rather than in the very small modern sector. The contradiction between modernity and rural reorientation confused and impeded the important goal of Sihanouk: building a modern state. It resulted in frustration especially among the university students and graduates, and a lot of political protests happened throughout the 1960’s.

The 1970’s was “a period of division” as Ayres (2000a) described (p. 69). In March 1970, Sihanouk was disposed by the National Assembly and he joined the Communist

¹² Sihanouk himself was educated in the French system.

movement. The Khmer Republic, led by the Prime Minister Lon Nol, was the biggest rival who embraced participatory democracy with support from the West. According to Ayres (2000a), division during this period was:

between supporters of Communism and republicanism; between supporters of the political left and those of the political right; between inhabitants of the city and those of the country; between the rich and the poor; between the beneficiaries of corruption and its victims; and between those Cambodians whose conception of nationalism constituted the notion of social equality and those whose conception supported the status quo (p. 69).

In such circumstances, education policies were not fully implemented and counterpolicies and criticisms were launched solely to criticize the other side. But anyway, the Khmer Republic improved its presence while Sihanouk was in decline.

Lon Nol's approach to education was so called neo-Khmerism (Ayres, 2000a). He first tried to remove images of the past under Sihanouk both symbolically—removing his portrait from school buildings—and substantively—localizing French colonial education system by replacing the language of instruction from French to Khmer.¹³ He also tried to involve students in the national campaign and direct actions against Vietnamese and Communism through civic and political education. However, these attempts failed because Lon Nol and the Khmer Republic gradually lost their legitimacy toward 1975. The government territory was shrinking and the majority of schools were closed, abandoned, or destroyed.

¹³ The national assembly decided in 1967 that language of instruction should be Khmer in all levels of education and Lon Nol government strengthened the “Khmerization (*Khmergo-ka*)” (Sasagawa, 2010, p. 117).

From the Khmer Rouge to Paris Peace Agreement (1975-1993)

Cambodian education cannot be understood without referring to its tragic history, or the Khmer Rouge period (April 1975-January 1979) more specifically. Pol Pot, a leader of the Khmer Rouge, denied access to education as he believed it is a source of inequality—between educated white color and illiterate peasants. In a sense, Pol Pot tried to cut down the link between education and power. Therefore during this period, the Cambodian education system was totally destroyed. 75% to 80% of teachers were killed just because they were literate. School buildings were occupied to be used as prisons (Ayres, 2000a).

After the Vietnamese army overthrew the Khmer Rouge on January 7, 1979, Vietnamese-sponsored People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK, later changed the name to the State of Cambodia, SOC) started reconstructing public education system based on the Soviet socialist ideology (Tully, 2005). PRK's attempt failed, because the West stopped all of the financial and technical support to Cambodia in the midst of Cold War (Gottesman, 2003). Gottesman (2003) sharply described the situation as follows:

No Berlin Wall ever fell in Cambodia. No Vaclav Havel or Lech Walesa came to power. The regime did not collapse; it negotiated the terms of its survival. Impoverished and isolated, the SOC understood that it needed legitimacy and assistance from the United Nations and from the West. This meant complying with the expectations of the international community, when necessary, and protecting power in undemocratic and frequently violent ways, when possible (p. 348).

After the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 and the first election in 1993 under the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) supervision, the new

coalition government¹⁴ seriously started to reconstruct its formal education under the pressure from the international community (Chandler, 2008). The coalition government embraced the provision of formal education as a way to build a nation-state that looks modern and at the same time to legitimate and sustain its leadership (Ayres, 2000b).

Similar to other sectors, however, the Cambodian Ministry of Education did not have autonomy over education during UNTAC period. Political scientists stated that Cambodian political culture during this period can be characterized as follows: politicians concerned about maintaining their legitimacy and complying with expectations from international communities, but rarely about the Cambodian people (Kusakabe, 2009). Having experienced the cut of international aid during PRK, and having relied on international aid for more than half of its budget, the Ministry of Education tried to accept as many development projects (Shimizu, 2007). Although a lot of efforts had been made, education in this period was based on “donor-driven” projects that resulted in discrete, inconsistent, and unsatisfactory development (Shimizu, 2007, p. 2).

Recent Development (1993-Present)

In contrast to the UNTAC period, the share of external assistance in Cambodian education has gradually been decreased as low as 27% (66 million out of 364.8 million US\$) of total education expenditure in 2009/10 (Government-Donor Partnership Working Group 2004). This decrease of the share of external assistance is mostly because of the increasing share of public expenditure in education. Cambodia spent only 7.9% of total government expenditure on education in 1999, whereas the figure reached 13.08% in 2010.

¹⁴ FUNCINPEC and the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) shared control in this coalition government.

These trends indicate that the Ministry of Education has gradually regained ownership in its education, although it continues receiving significant amount of assistance from donors—or what they now call “development partners”—in various sub-sectors.

The latest two decades have produced major development in Cambodian education. During the 1990’s, the main target was the quantitative aspect of education, or improving access to primary education more specifically. According to the official statistics, net enrolment rate in primary education has increased from 77.8% in 1997, 91.3% in 2005, to 96.4% in 2011 (MoEYS, 2012). Given these improvements in access to education, the quality of education gradually attracted more attention from development partners and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) during the 2000’s (Shimizu, 2007). Improving the quality of education was included in the National Plan of Action for Education for All 2003-2015 and other major policies as one of the three policy priorities in education (MoEYS, 2003).¹⁵ Therefore, we saw a huge shift in the priorities of educational development—from quantity to quality.

It is in this context that quality of education, especially quality of teaching and learning processes, started to be discussed in Cambodia. As the very initial effort to improve quality, there was a significant structural reform undertaken in 1993. In the structural reform, with support from Redd Barna (now known as Save the Children), Swedish International Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and UNICEF, RGC introduced the school cluster system. Usually, six to nine nearby schools were grouped together into a school cluster, which consists of a core school and the other satellite schools. This reform

¹⁵ Other two priorities are (1) to improve access to nine years of basic education and (2) to develop institutional capacity and improve effectiveness of education management system.

aimed to address both imbalance of school resources and poor quality of its teaching force, by sharing resources and improving technical capacity of teachers through cluster-level meetings on every Thursday (Wheeler, 1998). However, as Wheeler (1998) reported, this reform was more effective in school construction and resource allocation than in changing teaching practices.

Student-Centered Pedagogies in the Context of Educational Development

This brief overview of Cambodian educational development helps us understand the fact that political circumstances have significantly affected the system and content of Cambodian education. Especially after the Khmer Rouge period, both national and international political circumstances affected it. It has been functioning as a mechanism through which political power is legitimized and strengthened. Student-centered pedagogies also emerged in Cambodian education discourse as a way to legitimate the government. I now turn to discuss both national and international circumstances in which student-centered pedagogies were brought to Cambodian education.

The term student-centered pedagogies first appeared in official documents as early as 1995 in guidelines for the curriculum development. According to Va (2006), the ministry officials were exposed to student-centered pedagogies at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, in which three representatives from the Ministry of Education participated. These officials later took leading positions in the Ministry,¹⁶ and brought student-centered pedagogies back to the country. The biggest interest of the RGC to adopt a student-centered framework was mainly political at first. In

¹⁶ One of the participants became a minister (Mr. Im Sethy), and another one became a secretary of state (Mr. Nath Bunroeun).

Cambodia, modernizing pedagogy was not just a matter of education. It has been a national political project to appeal to international communities that Cambodia got rid of the ideological disruption in the country—from monarchism, republicanism, communism, and finally to Soviet socialism—since its independence from French colonial occupation in 1965 (Ayres, 2000b). For the RGC, it was necessary to reconstruct the country with democratic principles, and education is the sector through which democratic society could be built. Replacing traditional authoritative teaching methodologies with the ones that are based on democratic principles was one of the key strategies for the RGC (Va, 2006). Student-centered pedagogies, which carry a democratic connotation, were, in fact, a useful tool for the political leaders to show their efforts toward democracy, albeit at least on paper.¹⁷

Along with this political interest, student-centered pedagogies were a channel for the RGC to attract external assistance to its education. Cambodian education during the 1990's can be characterized by its heavy dependence on external assistance, which contributed 57.9% of total educational expenditure in 1994-1999 (Government-Donor Partnership Working Group 2004). Under this circumstance, development partners (among others, UNICEF, Redd Barna, Kampuchean Action for Primary Education: KAPE, VSO Cambodia, and Japan International Cooperation Agency: JICA) launched emergency and development projects that touched upon student-centeredness, emphasizing different aspects and with different labels: child-centered approach (UNICEF and Redd Barna);

¹⁷ Although all teachers were required to use student-centered teaching methodologies regardless of subject or grade level, there was neither shared understanding about student-centeredness among the higher-level officials nor enough learning opportunities for in-service teachers (Reimer, 2012).

cooperative learning (KAPE); student-centered learning (VSO Cambodia); and inquiry-based learning (JICA).¹⁸ Redd Barna, for example, stressed critical thinking skills, while KAPE's cooperative learning emphasized emotional aspects, such as attitudes and communication skills. The government accepted these similar but different projects with very limited coordination, as discussed above. These projects not only allowed the RGC to present its education as a channel for democratic society, but also to secure funding to reconstruct the education system.

In terms of educational intentions, the purpose of adopting student-centered pedagogies at its early stage was quite instrumental. It meant accommodating a growing number of students in primary schools, which increased 19.7% in three years (from 2.0 million in 1997/98 to 2.4 million in 2000/01).¹⁹ In order to meet the demands, the ministry employed two solutions: hiring contract teachers with emergency license and introducing multi-grade teaching (Geeves & Bredenburg 2005).²⁰ Various manuals for active and participatory teaching methods were produced during the 2000s as part of multi-grade teacher training programs (Teacher Training Department 2007). These programs valued the student-centered methods as an effective approach that enables one teacher to keep a group of students on task while he/she teaches another grade. In this sense, student-centered pedagogies provided a solution for the realistic problems in Cambodian education.

The current pedagogical reform emerged as an elaboration of the experiences from

¹⁸ JICA's inquiry-based learning (IBL) is mainly for secondary level science.

¹⁹ During the same period, number of primary school teachers (teaching staff) increased for only 4%, from 43,282 to 45,152 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 1998, 2001).

²⁰ According to Geeves and Bredenburg (2005), contract teachers composed 9% of total primary school teachers at its peak.

various projects during the 90's. Because multiple development partners had been involved in this reform, it should also be understood as a product of interaction and negotiation between the Ministry and development partners. There must be some kinds of power relationship, but as I discuss in the following chapter, it may not as simple as what neocolonialists usually imagine. We should also take into account multiplicity of agencies within donor communities or within the ministry that further complicates the relationship (Steiner-Khamsi 2006), which I explore more in Chapter 4.

Changing Pedagogy, Transforming Society

The current pedagogical reform under Child Friendly School (CFS) framework is based on student-centered principles, which were not totally new when UNICEF first brought CFS models to Cambodia. Almost a decade of experiences had been accumulated through various projects implemented by several development partners at the point of Cambodia's encounter with student-centeredness. However, since the term student-centered did not mean the same for each development partner, and as these projects were uncoordinated and geographically scattered, student-centered pedagogies could not gain momentum to make it a national movement. A gradual move occurred since 2000, when the Ministry representatives participated in CFS workshop held in Thailand (Bunlay et al. 2010). Since then, the Ministry seriously started introducing student-centered principles in Cambodian education and especially in teaching and learning, and organized pilot projects in collaboration with development partners. Although UNICEF's influence was undoubtedly huge, the current pedagogical reform was developed building on the past experiences within Cambodia, rather than simply imported from elsewhere.

Experiences in the projects both before and after 2000, especially those implemented by non-government organizations (NGO), were actually a big push for the student-centered pedagogies. For example, Redd Barna launched an emergency education project called Schools of Hope in 1991. This project stressed student-centeredness in terms of child participation in school management as well as in teaching and learning. It especially focused on critical thinking as a means to regain peace in minds of the people and in the country after decades of chaotic political circumstances. A local education expert from Redd Barna, who was one of the writers of the policy documents, recalled,

I was not supposed to use my mind... During 30 years of civil war, my mother told me, “Keep silent. Don’t talk. Listen where the bullets come, where the enemies come.” This was the thing that parents taught to their kids. Don’t talk, listen. It was for survival. But you can imagine, from generation to generation, we trained our kids, trained our people, don’t talk, listen, for everything. If you tell them or give them a tool, they enjoy using it. They just follow [the instruction] exactly. But if you ask them to talk about their ideas, they don’t know because this was a kind of culture. We were trained by the regime. We were, and still, trying to remove these. This cannot be done by training them, or telling them to do this or that. (Interview, I10²¹)

Many local experts echoed him and associated traditional teaching with their experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime, when they were trained to do anything they were told but nothing other than that.

Student-centered pedagogies were the response after the Khmer Rouge period to

²¹ All participants are numbered based on who they are (I: participants from international organizations or NGOs; N: ministry officials or national education consultant; S: provincial/district education officials or school principals; T: school teachers).

overcome such residual effects. An education expert said, “I can easily imagine why Western people first thought they must replace traditional teaching with student-centered one” (Interview, I12). According to her, it is because,

When they [Western education experts] first came to Cambodia, they must have wondered why Cambodian people didn’t resist against Pol Pot when he forced to move all people from Phnom Penh to countryside. Especially for French people, who have good history of resistance, should have wondered. Then they must have thought ‘Oh why Cambodian people cannot think by themselves? Probably we need change how kids are taught in school. Teaching should be more student-centered and we need to give kids more room to think.’ (Interview, I12)

Another participant described student-centered pedagogies as a means to educate students to become a citizen with good attitude:

If they [students] have critical thinking skills, they change their minds. It is very difficult for someone to change their mind, if they cannot think or cannot make decisions by themselves. ...If they know how to help each other, they know how to be kind to and care with each other. If they think a lot, their decisions may be good ones. ... These things cannot be done just telling students to do so, but letting them work together and engaging them in the learning process ...student-centered pedagogies ... make this happen. (Interview, I9)

For those who actually engaged in the rehabilitation projects, student-centered pedagogies were a symbol of a peaceful, democratic, and cooperative society.

Student-Centered Principles in CFS Framework: A Global Model

CFS models²² are the pragmatic and comprehensive approach to address the total

²² UNICEF (2009d) repeatedly emphasized that CFS should be regarded as a pathway to

needs of the child as a learner, and to improve both access to and quality of education. Suggested by UNICEF, the models were evolved based on the past experiences with its “single-factor approach”—interventions to teacher education or supply of textbooks independently—by which only limited improvements could have been observed. They are based on the notion of education as a human right and “a child-centered ideology that regards the best interest of the child as a paramount at all times” (UNICEF, 2009d, p. 2).²³ In addition to child-centeredness, “democratic participation” and “inclusiveness” are also the basic principles that underlie CFS models (UNICEF, 2009c, p. 1). These principles are further developed as key components such as pedagogy, health, gender sensitivity, community participation, inclusiveness and protection (UNICEF, 2009c).

As UNICEF (2009b) reported, CFS models have been implemented in 56 countries globally in 2007, and in 20 countries out of 28 nations under UNICEF’s East Asia and Pacific Region, including Thailand, Philippines, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. In Thailand, CFS has been implemented in northern and northeastern provinces, which are particularly disadvantaged, since 1990’s. Although CFS is not a national policy *per se* and thus local governments can decide whether they apply CFS model or not, Thailand started to accept study visits and offer training titled ‘Child-Friendly Schools: Theory and practice’ to neighboring countries including Cambodia (UNICEF, 2009a).

Thailand played a significant role to disseminate CFS models in the region. Since the early 2000’s, Philippines, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and other countries started to

educational quality rather than as a rigid blueprint, and described it as “models”.

²³ The child-friendly school concept was first used as an “equivalent of the ‘baby-friendly hospitals’ that contributed to quality standards in health” (UNICEF, 2009d, p. 7).

incorporate CFS models into their education system. For example, the Philippines started Child Friendly Schools System (CFSS) initiative in 2001, after the regional conference on CFS environment was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand (UNICEF, 2009b). Philippines model defines 1) effective with children, 2) healthy for children, 3) protective of children, 4) gender sensitive and inclusive, and 5) family and community involvement as the five dimensions of CFS. Lao PDR launched “Schools of Quality (SoQ)” framework based on CFS models in the early 2000’s, when the ministry officials were exposed to the concept of CFS through regional workshop and UNICEF-funded study visits to Thailand. Although SoQ basically follows CFS models in Thailand, it is structured based on two guiding principles: “child-seeking school” and “child-centered school” (UNICEF, 2011). These examples indicate that there was a regional movement toward CFS and countries launched different “models” with CFS principles.

Together with the perceived need to replace teaching approaches to more democratic and participatory ones, such regional CFS movement inevitably affected Cambodia as an external pressure to meet the regional (albeit not global) standards. UNICEF, KAPE, and SCN piloted CFS projects in six provinces in the early 2000s. CFS steering committee, established in 2002, was a mechanism to accumulate pilot experiences in order to expand CFS to many more provinces. It consisted of representatives from UNICEF, KAPE, Save the Children, and other NGOs as well as key departments in the Ministry and was primarily responsible for overseeing the program and ensuring the consistency with the broader education system (Bunlay et al. 2010). Successes in the pilot projects reported by the committee members were, definitely, a driving force to convince

the Ministry about the effectiveness of CFS framework. In 2005, when then-Minister of Education, Im Sethy, decided to make CFS a national policy,²⁴ this committee took the authorship of policy and related manuals. Therefore, CFS policy and its related documents directly reflect views of NGOs—as one of the participant stated “this is the part I wrote” by pointing to one of the manuals (Interview, I10).

Similar to other CFS models, Cambodian CFS policy is based on the rights-based approach that is “very centrally concerned with the intrinsic value of education and the quality of educational processes,” more than with outcomes of education that facilitate achievement of other rights (Barrett, 2011, pp. 123–124). It touches upon the children’s right to develop to their fullest potential (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, n.d.). Based on this legally binding principle,²⁵ teachers are expected to accommodate different learning needs and styles of their students. Cambodian CFS policy consists of six dimensions. Although in many cases, CFS models consist of five dimensions that are 1) inclusive access, 2) student-centered pedagogies, 3) attention to health and safety, 4) gender sensitivity, 5) community participation, Cambodian CFS policy adds education management as the sixth dimension. This reflects the fact that education administration did not have good capacity to manage its system effectively (Interview, I2).

What UNICEF (2009d) called “child [student]-centered ideology” also informs Cambodian CFS policy. It describes student-centered approach not just as a teaching methodology. Rather, it is “very significant and overarching educational methodologies which are vital to all aspects of its implementation” that is characterized by:

²⁴ *Child Friendly School Policy* was signed and has been in effect since 2007.

²⁵ Cambodia signed the Convention of the Rights of the Child as early as 1989.

- Teaching and learning through creative idea
- Participation and co-operative learning
- Research, analysis and critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Innovation and encouragement of creative and divergent thinking (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2007, p. 8).

Through this educational methodology, the policy emphasizes developing students' knowledge and attitudes to be able to live together (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2005). It clearly reflects the desires of NGOs to build a democratic society based on the student-centered principles.²⁶ ETL is the second dimension of Cambodian CFS framework and has strong inclination for transforming the society to become more peaceful and democratic.²⁷ I now turn to discuss what ETL is and how it consists of the main component of Cambodian CFS policy.

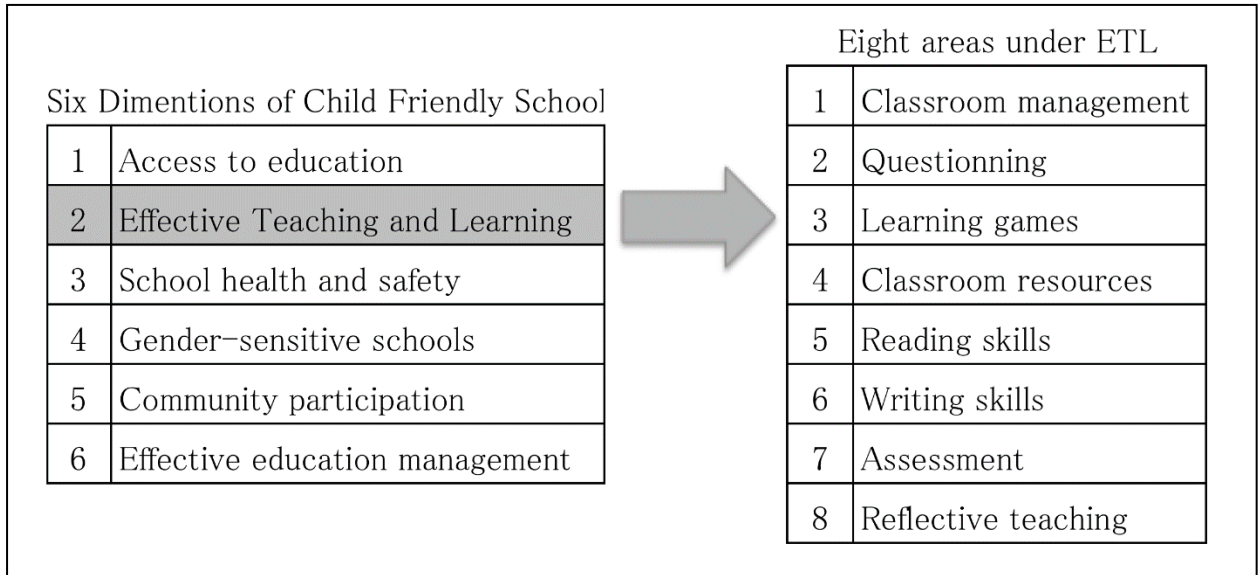
Content of ETL

Based on this notion of student-centered approach, ETL provides more practical pedagogy. It is divided into eight areas as shown in the Figure 5. By representing eight areas based on *ETL Training Manual* (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, n.d.), I unpack the nature of ETL.

²⁶ See Chapter 1 for the discussion about globalized student-centered principles.

²⁷ From this perspective, education quality is not limited to learning achievement but it is expected to enhance both cognitive and non-cognitive development of students.

Figure 5. Eight Areas under ETL



Source: Created by the author based on *ETL Training Manual*

Area 1: Classroom management. Area 1 lays out the principles of difference and equity that are fundamental of CFS framework. Two basic notions are discussed under the section of classroom management. The first is the idea that all children are different and teachers must employ various teaching methods to help all students to learn.

Children are all different and learn in different ways. Therefore, teachers have to provide as many of these possible ways as we can to understand ways of learning of these children. We cannot just rely on one or two methods all the time. We can use other methods to help students to learn. (p. 8)

It clearly states that teachers must understand different ways of learning of their students in order to help them to learn. It also implicitly criticizes teaching that relies solely on dominant methods, most probably on lecturing or rote learning, which may dismiss other possible ways of teaching/learning and thus leave some children behind.

Related to this, the notion of “natural learning” is introduced (p. 9). *ETL Training Manual* presents it as an approach different from the traditional one, in which learning happens in formal classroom setting where students absorb and memorize knowledge in the textbooks as it is. The manual’s description of ETL touches upon the sources of knowledge, including families, friends, and students’ own experiences.

Most effective learning can take place without formal teaching using textbooks and teacher manual, writing things down and so on. It is what might be called "natural learning". ... Teachers can use a lot of these ways of learning in their own classrooms at school. (p. 9)

The discussion goes on to valuing what individual children know from their lives, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or family backgrounds. It further draws our attention to the fact that a traditional teaching method that primarily relies on lecturing impacts negatively “the bottom line” students (p. 7).

Area 2: Questioning. By directing our attentions to the cognitive process involved in learning, Area 2 makes us think about how students know, rather than what they know. Asking questions is described as an important strategy to foster students’ cognitive development by checking students’ understanding, getting students to talk and expressing their ideas and opinions, and to make the instruction more student-centered (p. 11). *ETL Training Manual* categorizes levels of questions into memory, understanding, and critical thinking questions (p. 12, see Figure 3.2.). It places critical thinking as the highest level and most important. Critical thinking is defined as “...requires children to think about one or more pieces of information or ideas and produce a new piece of information or idea as a result” (p. 48). It is more than just recalling information (memory) or explaining the

meaning of information (understanding), but critical thinking requires application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of one or more pieces of information.

Figure 6. Levels of Cognitive Skills



Source: Created by the author based on MoEYS. (n.d.-b). *ETL Training Manual*. p. 12

ETL Training Manual suggests research assignments as a possible method to develop students' critical thinking skills. It states, "organizing simple research tasks for students is an excellent way of stimulating critical thinking. This is because the children are "creating" knowledge for themselves by the research they do, not by simply hearing about or reading something" (p. 17). These assignments also cover communication and presentation skills in addition to critical thinking. ETL even acknowledges critical thinking as a skill that is as important as reading and writing (p. 1).

Area 3: Learning games. Area 3 discusses a range of learning games as a way to develop skills discussed in Area 1 and 2. *ETL Training Manual* pays particular attention to the social aspect of these games, which contribute to nurture students' non-cognitive skills that are necessary to learn to live together.

Children enjoy playing games and this can help make the classroom atmosphere lively and fun. ... children are also developing their skills in speaking, listening and co-operating with others (social skills and values). Many children also learn best when they have a chance to discuss new learning with other children (peer learning) (p. 11)

Games can also reinforce and enrich what students have learned, and stimulate critical

thinking by encouraging students to apply what they know.

Area 4: Classroom resources. This area introduces the idea of rich environment for learning, which is healthy (clean), attractive, and stimulating (p. 29). In such classrooms, stimulating materials are displayed and used in the lessons, in order for children to be happy to come everyday. *ETL Training Manual* particularly discusses posters and maps as useful materials because they contribute to develop students' listening and speaking skills and critical thinking skills, if used in participatory ways. Using posters and maps is also described as effective classroom management strategy when teachers need to give additional assignments for students who finish tasks earlier.

Area 5: Reading skill. Area 5 particularly discusses approaches to develop students' reading skills. ETL emphasizes basic literacy skills as important both for students' educational prospects and for their social lives. In this area, teachers are encouraged to help students acquire understanding about basic rules of written texts (conventions of print) because Cambodian children do not often see adults reading and usually come to school without knowing these rules. Developing basic reading skills also has social importance.²⁸

In rural Cambodia, having someone in the family who can read is a very important resource. The ability to read gives access to many different kinds of information. Some of this information, such as directions or warnings on medicines, agro-chemicals and other products, could be life saving. Literacy is also a vital skill in accessing information about legal rights and citizen's rights. This is why many people describe literacy as the most important "life skill" of all (p. 38).

²⁸ Cambodia's adult literacy rate was 73.9% in 2009 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.) and the ministry has set the goal to double its spending to adult literacy programs by 2015.

Reading skills are not limited to basic literacy: teachers are expected to help children understand texts as a whole and introduce various types of texts such as advertisement, recipe, and manuals for electric devices are also encouraged as a way to help broaden students' reading experiences. This is based on the concerns about pervasive practices where teachers “concentrate heavily in their teaching of reading on letters and words rather than on the whole texts” (Logbook, p. 21) and as a result students do not have the chance to understand and think critically about the texts as a whole.

Area 6: Writing skill. The vision introduced in this area is the importance of original writing that communicates meaning clearly and economically. The two documents define writing skills more than just knowing letters and being able to write neatly and spell correctly.

It is important for the teacher to provide opportunities for even the youngest children to produce their own writing. This means that the writing contains the children's own ideas, it is not copied from the blackboard or a book. Children who do original writing will grow in confidence as they practice. One sentence will become two and then three and then a paragraph and then each one a text (MoEYS, n.d., p. 25).

The strategies recommended based on this vision are “negotiating texts” (MoEYS, n.d., p. 25) and the process of drafting and re-writing. Negotiating texts means teachers and students, or a group of students, develop a text collaboratively on a certain topic by discussing what they want to say. By doing this, students can get a sense of ownership of the text they develop and understand the process to write their own texts. Drafting and re-writing is another strategy to help students develop their writing skills.

Area 7: Assessment. *ETL Training Manual* introduces a vision that good teachers

use various types of assessment as part of their daily routine. Both informal and formative assessments are important, because teachers need to understand the characteristics of students as learners and identify growth each student makes. These types of assessment are particularly necessary to “identify children who need more help and what kind of help is most useful” (Logbook, p. 28). The recommended assessment strategy is portfolio, by which teachers collect examples of students’ work during the year to assess their progress and use as evidence when they have conference with students and parents.

Area 8: Reflection. The idea of reflection is introduced in this area as a routine that “most good teachers do as a habit” (MoEYS, n.d., p. 39). The main purpose of doing reflection is to think about the ways in which teachers can change their teaching practice to improve the learning of students. A list of questions that guide teacher reflection is provided as follows:

- Is everyone learning well?
 - Which students are struggling? What are the causes of their difficulties?
 - Is everyone in the class interested in the lessons?
 - Are all the children attending school regularly and enjoying what they learn?
- (Logbook, p. 39)

This section also explains the cycle of reflection, in which teachers continuously plan, teach, and reflect about their teaching practices.

Transformation Model of Education

Overall, although it is presented as a variety of methods and ideas that seem to be discrete and unrelated, ETL represents globalized student-centered principles that Tabulawa (2003) identified: (a) more flexibility and relevance; (b) activity as the core of learning; (c) placing learners at the center of education; and (d) constructivist epistemology. By

contrasting new ideas with traditional teaching practices, ETL emphasizes new teaching methods as more effective and high quality. New methods are an antithesis to the common teaching practices in Cambodia, where rote memorization of textbook is a dominant teaching strategy (Ogisu 2009). They even touch upon the fundamental conceptions about knowledge and the process of learning. In ETL, knowledge is not limited to one in textbooks and teacher manual. Students learn not only by writing things down or listening to the teacher. Rather, they create knowledge by themselves through active, creative, and critical processes of learning, which involve doing something together, talking with peers, recording and presenting what they learn. These notions inform activity-based, cooperative, and hands-on teaching techniques that are promoted as alternatives to the “chalk-and-talk” practices and as a teaching approach that fosters higher-level cognitive skills.

We can say ETL represents a change from *transmission* model to *transformation* model of education. These two models have different orientations in how they perceive knowledge and knowing/learning. In transmission model, knowledge is seen as invariable and universal. Thus learners are supposed to absorb knowledge as it is. In contrast, ETL presents constructivist notions of knowledge and learning, where knowledge is more dynamic and learning leads transformations of information.

Chapter Summary

The goal of this chapter was to situate Cambodian pedagogical reform in its historical, social, and political contexts. I discussed that changing pedagogy was not just a matter of education, because education is so closely linked to politics and power. At first, student-centered pedagogies were introduced as a national political project that attempted

to build the modern nation-state. Although the MoEYS's motivation for the pedagogical reform was mainly political and economic at the beginning, experiences in the rehabilitation projects as well as desires to transform the society gave a big push to make student-centered pedagogies into a national policy. Geographically speaking, Cambodian pedagogical reform is based on the global model called Child Friendly School (CFS), which was originally brought by UNICEF. The expansion and success of CFS model in Southeast Asia were another big push for the then-minister to decide making a national policy based on the model. Finally, I discussed that the orientation toward transformation underlies the eight areas of ETL.

CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF A PEDAGOGICAL REFORM

(ETL was started), mostly, a dumbed down version of it, I would probably say, but it did help. I don't know if it was right or wrong.
(Interview, I5)

Introduction

The meaning of a certain policy is not given. It is shaped by the interaction among written policy, people, and contexts in which people *do* the policy (Honig, 2006). From this perspective, pedagogical reform is a complex social practice in which various actors construct and reconstruct the meaning of teaching and learning. In the case of pedagogical reform in Cambodia, all actors actively construct the meaning by interpreting and sometimes contesting the idea of student-centered pedagogies and enacting what they understand as the demands of the policy within cultural, historical, social, and political contexts in which they belong (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Pedagogical reform is thus neither monolithic nor normative: Different actors make sense of and enact a pedagogical reform policy in totally different ways, even when they all actively engage in it.

The goal of this chapter is twofold. First, I want to discuss how the meaning of ETL policy is constructed by various actors. I particularly focus on the mechanisms through which different actors (or stakeholders) negotiate the meaning of student-centered pedagogies and develop ETL policy, especially at the international and national levels. By doing so, I try to unpack what particular aspects of student-centered pedagogies got

emphasized and what aspects were silenced, and to examine why ETL policy was developed as it is today. Second, based on the analysis of two policy tools, I want to understand how these tools mediate local actors' understanding and practice of the ETL policy. I present local meanings made from the policy tools and shed light on the gaps between the policy intentions and local meanings. I argue that two policy tools involve paradoxes in its transformation orientation and its transmission approach, which actually hinder, not enhance, fundamental pedagogical changes.

Social constructivism informs how we can understand the roles of various actors and their interactions in Cambodian pedagogical reform. Social constructivism sees all individual actors actively engaging in constructing meaning. This perspective especially challenges the policymakers' common understanding about Cambodian teachers, who have been referred to as instruments and obstacles to instructional reform (Kim & Rose, 2011). Teaching has also been trivialized into techniques and, as a result, complexities and uncertainties inherent in teaching have been undermined in education policies. Instead, social constructivism suggests that teachers are the key agents who hold specialized knowledge and skills based on which they construct and enact the instructional reform. They are playing role as important as development partners, policymakers, and school administrators in constructing this reform.

Moreover, this co-construction of meaning should be understood as a social and situated process (Lave & Wenger, 1991) rather than as an individualized and isolated process. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the meaning constructed through interactions among various actors in order to understand better the process in which a

policy is interpreted and enacted. For example, donors negotiate the meaning of this reform in annual donor meetings, and ministry officials try to figure out what they want from donors and what donors want them to do in their business meetings. Cambodian teacher meetings at the cluster level are also an important mechanism to foster discussions among teachers specifically around this reform, aside from more informal interactions between teachers before or after classes, or during school-level meetings. These meetings and interactions among actors within and between different levels can be considered as a social setting where negotiations over the meaning of the policy could occur.

In co-constructing the meaning of a policy, tools play a significant role to mediate the process. Cognitive psychologists who take socio-cultural perspective suggest that cognition is distributed not only to individuals but to various artifacts, such as physical and symbolic tools, and that these tools are an integral part of activities (Putnam & Borko, 2000). For example, Putnam and Borko (2000) refer to Hutchins's (1990) example of the navigation of the US Navy ship:

Six different people with three different job descriptions and using several sophisticated cognitive tools were involved in piloting the ship out of the harbor. The distribution of cognition across people and tools made it possible for the crew to accomplish cognitive tasks beyond the capabilities of any individual member (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p 5).

Tools, as well as people, play important roles in accomplishing cognitive tasks such as piloting a ship. Wenger (1998) further posited that cognitive tools do not just assist people to do activities, but they are the “reification” of a meaning that gives fixed forms to the meaning negotiated in social interactions, or “participation” (p. 59). He conceptualized

participation and reification as indivisible and interplaying with each other, because tools shape and define how participation could be organized. These perspectives are very helpful to illuminate socio-cultural and even political meanings that are embedded in and extracted from the policy tools, such as manuals, worksheets, and checklists.

Constructing the Meaning of ETL

In the previous chapter, I discussed how student-centered pedagogies have been closely linked to the desires to change the Cambodian society. But, as we can easily imagine, not everyone assigns the same meaning to ETL, which is broad and vague. I want to reveal such multiplicity of perspectives held by various actors who have stakes in Cambodian pedagogical reform. I organize this section based on the levels—particularly international and national levels—in order to highlight the socio-cultural aspect of the process in which diverse meanings are negotiated within and across these levels.

Universal Pedagogy in Question: Development partners

While the Cambodian education sector is very successful in “coordinating” a lot of donors, the coordination mechanisms do not necessarily facilitate engaged discussions among donors to construct shared understanding about ETL. A mechanism called Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) and the more informal platform called EDUCAM are the venues for the coordination among donors, each of which organizes representatives of donors to get together once a month. ESWG plays “a critical role in coordinating donor assistance, promoting a common, integrated program approach, and exchanging information about program implementation” (Government-Donor Partnership Working Group, 2004, p. 10). It allows various actors to take part in the pedagogical reform

without an overlap—“coordination” has been the norm of development projects. It was also agreed that in the education sector all external assistance projects should be aligned with and support a single education sector policy, called Education Strategic Plan and Education Sector Support Program, developed under government leadership.

The two mechanisms—ESWG and EDUCAM—have slightly different functions. Based on the meeting minutes, it is clear that aid effectiveness is the central concern in ESWG. This is also clear from its background: the unsatisfactory progress before 2000, which saw only limited improvement even though education sector received a total of \$244 million in donor assistance in 1994-99, was “attributed to the lack of an integrated policy framework and the proliferation of discreet and ill-coordinated donor-funded projects” (Government-Donor Partnership Working Group, 2004, p. 8). In contrast, EDUCAM is an informal platform where donors, including major NGOs, share information about concrete projects. For instance, almost every meeting for which I could obtain minutes was structured with two presentations from participating donors. It is also important to note that more NGOs participate in EDUCAM than ESWG.

ETL and its mother framework Child Friendly School (CFS) became national policy in 2007 and were incorporated into the Education Strategic Plan in 2009, and thus all development partners support ETL in principle. It has actually been repeatedly brought up as a topic of discussion in EDUCAM. Technically speaking, EDUCAM can be regarded as an important venue for negotiation of meaning and co-construction of ETL policy. For example, at the meeting in January 2007, four different NGOs presented their experiences in pilot projects on ETL approaches, and participants had a discussion about its core

principles. According to the minutes, a participant shared his ideas about learning real life skills from local people by saying that one can teach kids fine finger motion with origami but without using such unfamiliar and costly material, “one can accomplish the same things by teaching them to weave palm fronds into baskets for sticky rice, with the added benefit that the kids can be sent to village elders to learn how to do it” (EDUCAM, 2007). Another person commented that, although it is good to mobilize local resources, “it also increases the need for more and more varied capacity-building” (ibid). Building on these discussions, yet another participant raised a question regarding the elder teachers and school directors who tend to be reluctant to employ new ideas, especially in city schools.

However, from interviews, it became clear that participants from various donor agencies did not necessarily construct shared understandings about ETL. Rather, they held quite diverse perspectives toward its student-centered principles. At one end of the continuum, participants who belong to the agencies that commit to expanding student-centered teaching stressed its principles as universal: “I think the concept behind the learner-centered methodologies is quite international. Right? ... It is activity-based, cooperative, inquiry... and students develop their ability to apply knowledge” (Interview, I8). But there were people at the other end who questioned the relevance of student-centered pedagogies specifically in Cambodian context.

An informant described ETL as follows:

ETL, to my understanding, is to teach children what they want to learn in order to achieve their goal, their ultimate goal. ... Quality in our definition is to give education in which students apply what they had learned to their lives in the community. Quality of education does not mean that students know theories ... just

copying the board or answering questions is not the quality I'm talking about. Students should, we should encourage students, think out of a box. Think out of a box. This is what we want to see in students. (Interview, I9)

In the above excerpt, transformation model of education (“think out of box” and application of knowledge in daily life) is sharply contrasted to the traditional notion of teaching and learning, in which students learn theories and memorize what the teacher tells them. For him, the transformation model of education is necessary to help individual students to “achieve their ultimate goal” and to “live productive lives.” Another participant from bi-lateral agency that implements teacher education projects described student-centered pedagogies as “better methodology” to equip students with the “whole range” of knowledge, skills, and attitudes;

If we talk about the pupils in the classrooms in the ends, there is of course stronger understanding of a subject, that should be a result of better methodology. Better understanding of the subject contents. The ability, it is actually, the ability to apply these knowledge, and the ability to go on to the higher levels, creativity to use the content that they have learned, and transform it into new things, to create, to analyze ... If they don't, you don't get the knowledge, the students will never be able to analyze or to apply ... It is not one particular thing that we want, it is the whole range. It is also social skills, for instance. We also want to develop more social skills, cooperative attitudes, it is not only about knowledge and skills, but also about attitudes (Interview, I8).

In contrast, there were participants from development partners who perceived pedagogies as appearing on a continuum rather than embracing student-centered pedagogies as the best and universal teaching approach: “in some cases student-centered approach is much better than lecturing. But lecturing is also important, so I cannot say

which approach is better, so combination of all approaches is the best” (Interview, I12). Another participant complained about what he frequently witnesses when he goes to schools, “I hate it when they do it, when I come into a classroom, they all start moving around and they shift the classroom setting just to show that they are doing some of the learner-centered methodologies” and he contended that “for some parts of a lesson you have to do teacher-centered” (Interview, I13).

Others went on to share uncertainty about student-centered pedagogies in the Cambodian context. For example, a consultant, who is originally from Cambodia, explained the cultural mismatch, “in student-centered approach, students feel they don’t learn anything from the teacher. They go to school to learn, not to share information among themselves. And teachers are supposed to teach students” (Interview, I14). Another participant shared his concerns about teachers’ insufficient knowledge about the content and said, “as long as [teachers] don’t understand the content it is very dangerous to use student-centered methodologies because it might bring confusions” (Interview, I13). Furthermore, an education expert at one of the development partners questioned the relevance of pursuing such higher-level skills at the primary level. For him, we must first improve more basic aspects in education, such as instructional hours, to meet international standards.

I think it is too early to think about these things [higher cognitive skills] in ETL. Rather, we should first work on more basic things, such as making sure teachers come to school every day. Seriously. Children have only 600 to 650 instructional hours per academic year... this too low compared to the international standard. You see, in this week, we had Water Festival [national holiday] from

Tuesday to Thursday, but many schools were closed for the whole week... (Interview, I3)

He even suggested that “teacher-centered approaches might be more effective to teach basic knowledge that is needed to enhance technology in this country.” These comments help us understand even those who take part in ETL policy, not to mention less involved actors, shared uncertainty about student-centered pedagogies and a transformation model of education because of institutional, cultural, and human resource contexts in which Cambodian schools exist.

The above analysis clarifies a wide range of perspectives held by the major development partners. It is striking that many participants expressed uncertainty about student-centered pedagogies, contrary to the common assumption that donors are the ones who actually “export” student-centeredness to many of the low-income countries.

It also became clear that many donors did not willingly support ETL policy because it is so strongly associated with UNICEF. Donors other than UNICEF and NGOs regarded it as owned by UNICEF, not necessarily by the Cambodian ministry of education, even though they acknowledged that it is a national policy and included in Education Strategic Plan, to which they have voices on what to include. The question about who owns a policy seems to have great implications for how donors engage in it. One participant stated, “We regard this ETL thing as UNICEF project. I don’t think other major partners are proactive to do this policy, if not overtly oppose it. We just try not to make our projects inconsistent with the policy” (Interview, I7).

My evidence suggests that donors do not proactively promote a policy when they regard it as someone else’s or too closely associated with a particular donor. A JICA expert,

for example, expressed that they promote the inquiry-based learning (IBL) approach by differentiating it from ETL (Interview, I13). According to him, IBL bridges subject content (mainly science) and pedagogy, whereas ETL focuses primarily on pedagogy and falls short in strengthening teachers' content knowledge. Another expert from VVOB also explained that their program is unique for its emphasis on TPCK, which incorporates ITC into pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Those partner agencies that work on pedagogical reform, which is actually very similar to ETL in their student-centered principles, did not claim they directly engage in, apply, or implement ETL policy. Rather, they try to differentiate themselves from ETL and emphasized unique contributions of their projects. If they say so [doing ETL], it means they are doing UNICEF project but not their own project: "Our project is not ETL *per se*. They seem, similar from your viewpoint, it might be true, but there are differences or originalities in our project" (Interview, I8).

Here the issue of visibility comes into play (Steiner-Khamsi 2006). Especially for the bi-lateral agencies like JICA and VVOB, making their projects visible and unique is crucial to hold accountability to taxpayers. At the same time, the norm of coordination does not allow them to ignore the core direction of ETL firstly because it is a national policy, and secondly, it is based on the student-centered principals which many—not all—donors do not oppose. Donors work in such an ambivalent balance among coordination and visibility.

The above evidence suggests that donor coordination does not lead various actors to construct a shared understanding. Although mechanisms like ESWG are often referred to as best practices of the MoEYS to promote its ownership and donor coordination (Hirosato &

Kitamura 2009),²⁹ having mechanisms does not necessarily ensure that different actors have engaged in discussion about the reform process and that RGC and MoEYS actually “own” an education policy. One participant shared his concerns about this area by characterizing what they do in the Working Group as just information sharing and said, “there is no one taking the lead and putting the noses to the same direction” (Interview, I8). The flip side of such loose coordination is to allow diverse actors to operate harmoniously on the surface. It also helps diverse actors participate in the pedagogical reform while maintaining an ambivalent balance.

ETL Meets “Effectiveness” Discourse: Ministry

Participants from the ministry departments took a more nuanced position regarding pedagogies. A ministry official made sense of ETL as a broader idea that subsumes both transmission and transformation models of education: “ETL is more than just student-centered pedagogies. It includes whatever methods that are effective, effective in terms of learning achievement” (Interview, N1). Ministry officials described ETL as a means to improve students’ cognitive learning outcome, which they emphasized as the national agenda.

“Effectiveness” was strongly emphasized by all ministry officials whom I interviewed. Effectiveness gained momentum in Cambodia especially after the results from 2005/06 reading assessment was declared.³⁰ The World Bank supported the assessment as

²⁹ Establishing the ownership of developing countries and the partnership among donors was set as the model for international cooperation in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, adopted in 2005 (Hirosato & Kitamura 2009, p. 41).

³⁰ It is based on EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment), which has been implemented in Latin America with strong initiative by the World Bank.

the nation's first ever attempt to ascertain how much students learn in primary schools. The result was quite shocking: only 40% of the Grade 3 students answered correctly in reading and 41.7% in writing (World Bank, 2006). It also found a huge gap between students in large urban schools (highest) and small rural schools (lowest). Although this assessment was limited to reading instruction, its results actually placed effectiveness—in terms of students' learning outcome measured by test scores—at the center of educational discourse in Cambodia.³¹

Such unsatisfactory results in the 2005/06 assessment exposed student-centered teaching approaches that had been associated with modern (and therefore good) methods to teach students to critical eyes from the ministry. Then-minister Im Sethy announced that “the teaching of reading would be a national priority, and that it would be taught according to the Chet Chhem method” which he had been taught in primary school and which enabled him to read for life (Seymour 2012, p. 3). Chet Chhem method is, according to a ministry official, “an indigenous method” that “most of the literate Cambodians in my age (mid 40s) and above had been taught” (Interview, N4). The method, named after Mr. Chet Chhem, who was a teacher educator and published several teaching guides during the 50's, is based on phonics teaching. The method is described as didactic approach (Courtney & Gravelle 2013) that emphasizes rote learning as the primary method to teach reading and writing.

Although the Chet Chhem method had not been used since the 90's due to the rise of “teaching for meaning” types of methods that involve activities and games, which are

³¹ Similar reading assessments have been conducted for Grade 6 in 2007, Grade 9 in 2008, and again Grade 3 in 2009. As of July 2013, Cambodian ministry of education was working on expanding similar early grade assessment in Math.

associated with student-centered pedagogies, growing consideration of effectiveness as a result of EGRA 2006 results brought it back to education discourses. The minister's announcement was, therefore, not only to prioritize effectiveness in teaching and learning but also to revive "indigenous" methods for Khmer literacy teaching. It also indicates the ministry's anxiety about the "effectiveness" of student-centered pedagogies—"Ministry was not convinced enough about it" (Interview, I8).

Quite interestingly, however, ministry officials did not necessarily abandon ETL that emphasizes student-centered principles. For one official, the Chet Chhem method falls under ETL if it produces a better learning outcome:

I think, the method [Chet Chhem method] and ETL, there is no contradiction between them at all. But from 1979 up to now, Cambodian students have difficulties in learning Khmer language. May students are under the standard. We did not have such problems before [with Chet Chhem method]. In the classrooms, as you know, we need to help children practice more in the classroom. We take our familiar method just because it helps students learn how to read and write. So that is a part of objectives of ETL.
(Interview, N4)

Based on the comparison between the past and present, this informant assessed the Chet Chhem method as effective in producing better students' learning outcome (in this case students' ability to read and write). And because of this, she regarded it as consistent with ETL—*Effective Teaching and Learning*.

Another official from the Curriculum Department considered any effective methods as ETL:

We develop the national curriculum, which all departments, including primary education department, need to follow. ETL was

developed as a means to deliver the national curriculum ... but the curriculum does not define how things should be taught. We don't really care how the curriculum is taught, by Chet Chhem or other methods. But we do care whether students actually learn it. Then we call it effective, ETL. (Interview, N3)

Although he did not necessarily claim that Chet Chhem method is effective per se, he certainly did not problematize the different orientations between Chet Chhem method and ETL. The case of the Chet Chhem method indicates that student-centered, transformation orientation in ETL was not necessarily brought up by ministry officials whom I interviewed. Instead, they used the term ETL to indicate any methods that produce good learning outcome. In other words, epistemological substance was mostly detached from the discussion about teaching methods within the ministry.

Whose Voice Got Reified

Similar to the broadened notion of ETL among ministry officials, policy statements are also indicative of the changes added to CFS policy and its major component, ETL, at the national level. Policy on Child Friendly Schools (2007) reconfirmed that CFS activities “which are implemented in schools throughout the country will improve and develop each school” (p. 6) and “The implementation of CFS is the essential strategy that needs to be strengthened and expended widely in all schools” (p. 10). As these statements suggest, the ministry emphasizes CFS as a *national* policy that all schools across the country must implement. This highly centralized Cambodian education system has significant implications for CFS policy.

Even the fundamental elements of the pilot CFS projects were turned around and embedded in the centralized system in the process of making a national policy. In the pilot

phase of CFS, NGOs employed a “menu-based” approach, in which local actors could decide what they need and want. Based on their own definition of child-friendliness, they could choose and implement their own versions of CFS from a list of activities suggested by education experts in each project (Bredenburg 2009). Another characteristic of the pilot projects was voluntary participation. Teachers themselves could decide whether they want to participate in the project, and once they completed a training successfully, the project gave them a small grant to renovate their classrooms.

These approaches taken in the pilot projects and transformation model of education have many characteristics in common. For example, service recipients (local actors and students respectively) are expected to participate actively, experts (staff of an implementation body and teachers) play a role of facilitators rather than being providers of knowledge, and a bottom-up, rather than top-down, approach was taken. According to Bredenburg (2009), pilot projects were quite successful in the sense that locally developed programs were more relevant to the local needs.

However, the menu-based and voluntary approaches were abandoned to allow the policy to be embedded in the centralized education system (Bredenburg 2009). It was essentially a political rather than educational decision. Having been a key advocate of CFS model, an educational advisor lamented,

When the ministry found this [voluntary participation] out, they were very unhappy. Very unhappy that we were approaching in this way. How dare are you to tell the teachers that this is voluntary? They could do it or not do it. Now CFS is a policy and everyone has to do it. I was trying to explain that, I know that it is a policy that everyone must do it, but the problem is that they won't do it. And

they said they must do it. But [I said] they won't do it. But [they said] they must do it. So no more voluntary approach. ... Doing in the way we were doing was realistic, but it was politically incorrect. ... I can understand the ministry's point of view, because if the ministry agreed to our approach, basically they acknowledge that they have no control over teachers. Publicly admitting that they have no control over these teachers. For very centralized, hierarchical government culture that they have, it cannot, they can never accept that. ... For the ministry, it meant a political statement about the real situation in the schools, which they can never accept. ... It is really hard to make approach politically consistent and acceptable. (Interview, I1)

Difficulties to make an education policy both educationally and politically correct are, to some extent, associated with how Cambodian education has been linked to power and legitimacy. As discussed in Chapter 3, having “control” over education, including teachers and schools, has great significance in the Cambodian political context throughout the country's history (Kusakabe 2009). Cambodian high-level politicians have used education as a political “tool” to maintain their legitimacy, and such politics have undermined educational goals and commitments (Ayres 2000a). In this political contexts, giving a lot of autonomy to teachers and schools, as CFS projects originally did, not only reduces the ministry's legitimacy, but also negatively impact the government's legitimacy.

Similarly, although in its original objective of ETL is to let teachers teach in flexible and creative manners in order to respond to students' needs and to enhance students' non-cognitive and critical thinking skills, the ministry does not necessarily present ETL in that way. Rather, the ministry provides detailed instructions that all teachers—regardless of geographic locations or grade levels—must implement. I now turn to an examination of

how ETL is constructed in policy tools.

Meanings Reified in Policy Tools

Reification is a very useful concept to discuss the process of negotiation of meaning in the pedagogical reform. According to Wenger (1998), reification refers to “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness.’ In so doing we create points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized” (p. 58). In the case of ETL, certain understanding about ETL is given form as various cognitive tools, which become “a focus for the negotiation of meaning,” people use them to perform an action (p. 59).

The notion of reification sheds light on the social process through which the tools were created. It helps us understand the mismatches or a paradox as a reflection of multiple meanings negotiated in the process of making the policy tools. At the same time, policy messages must be translated into accessible and concrete language in order for the local actors to be able to understand and implement the policy. In this sense, these tools actually define how ETL can be understood within the local contexts. In the sections that follow, I discuss how multiple meanings are negotiated mediated by the tools, drawing on the perspectives shared by the participants.

Checklist

One of such tools is a checklist. Teachers, school principals, and District Training and Monitoring Team (DTMT) use a comprehensive checklist to monitor and evaluate the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. This checklist plays a vital role to present ideals of ETL policy for local actors in an accessible and measurable manner. In

other words, it mediates between policy statements and practices. With Wenger's words, the checklist shapes the experiences of the people who use. Therefore, examining the checklist is a necessary step to understand what aspects of ETL policy are emphasized, undermined, or even twisted, and how it shapes and is shaped by local realities and practices.

Courtney (2008) has already pointed out that the checklist is inconsistent and misleading. According to her, it only helps inspectors check which activities (group work, questioning, lecture, etc.) are implemented but does not allow them to see the quality of a lesson as a whole. Therefore, she argued, school inspectors would get only superficial understanding about instructional practices with this checklist. This study directly speaks to the issue of reification that hinders people from making sense of what this reform actually tries to do. My analysis supplements this claim with evidence about what meaning local actors actually make out of the checklist.

Design. The checklist is a 10-page long table. The table is divided into two *dimensions*: the first dimension is classroom organization and administration, which consists of three *main activities* with 27 *detailed activities* and the other dimension is divided into 10 main activities with 52 detailed activities related more directly to teaching and learning. Four to five *items* are provided for each detailed activity in the next row, as many as 345 items in total! For example, under the dimension of classroom organization and administration, one of the main activities is classroom decoration and display. Nine detailed activities fall under this category, one of which is "displaying the national motto and the King's photo." Next to this activity, four items are listed: 1. The national motto is

written correctly; 2. There is a photograph of the King; 3. The photograph is displayed properly; and 4. This photo is well maintained and cleaned. Inspectors are supposed first to check whether a teacher implements each item, and then rank the activity based on how many items a teacher implements (A: four or more; B: three; C: two; D: only one) in the right column.

At the very bottom of the checklist, there are columns in which inspectors provide a total performance result. For these columns they need to put total scores of A, B, C, and D. Finally, on the last page of the checklist, there is a space where inspectors can provide a paragraph of written feedback. In principle, inspectors visit classrooms repeatedly until teachers reach an A or B grade in all activities. At that point, teachers are regarded as fully student-centered and advanced.

Content. Looking closely at the content of the checklist provides us with some insights about how the ideals of ETL policy are reified. Table 5 below shows a result of my interpretive analysis. Three categories emerged from the analysis: material/physical conditions, process, and content/quality. It is clear that arranging physical conditions and preparing necessary materials (such as lesson plans and teaching aids) are regarded as significant elements that constitute high quality teaching and learning.

In contrast, activities related to the content/quality, including the content of a lesson plan, content of a question, or content of homework, are not emphasized as strongly as the other two types. For example, out of five detailed activities under “use of materials in teaching and learning,” two activities are about materials (teacher prepares teaching aids; teacher uses simple environment resources) and all of the remaining three activities are

related to processes (students use the materials; students understand how to use the materials; teacher explains and facilitates the use of the materials if necessary). It means the checklist sets standards for using materials in particular ways, but does not necessarily include criteria for evaluating the content and quality of such materials.

Table 5. Types of Activities Listed in the Checklist

| Types of Activities | # of Activities | Examples |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Material/Physical Conditions | 37 (10) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Displaying students work. - Teacher uses simple environmental resources as teaching aids. |
| Teaching Processes | 27 (27) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher spends time as appropriate to the content of the lesson. - Teacher uses various activities (learning games, role plays, songs) in teaching. |
| Content/Quality | 15 (15) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher links the lesson with the community's livelihood. - Teacher uses standard curriculum. |

Source: created by the author.

Note: Numbers appeared in apprentices are those in dimension 2.

Underlying assumptions. The checklist uses a lot of student-centered terminologies such as “real life experience,” “critical thinking,” “facilitate,” “pair or group work,” “role play,” “games,” “reinforce students’ answers and good work,” and so on, which parallel with the transformation model of education presented in the policy. However, as I explain below, assumptions that underlie this checklist are more based on the traditional images of teaching and learning.

Assumption 1: Teaching as no more than a set of activities

First, this checklist frames teaching as a set of activities or actions initiated by teachers. Teachers must listen to the students, think various ways to present the content, and make decisions before actually taking actions. But the checklist allows inspectors to

focus only on the activities, and thus undermines complexities involved in teaching. Verbs used in the checklist are also indicative of this point: to arrange, to explain, to summarize, to question, to help, and so on. Teaching is framed with active verbs. In contrast, among the few items that hold students as the subject, verbs include to understand, to complete, to work, etc, which indicate that students are expected to respond to the activities in predictable ways. For example, the checklist does not expect students to raise questions or to share ideas other than answers to the questions raised. It conveys highly predictable image of teaching and learning, in which teachers hold most of the control.

Assumption 2: To be student-centered, the teacher has to implement ALL the activities on the list

Second, the checklist provides minimal standards for student-centered teaching. Student-centered teaching is defined as a set of activities on the list. Rather it is not regarded as student-centered if some activities are absent. It means, not implementing the listed activities is regarded as a problem that needs to be fixed. It leaves no room for teachers to choose but they have to implement all of the 79 activities and 345 items on the list, regardless of the subject content or the students they teach. It has strong inclination to standardize teaching practices in great detail.

Assumption 3: Certain materials and resources in the classroom are essential to student-centered teaching

Third, the checklist defines physical and material conditions as a prerequisite for student-centered teaching. Because all activities are valued equally by determining the total performance, teachers who do not have colorful posters, teaching and learning materials,

and time and money to make or buy these materials would never be considered advanced or good. Actually, a teacher who works in a remote school in poor neighborhood lamented, “My teaching is not student-centered yet... You see, my classroom doesn’t have walls. Where should I put posters? I can’t!” (Interview, T1)

Assumption 4: Deficit-oriented linear approach is key to teacher development

Finally, the checklist takes deficit-oriented approach to teacher learning and development. The basic logic underlying it is that identifying shortcomings is necessary in “helping improve the performance of teachers” (MoEYS, 2008a, p. 7). Information collected with this checklist is to be used to identify training needs, which are predefined in the list rather than emerge from the challenges teachers face in daily practices. Moreover, it implies that teachers who are able to implement all activities at one point have already overcome their problems and mastered student-centered teaching. The checklist assumes a linear process of teacher learning, in which teachers never have problems once they master student-centered teaching.

Perceived limited teacher capacity. All of the four assumptions, i.e., teaching as activities; good teaching as implementation of all activities; physical and material conditions as a precondition for good teaching; and teacher development as linear process, imply that teachers are the objects of the policy that is decided in Phnom Penh, rather than as active and autonomous professionals who can think and decide how they teach. The following comment made by a ministry official sharply illuminates how Cambodian teachers are perceived as barriers:

You know, I think in the context of Cambodia they [teachers] are different from other places, because after we started from 1979, we

used the people with more knowledge to teach people with less knowledge. People with less knowledge taught people without knowledge. Until now, teachers who completed up to Grade 4 still teach in schools. ... So the quality of teachers varies. ... Improving teacher quality is essential to improve quality of education, and ETL is one way to achieve it. (Interview, N3)

According to him, it is difficult to make sure that all teachers, even those with the lowest education level, are able to apply student-centered pedagogies.

Similar concerns about limited teacher capacity were shared by a lot of national and international actors. Education experts in donor agencies and a ministry official who is in charge of teacher training particularly concerned that Cambodian teachers in general do not have enough content knowledge necessary to make proper decisions in teaching. A university-based, domestic consultant further stressed that teachers do not possess higher-order thinking skills with which they interpret the policy messages and put them into practice, and which they should actually teach to their students. The perceived limited teacher capacities may have contributed to the mismatches in the checklist.

However, there were participants who were skeptical about the effectiveness of the checklist to translate the policy message:

It [checklist] is extremely long ... and many of which are about physical aspects, right? It asks whether they put posters, prepare lesson plans, or use teaching aids. They are all important, but can we say checking all of these equals to student-centered teaching? I don't think so. There are more ... I mean, deeper changes should occur. But in this country, in the centralized education system, many teachers still misunderstand student-centered as checking all the items, and it became priority. (December 18, 2012)

She criticized that the checklist leads misunderstandings and becomes a barrier for

“deeper changes.” This claim parallels Brodie, Lelliott, and Davis (2002)’s claim: activities “can be enacted in ways in which the substance of learner-centered teaching ... is not a focus” (p. 544). The checklist runs this risk by describing student-centered pedagogies as a list of activities. One of the participants from an NGO described checklist as a “dumb down version” of the ideals of ETL, as cited at the beginning of this chapter. But she admitted that simplifying the theoretical and philosophical ideas into concrete list of activities actually helped to make changes at the local level. This is what Wenger (1998) warned as double edge of reification. The tools make policy messages succinct, portable, persistent, and more focused, on the one hand, but it has a risk to ossify or mask what the policy actually means, on the other (p. 61).

Paradox. It seems that there are mismatches between the student-centered philosophy that underlies ETL and the assumptions that inform design and content of this checklist. ETL documents conceptualize learning as active participation to the process of constructing knowledge, whereas the checklist focuses on teachers’ activities rather than students. Teachers are supposed to make decisions in class based on the students’ learning needs and different learning styles, while the checklist predefines what every teacher must do in great detail. ETL policy emphasizes the importance of materials and teaching aids, but they are supplemental resources, not a precondition, to teach diverse students. Teacher development is defined as a continuous and cyclical process that is based on reflection according to the documents, rather than as a linear process.

It is even paradoxical that teachers are evaluated on their student-centered teaching with this checklist, which is more directly associated with transmission approach. It lacks

necessary flexibility to teach diverse students who have different learning needs and styles. Also, its design and content are to impose activities on teachers without stimulating their critical and creative thinking, which they are supposed to teach to their students. These characteristics are mostly informed by transmission approach, from which ETL policy tries to bring changes to transformative, constructivist approach.

Helping Slow Learners Manual

Another tool that I want to discuss is the manual called *Helping Slow Learners*, which was disseminated to all school principals and classroom teachers in 2008, after a year of implementation of CFS policy. The CFS steering committee created this 33-page booklet as a supplementary material for ETL. Although this manual is for the reference rather than as a daily tool, it is an important material that identifies what problems are and how these problems should be addressed in ETL. In this sense, it is also a cognitive tool with which policy messages are negotiated.

The problem. *Helping Slow Learners* is, as the name suggests, a manual about how to teach slow or weak learners to catch up with others. It defines high repetition and dropout rates as “the major concerns of MoEYS” (MoEYS, 2008b, p. 1) in its effort to improve the quality of education. Repetition and dropout rates remain high, according to the manual, because there are many slow learners especially in Grades 1 and 2 and “they are not helped on time” (ibid, p. iii). The manual summarizes the benefits of providing timely support to slow learners as follows:

- Students to remain hopeful and motivated in their learning because they are supplemented knowledge to help them pursue their interests and continue their study;

- Teachers to reduce the number of slow learners in their class and school thereby reducing dropout rate and increasing the promotion rate as planned;
- Families to be happy with their children's performance at school and to save money and time by avoiding the repetition of classes (p. 2).

As a result, helping them to perform better and be promoted would contribute to achieving the universal primary education by 2015, as stated in the National Plan on Education for All. Therefore, it states, all the stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, community members, and even students themselves, are supposed to take responsibility to help slow learners. This manual is to inform the ways in which different actors could help slow learners.

There are important twists in how *Helping Slow Learners* manual sets out the problem. First, it narrows the idea of different learning needs and styles down into “slow learners.” According to the *ETL Training Manual*, which describes overall ETL principles, it is discussed that all students are different and teachers must employ various teaching methods in order to fulfill every student's right to learn. Equity is one of the key principles of ETL, as discussed in the previous chapter. In contrast, *Helping Slow Learners* focuses only on slow learners, who have *difficulties* in learning, rather than attending to the *differences* that each student has. The manual identifies different reasons for students to learn slowly. These reasons include students' physical impediments, students' psychological problems (nervous or negligent), family situations, and teachers' inappropriate teaching such as not having lesson plans or not employing student-centered teaching approaches. This way of framing the problem dismisses the fact that culturally and

socially diverse students are often disadvantaged structurally and institutionally, such as in schooling. Rather, it frames the problem at the personal level such as physical impediments. By focusing on *difficulties* instead of *differences*, the manual undermines the principle of equity in ETL.

Helping Slow Learners also frames the problem in economic terms. It uses these rates as the indicators of educational quality, which are common to many developing countries that face strong pressure to show the improvements with measurable evidence to the donors. The manual states that reducing repetition would contribute to “save money and time” (MoEYS, 2008b, p. 2). But again, ETL and the overall CFS framework are based on the notion that education is a human right. Although it is understandable that ensuring the minimum learning standards in early grades is important to retain students in later grades, and in this sense it is to ensure students’ right to learn, the manual does not make this point explicit. Rather, it frames the problem in economic terms such as effectiveness and efficiency.

Strong emphasis on the basics is another twist that we can see in *Helping Slow Learners* manual. The manual identifies difficulties that slow learners may face especially in early grades (see Table 6 below). As the list illuminates, it only focuses on the basic cognitive skills rather than higher-order thinking and critical thinking, which ETL policy states as important as reading and writing skills. There is no discussion about non-cognitive aspects of learning as well, even though the policy emphasizes the need to develop students’ attitudes to be able to live together (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2007). The manual as well as other materials fail to provide how to achieve critical thinking and non-cognitive

development, which consist of the central components of the transformation model of education.

Table 6. Difficulties Slow Learners May Face, Identified in the Manual

| Khmer | Math |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cannot distinguish letters correctly - Cannot distinguish sounds correctly - Cannot combine sounds and spell correctly - Cannot read words and sentences correctly - Read without understanding the content - Write letters incorrectly - Spell many words incorrectly and give wrong meanings (know little vocabulary) - Cannot write phrases, sentences and articles well (their ideas are not clear) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not know the real numbers - Do not know how to add or subtract - Do not know how to add or subtract number by vertical line method - Cannot remember multiplication tables - Do not know how to multiply - Do not know how to divide |

Source: MoEYS (2008b). *Helping Slow Learners*. p.8-14

Solutions. Three types of solutions are discussed in the manual. The first type is providing special support to slow learners according to their learning needs. It includes avoiding insulting language or punishment, allocating front seats to slow learners, assigning them appropriate homework or exercises, and not forcing them to participate but encourage voluntary participation. It also includes offering special review sessions on Thursdays.³² The manual states that Thursday teaching should be focused on slow learners, so that they could get opportunities to practice what they have learned in regular class. It is advised that teachers give practical exercises and tasks rather than lecturing in these sessions, so that slow learners could “fill their gaps” (MoEYS, 2008b, p. 5). When assigning tasks, teachers

³² Before 2009, public schools are closed on Thursdays as these were kept for professional development days.

should divide students into two groups based on their ability and provide more support to the slow learner group.

The second type of solutions is to help slow learners outside study time.

“Student-helping student activities” are the major solutions discussed in this section. These activities include assigning Student Council members from Grade 4, 5, and 6 to work with slow learners in the lower grades during breaks. Elder students are supposed to provide hands-on support, such as holding slow learners’ hands to practice writing letters or helping reading textbooks.

Lastly, the manual discusses helping slow learners outside school. Organizing learning clubs and self-study are the two solutions to be taken outside school. Learning clubs refer to the groups of students who get together, aiming to help slow learners in the village. The club should be led by the leader from the Student Council with help from teachers, parents, and volunteers. Self-study is another solution basically done at home, with direct assistance from parents and siblings of slow learners.

These are not so radical solutions to address inequalities as they sound. One of the characteristics is the involvement of various actors in solving the problems of slow learners. Teachers, school principals, parents, and even students are supposed to take responsibilities in helping slow learners. This echoes with the core idea of CFS framework, in which “participation” is one of the six dimensions. However, compared to the notion of participation in CFS that assumes an equal relationship, involvement of various actors in helping slow learners is based more on the dichotomous relationship between elder-younger or faster-slower. I should also point out that the solutions are basically

described as techniques to be employed in addition to the daily practices, rather than as alternative methods that could replace existing practices. For example, Thursdays are added to the normal school days and the student-helping-student activities and learning clubs are new initiatives introduced to the existing school operation. Given that ETL policy tries to change the existing education system into more transformative and constructivist system, emphasizing repetition and dropout rates may hinder such substantial changes.

Local Meaning

When policy messages got reified in the way that narrows down the possibilities to bring intended changes or even involves paradoxes, it is no wonder teachers and other local actors would understand the policy as a totally different thing from its original intentions. The reified messages in policy tools (such as checklist and *Helping Slow Learners* manual) need to be decoded within local socio-cultural and material contexts. In the following sections, I discuss how policy messages already narrowly reified in the checklist and manual got farther filtered through severe material constraints in schools and the difficulties associated with slow learners. I also argue that it is not so much the actual material constraints or slow learners that hinder pedagogical reform, but how these difficulties are addressed in policy tools and perceived by local actors.

Local meaning made from the checklist.

Working with this checklist helps teachers improve their practices.

If teachers want to improve, they can see what they should improve

... from the list. I think teachers gradually improve their teaching.

They improve year by year, and someday they would complete all

of them. (Interview, S9)

As this comment by a school principal suggests, completing the checklist became an end rather than a means to achieve deeper changes. In other words, local actors considered the checklist as a set of activities that suffices for student-centered teaching, rather than as minimal standards. In the case of physical/material conditions for teaching, they saw materials as a parameter of teaching quality, not as a precondition for good teaching as the checklist implies. This is very slight difference, but it represents a disjuncture between checklist and meaning assigned to it by local actors.

Eight DTMT members are responsible for inspecting 10 schools in the cluster of the city of Prey Veng. In each semester, two or three members are grouped together and visit five schools for inspection. They basically spend half day in each school and observe each classroom to complete the checklist. Because of the time limitation, they sometimes cannot spend the whole lesson hour (45 minutes) in each classroom. They also cannot check all the 345 items on the list within that short period of time. Therefore, they select and focus on certain more important activities. One of the DTMT members listed activities related to physical and material aspects as his priority:

When I go to observe [for inspection], ... I see materials that the teacher uses. Does the teacher have a lesson plan? ... All teachers need to have lesson plans. They cannot teach random. Then I see teaching aids. Does he have teaching aids? What kind of teaching aids? (Interview, S1)

As this comment illuminates, DTMT members particularly emphasized lesson plans and teaching aids as part of physical and material conditions. These two materials were always grouped together and considered as the most important elements for good teaching,

compared to the classroom organization or the use of textbook.

However, what material conditions mean for DTMT members is slightly different from the checklist. DTMT members are the ones who understood the local contexts very well, and thus they know the difficulties that teachers face in preparing various materials stated in the checklist. Even preparing lesson plans and teaching aids requires a lot of energy in the reality of teachers' working conditions. DTMT members were sympathetic with teachers:

... that is the barrier for them. They have to prepare teaching aids by themselves for every subject. So we [district education office] help schools to buy materials, and school principals should take care of it. They have money to buy materials and they have to help teachers. ... Children of rich people come to this school [the largest school located in the city center] and parents help the school. But in Baray [the school in the poorest neighborhood] people are not so rich and they don't contribute much money to the school. These problems, most of them, are not the problems of teachers.
(Interview, S6)

For the teachers who do not have enough materials, it [implementing activities] is difficult. They have to prepare their own stuffs. ... But for those who already have materials, it is not difficult. If you have teaching aids and lesson plans, then it is not difficult. (Interview, S4)

In the cluster, schools do not have enough resources to be used for teaching aids, except for one in the city center, where the community donates a lot of resources. Most of the teachers hold second or even third jobs to complement their salary, which leaves little time for them to prepare for the class (for more detailed discussion about teachers' working conditions, see Chapter 5). As cited, DTMT members emphasized that barriers for ETL

implementation stem from local contexts—not from teachers’ education levels or limited capacity. Given these difficult local realities, having lesson plans and teaching aids signals a good effort that a teacher makes for the class. In this context, preparing lesson plans and teaching aids is regarded as a parameter of how well teachers teach, and thus the actual quality of these materials is not as important.

Teachers further internalized these expectations as their mandates, both through using the checklist by themselves and through inspections given by DTMT and school principals. In the cluster, school principals are responsible for distributing the checklist to all individual teachers in order for them to self-evaluate their own teaching. Teachers are supposed to complete it before DTMT members come to observe, and DTMT members observe classes based on the completed checklist. Therefore, the checklist is a document that teachers frequently referred to and worked with. This was particularly evident from the fact that all of the 13 teachers I interviewed referred to the checklist when I asked what they do for ETL.

A teacher who taught Grade 1 commented, “... we have to have lesson plans. We also have to prepare teaching materials, such as in Khmer, we have to prepare consonant cards. We also have to have posters. These are all stated in the list” (Interview, T13). This teacher clearly perceived preparing materials as her mandates, or what she *has to* do, rather than as what she thinks important to do in order to teach well. Only a few teachers could share why they thought these materials were important in their teaching:

I think preparing teaching aids is the most important [in ETL]... because not all students can see textbook together. *If a student doesn't have textbook, that students cannot learn.* I have a lot such

students in my class. With these aids and posters, students could see them at once... they all can learn with these materials. (Interview, T11)

For her, teaching aids are to overcome shortage of textbooks that affects many of her students. In this difficult condition, teaching materials are necessary to assure that all of her students can learn. She, similar to other teachers, placed teaching materials including textbooks at the center of teaching and learning.

The centrality of materials is very apparent in a sample checklist I obtained, the first round of which had been completed by both the teacher in question and DTMT. It is for an experienced female teacher who teaches in Grade 1 (T13). Quite interestingly, all of the activities ranked C or D fall under the category of material/physical conditions, and all activities in process and content ranked A. It suggests that her teaching has several problems in physical/material aspects, like she did not file students' portfolios or write report cards daily, but not in more intangible aspects. Although this is just a case, there seems to be a significant gap between my observation and local actors' evaluation, if this pattern holds in other evaluation.

This gap is mostly due to what the users of the checklist and I looked for. The teacher evaluated in the checklist was one of the most eager to employ ETL techniques, yet for my eyes she implemented them only superficially. She prepared and used various posters and teaching aids, but not necessarily implemented the substance of ETL—transformation model of education. Therefore in my observation her class was scored higher in material conditions than in process and contents. I was trying to look for the substance behind her teaching. The users of this checklist, in contrast, looked for concrete activities the teacher

actually implemented, or forms. In this sense, she *completed* most of the activities over time and thus got A in many categories. As discussed, checklist itself enhances such simple interpretations of ETL policy messages. Given that getting Cs or Ds is considered as problems, such evaluation can also be seen as an expression of local actors' understanding about ETL, in which they concerned more about the existence of objects (physical/material conditions) than the process and content of her teaching practices.

In a more controversial case, the teacher actually devoted a lot of energy to design and prepare worksheets for group work. It was a Grade 1 Math class, where students studied subtractions between 2-digit and 1-digit numbers. The teacher was very creative in preparing the worksheets, which present eight subtraction problems on the left side and a 3-by-3 table with nine possible answers on the right side of a paper. Students were supposed to calculate eight problems on the left, and find the answers from the table. They finally needed to find the fake answer from the table. This game was very well designed and a good way for the students to practice what they had learned. The teacher highly evaluated this activity, stressing how much effort she had devoted to prepare worksheets.

These activities follow nine *detailed activities* on the checklist. These are: students complete activities in groups; boys and girls work together; the teacher provides instructions before activities; teacher takes part in facilitating student activities; teacher prepares teaching aids; students use the materials; students understand how to use the materials; teacher explains and facilitates the use of the materials; and teacher uses various activities in teaching and learning. However, “due to time limitation and the cost to make photocopies” (Interview, T1), the teacher prepared only three worksheets for the class with

37 students. What happened was, as we can easily imagine, only some students actually calculated and others just observed. Even though the teacher tried to use teaching materials in more participatory manner, and she liked it a lot, she did not necessarily consider how students experienced the worksheets as much as the efforts she made to prepare them.

Overall, local actors in my study actually placed high priority on completing the checklist. But completing the checklist does not necessarily bring substantial changes that ETL policy tries to achieve. It is partly due to the design and content of the checklist itself. Policy messages were oversimplified, or dumb down, in the process of reifying them into checklist. It got further recontextualized at the local level. Local actors perceived the checklist as the things that are sufficient for student-centered teaching, rather than as necessary conditions as the checklist implies. Completing the checklist was regarded as an end by itself rather than as a means for teachers to change their teaching practices.

Koon ot ceh: Helping Slow Learners. “Oh, he doesn't know how to write. He is slow.” (Observation, May 20, 2013) One day when I observed a student practicing spelling a word, the teacher said this to me in front of her class. I was embarrassed and deeply regretted that I chose to observe this particular student, but it was when I started to understand what slow learners actually mean in the local context.

Cambodian teachers described their students using the dichotomy between *koon ceh* (student who knows) and *koon ot ceh* (student who does not know) or between *koon puukae* (smart student) and *koon ksaoy* (weak student). Based on his comprehensive study about Cambodian communities, Kobayashi (2011) pointed out that Cambodian people frequently

use dichotomous languages and they have significant implications in people's daily lives.³³ The divide perceived with such dichotomous languages felt as obvious, predetermined, and unchangeable—these are seen as *calma*, or consequences of people's previous lives. People act upon the perceived difference and construct patterns of social relationship based on it. These dichotomous languages by themselves represent people's worldview (Kobayashi, 2011, p. 492). Therefore, the distinction between *koon ceh* and *koon ot ceh* can be used as a window through which I explore teachers' worldview.

It became clear that *koon ot ceh* does not simply mean students who achieve less. It includes students who are frequently absent or who do not have necessary stationary such as pencils and notebooks and thus do not (or cannot) fully participate in class. Some participants explicitly linked the problem of *koon ot ceh* with students' socio-economic backgrounds. For instance, a school principal admitted that her school has a lot of *koon ot ceh*, mainly because there are many students from poor families, who tend to be absent frequently and do not have educated guardians who can tutor at home, in her school district (Interview, S14). *Koon ot ceh* embodies mostly negative expectations that people hold to the students with low socio-economic backgrounds. In this sense, *koon ot ceh* should be understood as a social construct with which socio-economic disparities in Cambodian society are manifested and acted upon in the classroom.

In many cases, teachers referred to *koon ot ceh* as barriers to teaching. Teachers employed the similar rhetoric to the *Helping Slow Learners* manual to this problem. For

³³ One of the well-known dichotomies is between *neak mien*, people who have or rich people and *neak ot mien*, people who do not have or poor people.

example, a Grade 1 teacher pointed out how difficult it is to help *koon ot ceh* within class time:

[I have] problems... *koon ot ceh*. I usually try to help them but they still cannot read and write. I try to help them every day, every class. ... But they still cannot write anything ... If I can use a lot of time to help them, they would be able to write... there are too many of *koon ot ceh* in my class. (Interview, T10)

The teacher described *koon ot ceh* as difficulties that need to be addressed, as in the *Helping Slow Learners* manual. For her, and for many other teachers as well, it is a question of efficiency rather than that of equity or social justice. This also echoes with the manual's rhetoric. But teachers concerns were mostly about whether they could cover lesson content within given teaching hours rather than about the loss of time and money that repetition and dropout cause. Their concerns about efficiency are understandable, because they get strong pressure to teach at a certain pace and finish the national curriculum by the end of academic year. Teachers partly admitted that it is impossible to teach without failing some *koon ot ceh*, not because of their teaching but because of the students' socio-economic backgrounds. Again, teachers conceptualized *koon ot ceh* as mostly static and unchangeable deficits students bring to classrooms.

Furthermore, *koon ot ceh* has strong implications for teaching. Many participants, not limited to the local actors, indicated that *koon ot ceh* is frequently brought up as a topic of discussion during teacher meetings. In such sessions, teachers “discuss techniques to help *koon ot ceh*” (Interview, T5). One of such techniques is pairing *koon ot ceh* with *koon ceh* in the same group (MoEYS, n.d.). When I asked a Grade 2 teacher to reflect about her practice, in which she led the students read a short text in pair, she said,

[The objective of the activity was] to let the students read the text, even *koon ot ceh*. I paired them with *koon ceh*, who can read and help them. Students need to help each other because [there are] many *koon ot ceh* in my class. (Interview, T11)

It is interesting that the teacher said “to help each other” in the excerpt. But she actually meant that *koon ceh* is expected to be like a student tutor for *koon ot ceh*. Many other teachers similarly said that they usually group slow learners with fast learners so that students “help each other,” and as a result they can teach faster. These practices were already part of teachers’ repertoires, most probably because of the *Helping Slow Learners* manual, although such practices may create particular relationships among students and have negative psychological consequences particularly to *koon ot ceh*.³⁴

Here I observed an example of very important recontextualization (or appropriation) of the ETL in local socio-cultural contexts, mediated by *Helping Slow Learners* manual. Preventing *koon ot ceh* from dropping out and repetition was perceived as one of the central components of ETL policy. However, as I have discussed, *Helping Slow Learners* narrowed the idea of differences in the ETL policy into difficulties, but it basically states that all students can learn if teachers teach well. At the local level, the idea about slow learners was incorporated and connected to generally low expectations teachers hold on *koon ot ceh*, which connotes socio-economic background, not just academic performance. It directs to strengthen and fix the divide between *koon ceh* and *koon ot ceh* rather than overcoming it, even though teachers actually implemented some of the recommended activities to help slow learners.

³⁴ One of the Cambodian informants explained, “I think teachers assume that *koon ot ceh* would work harder when they know they are thought as *koon ot ceh*. They have no ideas about psychological aspects of learning.” (Mar 26, 2014)

Negotiation of meaning mediated by tools. Examining two policy tools, i.e. checklist and *Helping Slow Learners* manual, reveals the common characteristics of how problems are addressed in these tools and how these problems are actually worked out at the local level. First, both policy tools take an approach, in which it first leads the users (especially local actors) to identify their problems and provides solutions. Both tools set out the problems and their solutions very concrete, and as a result detach them from the substance of the ETL policy—transformation model of education. Second, because tools are detached from the bigger policy messages, they do not successfully enhance local actors' understanding about why and how they are supposed to use tools. Although I did not observe overt contestations from local actors to the policy, and they actually took the policy seriously and tried to implement what they were supposed to do, tools enabled teachers to make sense of the policy only superficially. Third, the deficit-oriented approach taken in the policy tools promotes the idea that material constraints and slow learners are the obstacles for good teaching, even though the policy tools are to address such problems. These characteristics suggest that it is not so much the actual material constraints or slow learners that hinders pedagogical reform, but the bigger barrier is how these difficulties are addressed in policy tools and perceived by local actors.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I tried to map out various meanings that different actors held about ETL policy. Socio-cultural theories, especially Wenger's theory about community of practice, help us understand how such various meanings were negotiated and reified into policy tools through the mechanisms such as Education Sector Working Group and Joint

Technical Working Group. As exemplified in the checklist and *Helping Slow Learners* manual, the fundamental message of ETL, which is to replace transmission with transformation model of education, was narrowed down and even twisted in the process of reification. I identified a paradox, in which these policy tools were primarily based on a transmission approach.

These tools were actually used to pinpoint “problems” rather than to support actors to solve them. In particular, because policy tools were perceived as sets of tasks that are sufficient (not the minimal expectation) for good teaching, material constraints and slow learners were perceived as barriers out of local actors’ control. School principals and DTMT members were sympathetic to teachers and held very basic expectations of them. Teachers’ perspectives toward slow learners further evidenced that there was a huge gap between policy intentions (to help slow learners to catch up with others) and teachers’ expectations (slow learners are not solely based on their academic performance and therefore they cannot be helped to some extent). In such minimalistic circumstances, it is quite difficult to expect dynamic changes to happen at the local level.

CHAPTER FIVE: LOCAL RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF PEDAGOGICAL REFORM

“Cheap things are in your hands, Expensive things are in your mouth”
(Slogan put on the wall in a classroom)

Introduction

Many comparative education researchers have tackled the question of how we could understand the relationship between social and cultural contexts and education. Based on the criticisms to School Effectiveness research that prospered during the 1980's, researchers started to pay closer attention to the embeddedness of education in the broader contexts (eg. Fuller & Clarke, 1994).

It seems that pedagogy has a rather stronger relationship with its contexts than other aspects of education. Actually, pedagogy itself cannot be defined without referring to the social, political, and cultural aspects of teaching, as it is contingent upon them. According to Robin Alexander's definition, pedagogy “encompasses both the act of teaching and its contingent theories and debates—about, for example, the character of culture and society, the purposes of education, the nature of childhood and learning and the structure of knowledge” (Alexander, 2001a, p. 53). Building on Alexander's notion of pedagogy, an international research group led by Frances Vavrus and Lesley Bartlett developed the notion of contingent pedagogy (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012, 2013; Vavrus, 2009). By examining learner-centered pedagogy in a Tanzanian context, they revealed that Tanzanian teachers' pedagogical practices are shaped by their working conditions such as noise, class

size, and preparation time, and by their views about knowledge and how students should learn. They contended that “pedagogy is deeply influenced by the cultural and material conditions in which teachers teach” and by “perspectives on knowledge production and dissemination” (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012, p. 636). They contended that, constructivism, on which learner-centered pedagogies are based, is not universally applicable nor relevant, and thus we should examine it from the perspective of epistemological diversity. These research help us understand the extent to which pedagogies (both its theoretical and pragmatic aspects) are inseparable from the local contexts.

Therefore, in this chapter I want to unveil the situated nature of a pedagogy that narrows down (or opens up) the possibility to bring changes. More specifically, I explore an underlying logic and teaching conditions that govern local practices and thus define what meanings can be made out of ETL. By doing so, this chapter aims to draw some implications for the Cambodian pedagogical reform.

Unpacking the Logic That Governs Local Meaning

It is now widely acknowledged that pedagogy—both theory of knowledge and the act of teaching—cannot be separated from political, social, and cultural contexts because they constitute fundamental assumptions about education. Although pedagogy has not been the major topic of comparative inquiry, there exists a line of research that explored how pedagogy is culturally embedded. For example, *Preschools in Three Cultures* is an innovative comparative study that unveiled how much culture, which is implicit and unconscious, informs day-to-day practices in the US, China, and Japan. It examined culture as an alternative to “social and political forces” in explaining each nation’s systems of early

childhood education (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009, p. 224). Employing “video-cued multivocal ethnography” (p. 5), they revealed “implicit cultural logic” (p. 19) that shapes national characteristics of early childhood pedagogies. Alexander’s famous book, *Culture and Pedagogy*, is another attempt to unveil the contingency of a pedagogy to broader contexts by examining primary education in five countries (England, France, India, Russia, and the USA). His comprehensive analysis revealed “cultural models of pedagogy” (Alexander, 2001b, p. 556) that are a creation of political, historical, social, cultural and organizational characteristics. For example, he characterized Russian values in primary education as “teaching as competitive yet collaborative”, “teaching as both individualistic and collaborative” in England, and “teaching as individualistic” in French primary education (p. 223).

Shedding light on the “logic” or “model” that governs local practices not only helps us understand the national characteristics of a pedagogy, but also allows us to explore the ways in which local actors make sense of and enact a globalized pedagogy. For example, in her study about reading lessons in Guinea, France, and the US, Kathryn M.

Anderson-Levitt clarified that lesson structures are deeply rooted in national cultural differences even though the local teachers in three countries have similarly adopted global mixed method in reading lessons (Anderson-Levitt, 2004, p. 229). Informed by this line of research, I explored a logic that governs discourses about education as well as the act of teaching based on ethnographic fieldwork in 10 primary schools in the Prey Veng cluster.

***Paccekteeh* as a political-social-cultural logic**

Paccekteeh, meaning technique or technical (Headley, 1977, p. 473), is both one of

the most frequently heard terms in discussion and, at the same time, the one that troubled me most during the fieldwork. Participants in my study held that teaching is a technical process to transmit knowledge from teachers to students. The term *paccektee* has its root in *paccek*, a Pali word that means single, different or individual, used in words such as *paccek-piek* meaning separate or individual parts. In the context of teaching, it is similar to repertoire but *paccektee* particularly focuses on problem solving. For example, one of the youngest participant of this research mentioned, “I have difficulties to manage my kids. I need to have *paccektee* to keep my kids be quiet and listen to me” (Interview, T15). *Paccektee* is a set of legitimate steps that lead you to arrive at the solution to the problem.

***Paccektee* as a means to transmit knowledge.** In order to unpack the idea of *paccektee*, I need to touch upon the importance of religions (Hindu and Buddhism) in the history of Cambodian education. From earlier than the late thirteenth century toward the French colonial occupation, children of the laity were educated by monks at temples in Cambodia. Written texts were stored in temples and monks orally transmitted written poems and proverbs. As a result, temples monopolized written texts and played “a significant role in determining what texts were worth knowing” (Ayres, 2000a, p. 14). This tradition defines education as “predominantly moral enterprise” rather than equipping people with basic literacy and skills that are applicable to people’s daily lives (Reimer, 2012, p. 289). Oral transmission of knowledge also defined the proper teacher-student relationship as the storyteller and the audience (Needham, 2003), in which the audience was expected to receive and recite information correctly. *Paccektee* is a set of techniques to enable effective knowledge transmission. This type of thinking is still in effect among

many of the participants in this study.

The question about what counts as knowledge is a question of power. In the pre-colonial Cambodia, monopoly of knowledge, together with oral mode of teaching, perpetuated the hierarchical social order having a God-King on the top (Ayres, 2000a). Currently, the national curriculum defines knowledge that is worth teaching. According to a MoEYS official, “The national curriculum states what should be taught in schools. You can find more detailed knowledge and skills to be taught in the curriculum standards. All teachers must teach based on these standards” (Interview, N1). The curriculum embodies knowledge and teachers throughout the country are supposed to teach it as it is. Actually, “very little outside the taught curriculum has value as learning” (Pearson, 2011, p. 14). In this system, teachers are expected to transmit predefined knowledge in the curriculum effectively and correctly.

At the same time, possessing legitimate knowledge is regarded as power. A slogan hung on the wall in one primary school classroom read “*Cheap things are in your hands, Expensive things are in your mouth,*” as I cited at the beginning of this chapter. This slogan exemplifies a norm that values possession over application of knowledge. In this sense, teachers are associated with power because of their familiarity with *paccektee*. According to Pearson (2011), teachers try to prevent others from acquiring the same or higher level of knowledge by taking “know 10, teach 7” approach, as in the Cambodian adage (p. 14).

***Paccektee* and the teaching occupation.** Teachers are assigned technical (*paccektee*) or even mechanical roles in this system. Pearson, reflecting on her experience of working with teacher trainers, described Cambodian teaching culture as follows:

Trainers expect, indeed are hungry for, new tools, techniques, and materials, but their expectations are of a conveyor belt approach, within which they will receive new content or rules from someone who already knows it and then they will transfer it to others in the same way. There is no perceived need to analyze, or practice the use of, learning in other than delivery based on real understanding and practical experience. (Pearson, 2011, p. 14)

Teachers are expected to be like a “conveyor” that does not have creativity and flexibility.

This theory of knowledge has implications for the preferable relationship between the teacher and the students. A member of District Training and Monitoring Team (DTMT) defined the roles of teachers and students as follows: “Teachers give (*aoy*) knowledge to students. Students receive (*totuul*) knowledge” (Interview, S-1). A consultant suggested, in this context,

... parents would say, children go to school to learn from the teacher, not from their peers ... [in] child friendly school, student-centered approach, students feel they don’t learn anything from the teacher. They go to school to learn, not to share information among their group. ... Teachers are supposed to teach students. (Interview, I14)

With the traditional theory of knowledge that is quite different from constructivist epistemology, people may feel it is useless to organize discussion among children who do not possess legitimate knowledge nor the techniques to transmit knowledge.

The theory of knowledge also has implications for teacher learning and development. A ministry official described Cambodian teacher training as equipping teacher candidates with *paccektee* to teach. By comparing it with Japanese teacher education, he said,

We have quite different pre-service training from Japan, because in

Japan you train teachers at universities, right? But in Cambodia, no. We train teachers at teacher training centers. This is quite different because we call in Cambodia, teacher training, not teacher education like you do in Japan. ... teacher education and teacher training are quite different. In Japan you use teacher education because, before teaching in the classrooms, the candidates apply to the universities to become a teacher. In the university they don't focus on the teaching techniques, but mostly focus on upgrading their [content] knowledge. What we do is teacher training, so we don't focus so much on [content] knowledge, but we focus more on techniques to teach, so that they can teach after two years [of training]. (Interview, N3)

Contrary to our understanding about “pedagogical knowledge” and “pedagogical content knowledge” (Shulman, 1987) as important knowledge domains that teachers need to have, this official does not count teaching techniques (*paccektee*) as knowledge. For him, subject content is the body of knowledge that all teacher candidates are supposed to have when they enter teacher training centers. *Paccektee* are the ways to enable such transmission of knowledge effectively, which teacher candidates need to learn during their two years of training.

Professional development is also organized based on *paccektee*. In-service teachers have school- and cluster-based professional development opportunities where teachers get together in their own school or in the school cluster. These teacher meetings are called *procham paccektee* (technical meeting). The primary objective of this meeting is to provide professional development opportunities more frequently and closer to classrooms, and to nurture collegial relationship among teachers. During the meeting, teachers are supposed to reflect about their teaching experiences and exchange ideas about teaching and

learning (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, n.d.). Usually technical meetings are organized without having someone who can provide professional consultation, and teachers rarely have opportunities to observe each other's classrooms. Therefore, technical meetings tend to work as a platform where familiar *paccektee* is transmitted from experienced teachers to novice teachers (Wheeler, 1998).

Investigation of the discourses about knowledge and teaching makes it clear that *paccektee* is a logic that provides a basis for the fundamental assumptions about education. It is not just rooted in the local culture, but also in the power structure and the norms of social relationship. *Paccektee* is, in some sense, a means to maintain existing power structure where those who control knowledge are at the top, those who possess legitimate knowledge in the middle, and those have less access to knowledge are at the bottom. It also sustains and strengthens existing social relations such as that of teacher and students.

***Paccektee* in the Act of Teaching**

The technical (*paccektee*) view toward teaching and learning is also apparent in the other aspect of pedagogy, i.e. the act of teaching. The three vignettes below illustrate how this logic underlies actual practices.

Vignette 1: professional development day. After I observed a cluster-level technical meeting, in which teachers created exam problems, I noted, “It was a complete division of labor, one teacher worked on Khmer, the other on Math, and the rest three teachers on Science/social studies,”

... three teachers started working on creating Science/Social Studies exam. Because the textbook is written in open-ended style, the teachers must create their own questions that are accessible to

their kids. It seemed that teachers found this quite difficult and they discussed it a lot. They were quick to choose the topic/unit that they wanted to put in the exam. The topic they chose was about chicken. But the problem was how they make exam questions out of the topic. A teacher first wrote an open-ended question, “What do chickens eat?” and showed it to the leader teacher. The leader teacher said, “This might be too difficult. We should give choices so that students can choose the correct one. How about putting like, A: Chickens eat worms and grains, and B: Chickens eat meats.” The three teachers agreed and started writing them on the paper. But still they found it difficult to format these choices and finally created two “true” statements! (Observation, May 30, 2013).

Technical meeting was officially institutionalized in 1993, along with the organization of cluster school system. Although teachers were paid a daily allowance when they participated in this meeting before 2009, MoEYS stopped providing monetary incentives because the participation became a mandate. This negatively affects the motivations of teachers to bother to spend a day in school, when they could earn money elsewhere. As a result, only about two thirds of teachers in the cluster actually showed up in both of the two meetings that I observed.

Usually DTMT organizes technical meetings on the last Thursday every month in one of the schools in the cluster, and all other schools are closed the whole day. It lasts about three hours, in which all teachers first get together to share schedule and information, then work in grade-level groups, and finally come back to the whole group to wrap up. In the grade-level groups, teachers are supposed to develop a “teaching program” for each subject that provides a rough idea about what content they should cover in the following month. Sometimes teachers need to work on other tasks, such as generating exams, in

addition to teaching programs, or need to participate in training sessions provided by DTMT.

The vignette described above is from the scene where Grade 2 teachers just finished generating teaching programs and worked on the additional task to generate exams that would be used in all Grade 2 classes in the cluster at the end of the semester. The name “technical” is a perfect descriptor of what I observed—teachers worked on practical tasks (in this case creating exams) by division of labor most of the time. They talked about the questioning techniques, such as multiple choice or open-ended. What they might have learned in this meeting was procedural techniques to convert statements in the textbook to exam questions.

What surprised me most during the meeting was that there were very limited interactions among teachers. One of the teachers worked on preparing Khmer exam completely by herself, although other teachers were physically in the same room. She even did not check whether others were okay with the topic she chose. She passed her draft to the leader teacher for check, and left the room without waiting for the other teachers to finish. No group discussion that involved all of the five teachers was initiated when they were working. Although teachers engaged in more casual chatting when DTMT members distributed lychees for a snack, the topic was mostly about the election scheduled in July. In the end, therefore, teachers did not talk about their own teaching or about their students at all.

Even when they interacted, the discussions centered around procedures (how to) rather than on the content (what) or the purpose (why) of the exam. It was as if content and

purpose were given a priori, or just creating exam questions itself was the purpose of this meeting. Three teachers who prepared Science/Social Studies exam did not discuss, for example, what knowledge and skills of their students they want to assess with this exam, what certain questioning techniques allow students to think about, or why understanding chicken's feeding behavior is important for the students. All the questions they created were what they call "memory questions" to make students recall what they have been taught. No possibilities were discussed to put "critical thinking" or even "understanding" questions—which is one of the most significant assets to the ETL.

Such a technical view toward teaching and learning is woven into their daily classroom practices, which I now turn to discuss. The following two vignettes are from math and Khmer classes. One is based on more traditional teaching approach mainly based on lecturing, whereas the other is more activity-based and ETL techniques were applied. But both vignettes equally illuminate how much procedures are emphasized in the daily practices.

Vignette 2: a math class.

The teacher (T3), a young male teacher, who taught 29 students in his G2 class, first wrote an exercise problem from the last period:

$$\begin{array}{r} 456 \\ - 278 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

The teacher asked the students to solve this problem by themselves on their slates (there were around eight students who did not have their own slates and they worked it on their notes). Some students used their fingers, or wrote bars on the slate, in order to calculate subtractions between two-digit and one-digit numbers, such as 16-8

and 14-7. Because in doing 16 minus 8, students need to write 16 bars and cross 8, and then count the remaining, some students got confused in the process.

Figure 7. A Student Working on Calculation



Source: Photo taken by the author

Some students forgot to reduce one when they borrowed from the five in the tenth digit or four in the hundreds digit. Students around me, therefore, did not get correct answers at first.

After a while, the teacher led the students put up their slates so that he could see whether students got correct answers or not. He looked around the classroom and nodded, then appointed a girl (Neth) to come up to the blackboard and show what she got.

$$\begin{array}{r} {}^3 4 {}^{14} 5 {}^1 6 \\ - 278 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

The teacher started to explain the procedures step by step while posing short questions:

T: “Okay, thanks Neth. Do you remember how to solve this? Where should we see first? From left or right?”

Unknown (S): “From right.”

T: “Correct. So at first, we should calculate 6 minus 8. Can we

subtract 8 from 6?”

Unknown (many): “No!”

T: “No, so we should borrow one from 5. We should change 5 as 4. Now we have 16. 16 minus 8 equals?”

S (in the front): “Eight.”

T: “Okay, so I write 8 here. Next, can we subtract 7 from 4? No. So we should borrow one from 4. Here we should change 4 into 3, because we borrowed one, and now we have 14. What is 14 minus 7?”

S (in the front): “Seven.”

T: “Yes, so we write 7 here. Now we subtract 2 from 3 and get 1. So the answer is 178. Clap your hands for Neth!”

T: “Okay, before moving on to other exercise problems we should tackle, I want to make sure that you know how to calculate this problem. I explain the procedure once again, and you should repeat after me. I start from the right.”

All students: “I start from the right.”

T: “Eight cannot be subtracted from six. I borrow one from five and change it into four.”

All students: “Eight cannot be subtracted from six. I borrow one from five and change it into four.”

T: “Now I calculate 16 minus 8 and I get 8.”

All students: “Now I calculate 16 minus 8 and I get 8.”

T: “Seven cannot be subtracted from four. I borrow one from four and change it into three. Now I calculate 14 minus 7 and I get 7.”

All students: “Seven cannot be subtracted from four. I borrow one from four and change it into three. Now I calculate 14 minus 7 and I get 7.”

T: “Now I calculate 3 minus 2 and I get 1. My answer is 178.”

All students: “Now I calculate 3 minus 2 and I get 1. My answer is 178.”

T: “Very good! Now we are moving on to other exercise problems. You can solve these problems unless you follow the steps we just

learned.”

This class was one of the most traditional in terms of how the content was delivered. Tables were arranged in rows and students sat directly facing the blackboard, where the teacher stood most of the class time. But there existed a clear and logical link between the purpose (students become able to calculate subtractions between 3-digit numbers) and the flow of the lesson (review and exercise), which I did not see in many more activity-based classes. The teacher succeeded in making a good classroom atmosphere by praising students and letting students to praise others. He also involved students in the process by posing a lot of questions.

It was intriguing to see that the teacher made the students verbally express all the steps they should take in calculation. It was very strange for me at first because it sounded like a song and the students murmured it while calculating other exercise problems. But after I spent some time in various classrooms, I learned that this is a quite popular strategy found across grade levels and subject areas. This practice is called *sourt*, to recite or to chant, which consists of the core of teaching method used in temples known as *soutrien*, meaning to learn by heart (Needham, 2003). An informant cynically pointed out that Cambodians learn chants to access the highest knowledge, Buddhism, but in many cases people chant a mantra without knowing what it means.

The perspective that underlies the practice of chanting is that knowledge is primarily transmitted verbally. Needham (2003) pointed out that repetition, memorization, and verbal performance are the norms of classroom practices, based on her ethnographic study about Khmer literacy lessons. She observed “recital elicitation” as the dominant form of learning activities, in which “students are called on to recite an extended portion of the

lesson by repeating after the teacher” (Needham, 2003, p. 33). Although this observation is about Khmer literacy, it also applies very well to Math teaching described above. The teacher spent almost half of the lesson hour (about 20 minutes) for the recital elicitation about calculation procedure, which was much longer than the time students actually worked on exercise problems.

The chant also indicates the centrality of procedural knowledge in doing mathematics. As Gu et al. (2004) contended by examining Chinese mathematics teaching, repeating procedural teaching is not necessarily a rote drill when it involves “procedural variations” (p. 322).³⁵ The chant involved procedural variations that help “students arrive at solutions to a problem” (Gu, Huang, & Marton, 2004, p. 322). It transformed a challenging problem (456 minus 278) into a set of familiar problems (such as 18 minus 8) as the small steps (*paccek*) that guide students to arrive at solutions to the problem. Yet it is limited in its ability to develop students’ conceptual understanding because no explanation was provided in the chant (and in the lecture) about why the problem should be calculated from the right to left. It also left no room for the students to think, or be aware of, possible approaches to calculate 456 minus 278. Therefore the chant reduced the amount of mathematical thinking that is required to solve the problem by dividing the procedure into small steps.

Vignette 3: a Khmer class. A female teacher (T2) in her late 30s taught her 36 students in one of the two G1 classes in the school. Below is an excerpt from one of her

³⁵ Teaching with procedural variation introduces multiple methods to solve a problem in order to help students “form a hierarchical system of experiencing process through forming concepts or solving stages of problems” (Gu, Huang, & Marton, 2004, p. 324).

Khmer classes.

The class worked on composing words in groups. They worked on creating a word with given cards, on which letters (sometimes a combination of a consonant and a vowel, or a consonant alone) were written. Each group got three cards that are necessary to create a word.

The students were divided into three groups, each group with more than 10 students. Students got together around a table, which was too small for 11 or 13 students, and they had only one set of cards. In one group, which worked on the word book, *siavpau*, students started identifying the cards one by one:

S1: “Is this consonant វ / vou /?”

S2: “That is វ / vou /. This one is consonant ស / so /.”

S3: (looking at the letter table) “Vowel ័ / ia /. Consonant ស / so / and vowel ័ / ia /, ស័ / sia /. What is the next one?”

S1: “Consonant... ភ / pou /?”

S3: “And vowel... ័ / au /.”

S1: “So ភ / pau /. Isn’t it ស័វភ / siavpau /?”

Students succeeded in identifying all the cards and the word they were making. They started to look for the word on the blackboard and in the textbook, so that they could know where the consonant វ fits in.

After each group successfully found what the word was, the teacher asked them to read the word aloud.

After class

Takayo: So, what were the things that you wanted them (students) to learn in the game you did today?

Teacher: The game I used today was to make sure that my kids are able to decompose combinations of consonants and vowels in order to read words.

Takayo: How do you evaluate it?

Teacher: It was good. Good, because they enjoyed it and all of them could read words in the end. They like to study in that way and also learn a lot when they are happy, you know.

Managing a relatively large class, compared to 27.4 students per class on average in Prey Veng city, the teacher succeeded in creating an organized but warm learning environment in her room. The teacher employed one of the ETL methods—working on a game in groups—and led the students practice what they had learned. In the group I was with, at least some of the students initiated discussion and worked together to figure out the word.

Because Khmer language has a phonologically based writing system with 67 letters including 21 vowels, early grade Khmer reading instruction is generally based on phonics teaching. Students first learn the shape and sound of each of the consonants and vowels, and then learn the combinations of them (Courtney & Gravelle, 2013; Needham, 2003). Students followed the steps they had been taught—first to decode letters into sounds, and then combine them together—and finally figured out the word *siavpau*. Things actually happened as the teacher intended.

Furthermore, even though the vignette 3 looks a lot different from the vignette 2, in terms of grade level, subject matter, and teaching approach, the core ideas about teaching and learning are surprisingly similar: Procedures were at the center of teaching and learning.

The game was designed to establish procedures to read words that involve decoding letters and combining sounds. This fits very well with the overall objective of this lesson, which was “to make sure that students are able to read words that contain consonant-vowel combinations” according to the lesson plan. Students were to follow the steps to read, relying on their memory about letters (or a letter table). In fact, the game left no room for thinking and discussions even though it took the form of group work. This parallels what I observed in the math class (vignette 2) as well as in many other classes.

Another important aspect of the vignette 3 is the teacher’s high evaluation of the activity. As noted, there were many students who could not, or did not, join the discussion during the group work. It was partly due to the lack of the cards that the teacher prepared by herself. She “wanted to prepare additional card sets” at least for five or six groups, but she could not because there were no thick papers left. As a result, each group had more than 10 students including both *koon ceh* and *koon ot ceh*. In the group I was with, three *koon ceh* dominated the discussion and others just observed. But the teacher evaluated, “all of them [students] could read words in the end.”

The above three vignettes sharply illuminate the fact that the logic of *paccektee* (technique) underlies local practices. Creating exam (vignette 1), doing subtractions between 3-digit numbers (vignette 2), or reading words (vignette 3), were all divided into small steps (*paccek*). It also allows teachers and students to arrive at solutions with less thinking. Such techniques, often presented as the only effective and thus correct method, make teaching and learning predictable and even mechanical process.

Making sense of ETL with the logic of *paccekteeh*

Paccekteeh is a logic that provides a basis for the fundamental assumptions about Cambodian education. This logic also worked as a hidden frame of reference within which ETL could be understood and practiced at the local level. Interestingly, local actors are the ones who most strongly supported what they think as student-centered principles and thus seriously engaged in what they think as ETL, compared to international and national actors. They held the idea that student-centered teaching involves a lot of questions, activities and games, and group work that is based on a well-written lesson plan. It is also to ensure that students know (*ceh*) the basics: “before we just cared about whether teachers cover the content, but [in student-centered teaching in Khmer subject] we care more about whether students know how to read and write” (Interview, S2). Student-centered teaching was placed at the opposite end of teacher-centered teaching, which a teacher described, “[classroom discourse was] all dominated by teachers and students listened to the teacher all the time. [This was a] typical teaching approach 30 years ago” (Interview, S8).

But ironically, the way local actors constructed ETL was so fundamentally based on the logic of *paccekteeh* that their serious commitment was directed toward sustaining, not changing, their pedagogies (both theoretically and pragmatically). In particular, local actors constructed ETL as 1) a set of techniques that automatically lead them to student-centered teaching and 2) additional tasks rather than alternatives to their familiar practices.

Local actors understood that ETL is a set of techniques. According to a district education official, “ETL helps teachers. It helps teachers identify problems in their teaching and also gives them *paccekteeh* to improve their teaching” (Interview, S6). Teachers further

connected ETL techniques to student-centered teaching. For example, one of the participants evaluated her teaching as student-centered because she has known “how to use ETL techniques for many years” and has “completed all the items on the checklist already” (Interview, T7). In relation to the first point, local actors also perceived ETL as additional techniques. This meaning is expressed in the following excerpts from interviews: “now that we have ETL, we have to implement all the items on the checklist. We have more things to do but get the same amount of money” (T3), “I try to use different types of games at least once in a day. Sometimes I cannot especially when I am behind the schedule” (T11). These comments suggest that teachers perceived ETL as techniques that they need to add to their day-to-day workload, which is already quite heavy, rather than replace their familiar teaching.

Local actors constructed these meanings of ETL fundamentally based on the logic of *paccekteeh*. They focused more on the procedure and small steps rather than conceptual understanding about ETL or multiple ways to arrive at student-centered teaching. This parallels with what underlies the mathematics lesson I discussed in vignette 2. The second meaning also represents resilience against change that is also a characteristic of the logic of *paccekteeh*. Therefore, although local actors embraced what they think as student-centered teaching, they ended up sustaining and strengthening transmission approach rather than replacing it with transformation approach.

Teaching Conditions that Shape Local Meaning

Examining teaching conditions has been established as an approach to explore how teaching and learning are conceptualized and enacted. Lortie (1975), in one of the classics

of this approach, identified the nature of teaching profession by examining various aspects of teaching conditions. Kennedy (2005) also found that school organizational rules and norms hinder effective teaching both physically and culturally. Especially regarding low-income countries, researchers have identified large class size, lack of basic facilities, and limited availability of teaching/learning materials as obstacles to teaching. Those who study pedagogical changes have claimed that student-centered pedagogies are not relevant to the difficult working conditions for teachers in low-income countries (Guthrie, 1990; O'Sullivan, 2002, 2004).

Although it is clear that these obstacles similarly narrow the possible teaching options that Cambodian teachers can employ in their classrooms, situative theory further suggests that their implications are much more fundamental to pedagogical changes. The theory posits that sense making—not just decoding the information—cannot be independent from social and physical contexts in which it happens (Putnam & Borko, 2000). It means, teaching conditions close down (or open up) the possible meanings that people can make about certain stimulus. An understanding of how local actors make sense of ETL in their world of work thus helps us better understand the local meaning and practice of ETL.

Teaching Conditions as a Basis for Expectations for Teachers

In Chapter 4, I discussed local actors' holding only minimum expectations to teachers, which had significant implications for how ETL is understood and practiced. It turned out that teaching conditions, especially low salary and resource constraints, had significant implication for the ways in which local actors, as well as some national and

international actors, understood what teachers must do in this pedagogical reform.

Low salary. As is the case for any workplace, salary is an important factor to motivate or de-motivate teachers extrinsically. According to the study done by NEP (NGO Education Partnership) and VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas), with 213 teachers, salary was nominated as the biggest cause of dissatisfaction in their job (NEP & VSO, 2008, p. 23).³⁶ Participants in my study also complained about their low salary. For example, a school principal described the situation as follows. “They [teachers] don’t get enough salary. Only 10,000 Riel for one day, it is only 2.5\$. They have children to feed and they need to fill the gas for their motorbike to come to school... And they have to prepare teaching aids out of their own pocket” (Interview, S8). An NGO official also explained how low salary negatively impacts teaching:

The problems is their [teachers’] salary is too low. I know this is something what people say again and again. Nobody wants to listen to it but it is important. It’s important. If people, when you are talking about the basic needs, and when you don’t have things to eat or money to send your ill child to the hospital, how can you think about [your job]? ... If teachers don’t have money to send their own kids to school, or if they don’t have enough food, how can they

³⁶ The Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA) is “the only independent, nonpartisan, non-profit, non-governmental teachers’ union” in Cambodia, which was established in March 2000. It advocates for “a living wage, safe and sanitary working conditions, continuous professional development, for legal and democratic rights” of teachers (CITA, 2010, p. 3). They report that Cambodian teachers make from US\$50 to US\$80 every month, which is not enough for them to support their daily living. We can easily imagine what this salary means in Cambodian context by comparing it with US\$19.80, which is the cost of purchasing the absolute minimum food to meet basic calorie requirements for an individual. Although MoEYS has made efforts to increase teachers’ basic salary by 20% annually since 2010, it would take long time to reach to the minimum basic salary of US\$250, as recommended by Cambodia Independent Teachers Association (CITA, 2010).

think about teaching and learning, or effectiveness, or student-centered? They don't even use their time to prepare for class. Because they already have lesson plans that they made two or three years ago. Just use it. How can they spend 500 or 1,000 Riel [10-25 cent] to buy books to read? No. With 1,000 Riel they can buy a cup of coffee. (Interview, I9)

This comment makes a case that a low teacher salary is not just a problem of motivation but is about survival and maintaining a basic living. Low teacher salaries lead to problematic consequences such as second job and corruption (CITA, 2010).

Aside from these pragmatic issues, low salary is a basis for the minimum expectations to teachers. As exemplified in the comment cited above (I9), some national and international actors held that the current level of teacher salary is already low for what teachers are doing, and expecting more to them is “not realistic and appropriate” (Interview, I7). Local actors also had the same concern. For example, a teacher complained, “we don't get much salary but there are a lot of work!” (Interview, T4). School principals and DTMT members were very sympathetic to teachers and emphasized the most basic tasks such as preparing a lesson plan and teaching aids, because preparing these materials itself actually requires a lot of efforts in this condition: “They [teachers] usually have one or two jobs other than being a teacher. Some of them do farming, others sell stuff at the market, or drive a motodop [motor taxi]. So they don't have time to prepare lesson plans” (Interview, S3). Therefore, expecting less is a kind of norm that is shared among local actors due to the low salary that teachers receive.

Resource constraints. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, local actors, mediated by policy tools, made sense of ETL by placing particular emphasis on material aspects such as

posters, lesson plans, and teaching aids rather than on the aspects of process or content. This is because they perceived materials as the prerequisite for learning, as a teacher suggested in the following comment: “if a student doesn’t have textbook, that student cannot learn” (Interview, T11). Lack of textbooks or necessary materials for creating teaching aids was perceived as the biggest barriers for student-centered learning.

Given the centrality of materials in the local meaning and practice, resource constraints also provide a basis for the norm of minimum expectations. This results from the idea that teachers are not responsible for addressing resource constraints because that is the job of school principal. Particularly the roles of school principals were stressed not only by local actors but also by international and national actors. A participant explained that school principals are at the top of the pyramid, and they take top-down approach and not willing to see changes from teachers (Interview, I3). Therefore, in general, school principals take responsibility to address resource constraints rather than teachers themselves explore resources available outside schools.

In contrast, principals themselves perceived that material constraints in their schools are due to the limited contributions from the community they serve. Every public primary school has a community organization that is called *sahakaa*, or school support committee, consists of administrative officers, teachers, community leaders, and volunteers (Kambayashi, 2008). *Sahakaa* shares responsibilities with its supporting school especially in mobilizing resources.³⁷ Resources are usually raised through *bon pukaa*, literally

³⁷ As Kambayashi (2008) explained, people perceived that schools cannot collect money directly from students, but they can raise money from community. As a result, monetary contribution from communities shares as much as 40% of Cambodia’s total education

translated flower festival, in which school offers light snacks and drinks and community members donate money in response. The amount of monetary contribution from *sahakaa* makes a difference in school resources, such as library and classroom construction or facility repairs. I was able to participate in two such festivals in different schools (School #1 and #6), and my field note reads,

Compared to the last one [held in School #6], there were fewer people and monks. Last time I met the head of Provincial Education Office but this time he didn't show up. The principal [of School #1] came to me and said this *bon pukaa* is for building new library but he needs much more money. (May 27, 2013)

The gap I observed in the two schools was also pointed out by the principal of School #1 in the interview. "They [School #6] do much better than us [in terms of school conditions]. They have a good *sahakaa* that contributes a lot to the school. We don't have that strong support" (Interview, S12).³⁸

In any case, teachers are not expected to take initiative to address resource constraints that they perceive as the biggest barrier. They are expected to do what they can do with the resources available to them inside school, contrary to the ETL policy and policy tools that encourage teachers to bring in locally available resources in order to supplement resources.

Teaching conditions provide a basis for low expectations for teachers, which actually work as a filter that narrows down the possible meaning of ETL into a set of

expenditure.

³⁸ In School #3, which was described as the poorest by a DTMT member, the principal complained: "In my school, *sahakaa* contributes very little. They donate a lot of money to the temple not to this school. I always ask help but they care about their next lives but not about educating kids" (Interview, S3).

minimum things to do.

Practices in Different Teaching Conditions

As was confirmed by the participants of this study, teaching conditions have significant negative impacts on local practices. But my observation suggests that although teaching conditions (especially resources) are important, their impact is not as deterministic as people may imagine. Rather, I observed much more flexibility and creativity in “difficult” classrooms where there were more students but fewer resources than in classrooms in the city school, which people typically described as wealthy and thus the best primary school in the province. By comparing these two classrooms, I want to shed light on the complex—even contradictory—realities that I have observed.

Classroom A in the “advanced” school (School #6)

Prey Veng people, ranging from Provincial Education Office staff to my landlord, said this is one of the best primary schools in the province. Actually, its appearance is quite different from other schools because it has a big school gate and a lot of colorful animal statues. It has more than four school buildings, a big playground, and an assembly hall. The school offers 23 classes and caters for 788 students in total. It is particularly unique for its after-school English classes that most students take for US\$5 per month (out-of-curricular program).

One morning I observed one of its four Grade 2 classrooms. Twenty-eight kids fit in 15 tables and each has his/her own chair, with which they can move. The class started exactly on time: no tardy student is accepted and students who come late should go to see the principal, according to the teacher. She showed me the “official” copy of a lesson plan, which her co-worker had developed and the vice principal approved. She said, “I have to follow this because I cannot teach faster or slower” than other Grade 2 classes.

It was a Khmer class, in which students learned to spell words that appeared in a text that they learned the day before. The teacher had the kids prepare their slates for the dictation. There were two or three students who did not have slates, but she did not take care of them even though medium size chalkboards were stocked in the cabinet. She pronounced a word slowly for the kids to write it on the slate, and made them raise slates high enough, so that she could check if there are students who spelled it wrong. When she found mistakes, she just pointed to the students and let them correct with help from nearby students. After these mistakes were corrected, students “chant” how they spelled it. (Feb. 23, 2013)

Classroom B in a “basic” school (School #8)

This school is located in the middle of a vast rice field, with only eight teaching staff. 206 students were packed in a two-story building. The rain often floods its playground and roads to the school especially during the rainy season, and makes it difficult for both kids and teachers to come to school on time. The principal described his school as “basic,” because the school is categorized C (basic or below average) according to the DTMT evaluation. After a heavy shower, I visited the school and observed Grade 1 classroom. There were 36 students at the beginning, but the teacher was not there yet. Five minutes later the teacher arrived and she made the students sing two songs and welcomed three more students who came late. Ten minutes late from the schedule, she started a Khmer class by showing a poster that shows all consonants (the only laminated poster in her class) and said, “Today we are going to study consonant *yo*” and pointed the consonant on the poster. Then she took her earrings (*royaa*) off and asked what these were, then taped her earrings and a piece of paper on which she wrote the word on the blackboard. After similarly introducing three more words, she removed papers and asked students to put them under the objects that they represent. She was reluctant to show me her lesson plan (although she did not

call it a lesson plan), which was as simple as the unit name and the list of questions that she planned to ask and of course there was no stamp from the school principal. (Feb. 13, 2013)

It is clear that classroom A is more rigid and follows the norms of Cambodian education. Such rigidity does not allow teachers to mobilize resources for the kids who are in need, even though there are things that can be used more flexibly (such as spare chalkboards). In contrast, classroom B and the school are in difficult conditions that restrict how teaching can be organized. But the teacher cared about her students more than the norms and rules and effectively used available resources.

These examples suggest that it is not so much the availability of resources that limit the range of teaching methods that teachers can employ in classrooms. Rather, teachers' creative and flexible use of available resources is an important determinant about how things can be taught. Comparing these two classrooms confirms the fact that the teaching conditions constitute an important aspect of Cambodian pedagogy, but it is just one of many aspects. We should pay attention to the teachers who work in severely under-resourced classrooms but managed to teach in ways that engage students in teaching and learning processes, and vice versa. Pedagogy is contingent to teaching conditions but they are not absolute.

I should also note that for many local actors classroom A is more effective and advanced. This even applies to the teacher of classroom B, who does not evaluate her own teaching very high, "It is worthless to observe my class. I don't teach well" (Interview, T9). For the local actors, rigid and structured practices such as in classroom A are valued as more effective than creative and flexible practices like those in classroom B. The logic of

paccektee (techniques) informs such evaluation. As discussed, *paccektee* is to provide step-by-step procedures in order to reach to the solution with minimum uncertainties. Flexibility and creativity, which are to respond to uncertainties, are placed at the opposite end of rigidity and structure, and thus regarded as ineffective. Discussing the difficult teaching conditions as if teaching practices cannot be changed without overcoming such difficulties runs the dual risks: (1) undermining the active and creative roles played by the local actors who somehow manage to teach in such conditions and (2) ignoring the logic that governs how teaching and learning should be operated and evaluated at the local level.

Is Pedagogical Change Possible?

It turns out that both logic of *paccektee* and severe teaching conditions play important roles in determining what kind of meaning can be made about ETL and how such meaning can be expressed in practice. Although it is impossible to conclude which is the more important “barrier” for Cambodian pedagogical reform, I would argue that these two factors are strongly intertwined and make Cambodian pedagogies resilient in the face of change.

On one hand, teachers’ working conditions provide a rationale to the logic of *paccektee*. Chanting and recitation, which is rooted in political social, as well as cultural norms, are also the practices to address resource constraints. This must particularly be so when there are only limited textbooks available. Low teacher salary also provides explanations about why simple, even “dumb down” procedures should be provided. That is to say, teachers are not necessarily expected to do much in ETL, mainly due to the minimum amount of money they earn. With such low expectations, it is better not to let

teachers have autonomy to think and decide by themselves. Rather, it is safer to make things “teacher-proof” as much as possible. The logic of *paccektee* is, to some extent, a consequence of difficult conditions in which Cambodian teachers work.

On the other hand, it is also true that the logic of *paccektee* shapes how people perceive teachers’ working conditions. As discussed, local actors discussed that teaching conditions including low teacher salary and limited resources are the major barriers for “effective” teaching, which is to be rigid and structured. Teaching conditions are barriers for them because they prevent teachers from performing all the small steps and procedures as planned, or from making things organized and structured. From another angle, the status of not having these conditions enables local actors to exercise autonomy—by changing school time table or producing original teaching aids, because there are no *paccektee* to deal with such situations. But again, flexibility and creativity are perceived as inferior or incomplete where *paccektee* is much appreciated. In this sense, teachers’ world of work is very strongly governed by the logic of *paccektee*.

It is unlikely that improving teaching conditions leads teachers to employ more creative and flexible teaching methods. It is likely rather to strengthen rigidity and enhance practices based on *paccektee*. It is also difficult to imagine changing the logic of *paccektee*, which is deeply held by teachers, without improving teaching conditions. If we seriously try to replace “traditional” teaching practices that emphasize recitation and reproduction of knowledge with the one that values critical thinking and production of knowledge, it is inevitable to tackle both the logic and norms and teaching conditions simultaneously.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the logic and norm that underlies local meaning and practice of ETL. I highlighted how the logic of *paccekteeh* consists of the core of the Cambodian pedagogy in terms of both discourse about teaching and learning and the act of teaching. Local actors also held the norm of minimum expectations for teachers that has a basis in the teaching conditions in which teachers work. I argued that the logic of *paccekteeh* and teaching conditions are closely linked and even strengthen with each other. Therefore, although currently political-cultural-social logic and norm and teaching conditions are taken as independent factors that hinder pedagogical changes, we need to consider and tackle these simultaneously if we seriously want to bring substantial changes in local processes.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Reforming teaching practices is a challenging mission. In this multi-level case study, I aimed to understand the complexities inherent in a pedagogical reform by shedding light on the dynamics and tensions within and across communities of practice at three levels—international, national, and local—in the case of an on-going pedagogical reform implemented in Cambodia. I was particularly interested in the social process in which various actors take part in constructing this reform, i.e. ETL. It turned out that actors did not necessarily agree on what ETL means and ETL covers a wide range of pedagogical approaches. Moreover, it was constructed not only as a matter of renewing pedagogies, but also as a matter of political, social, and cultural change. In other words, actors employed political, social, and/or cultural rationales to make sense of ETL.

In this concluding chapter, I want to take a step back and discuss what larger picture I can draw by combining smaller discrete findings. In addition to presenting the bigger picture, I want to achieve three more goals in this chapter. First, by revisiting the literature on which this research draws, I want to discuss how my findings could speak back to the existing discourses. I will also discuss theoretical contributions of this research to the field of comparative education and teacher education. Second, I want to reflect about and explore how the knowledge presented in this dissertation was constructed through interactions with the participants in my study. This serves as a discussion about methodological issues, especially focusing on how this multi-level case study supplements

vertical case study. The last goal of this chapter is to provide practical implications to the current and future pedagogical reforms in Cambodia.

Multiple Rationales of Cambodian Pedagogical Reform

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I illustrated how actors involved in Cambodian pedagogical reform made sense of it with political, social, and/or cultural rationales that define the current education system and practices. Moreover, they actively constructed and reconstructed its meaning through social interactions with others and policy tools. I first want to revisit and summarize my findings in these chapters, then turn to a discussion of the bigger picture of this reform.

Revisiting Findings

As I described in the first chapter of this dissertation, my research interests emerged from a question about why it is so difficult to change teaching practices even when well written policies exist. There exists an extensive amount of research that reveal failures and difficulties that various low-income countries have experienced in the process of reforming pedagogies based on student-centered principles. Several scenarios could be drawn from this body of research. The most frequently seen and probably the most persuasive scenario is that local cultural and physical conditions are not necessarily compatible with student-centered pedagogies. This explanation also applies to the literature on the pedagogical reforms in Cambodia (Bunlay, Wayne, Sophea, Bredenburg, & Singh, 2010; Wheeler, 1998).

Yet the story is not this straightforward because ETL is more than just a matter of pedagogy. In Chapter 3, I situated ETL in historical and political contexts of Cambodian

education and examined how Cambodian education has been explicitly linked to political power. In fact, original intention of the RGC to adopt student-centered pedagogies was to appeal to the international community about progressive and democratic orientation of new government and RGC did not show any commitment to the pedagogical reform. In contrast, from the perspectives of advocates of the current pedagogical reform, i.e. ETL, because it was developed based on the experiences of NGOs and UNICEF, its official policy strongly reflects the desire to transform Cambodian society as a whole. I also pointed out that such desires could also be situated in the Child Friendly School (CFS) movement in Southeast Asia and other places. In this sense, ETL is not only a pedagogical, but also a socio-political project that was shaped under the global forces that promote student-centered principles.

Chapter 4 sheds light on the dynamic interplay, within and between international and national levels particularly, by exploring communities of practice at these levels. At the international level, I found that there were numerous development partners involved in the current pedagogical reform but many of them supported ETL only indirectly—by making their own projects consistent with the basic student-centered principles of ETL but not necessarily implement ETL itself—because ETL was so strongly associated with UNICEF. The norm of coordination within the donor community allowed many aid agencies to be involved in the current reform, without seriously negotiating and constructing shared understandings about new pedagogy.

At the national level, because of the growing concerns about effectiveness, ministry officials including the minister of education are not fully committed to student-centered

pedagogies in terms of producing good learning outcome. In response, the traditional teaching approach called Chet Chhem method, which are phonics-based approach involving a lot of didactic teaching, were revived. What was intriguing here is that ministry officials did not see ETL and Chet Chhem method as contradictory with each other, but they expanded the range of ETL to include any teaching approaches that are effective to produce good learning outcomes. Examining two policy tools further revealed twists and paradoxes that emerged through the interplay between international and national levels. It turned out that although, in principle, ETL tries to introduce a transformation model of education that promotes critical thinking and individualized teaching, two policy tools took a transmission approach that does not value creativity and flexibility in teaching and learning. These findings make it clear that the ministry was very active in constructing globalized pedagogies by making “politically correct” decisions, which resulted in inconsistencies and paradoxes within a policy.

Chapter 5 revealed that local practices are governed by a cultural logic with which student-centered principles were directed to sustain and strengthen transmission model of education rather than promoting transformation model. Based on the interviews and observation, I illustrated the ways that *paccekteeh* (techniques) is a logic that underlies Cambodian pedagogy. This logic is based on the idea that knowledge should be transmitted and absorbed as it is, and that *paccekteeh* are the methods that help make knowledge transmission easy and correct by minimizing the room for each individual to think by oneself. The logic of *paccekteeh* actually hinders pedagogical changes from transmission model to a transformation model.

Also, from local actors' perspective, teaching conditions—in terms of both low teacher salary and bad school management—are the major barriers to changing practices. However, comparing teaching practices in different conditions further revealed the fact that improved conditions (such as with more materials and better school management) does not necessarily result in more creative and flexible teaching. Rather, just improving material conditions may strengthen and reproduce practices that appreciate rigidity and reproduction of knowledge. Similarly, because culture, i.e. the logic of *paccektee*, has been linked to teaching conditions throughout the history, changing this logic without improving material and monetary conditions for teaching may not produce substantial change.

Multiple Rationales

Based on the above summary of findings, I could identify three rationales—political, social, and cultural—that actors used to construct the meaning of ETL. The shape and scope of ETL are defined based on these rationales.

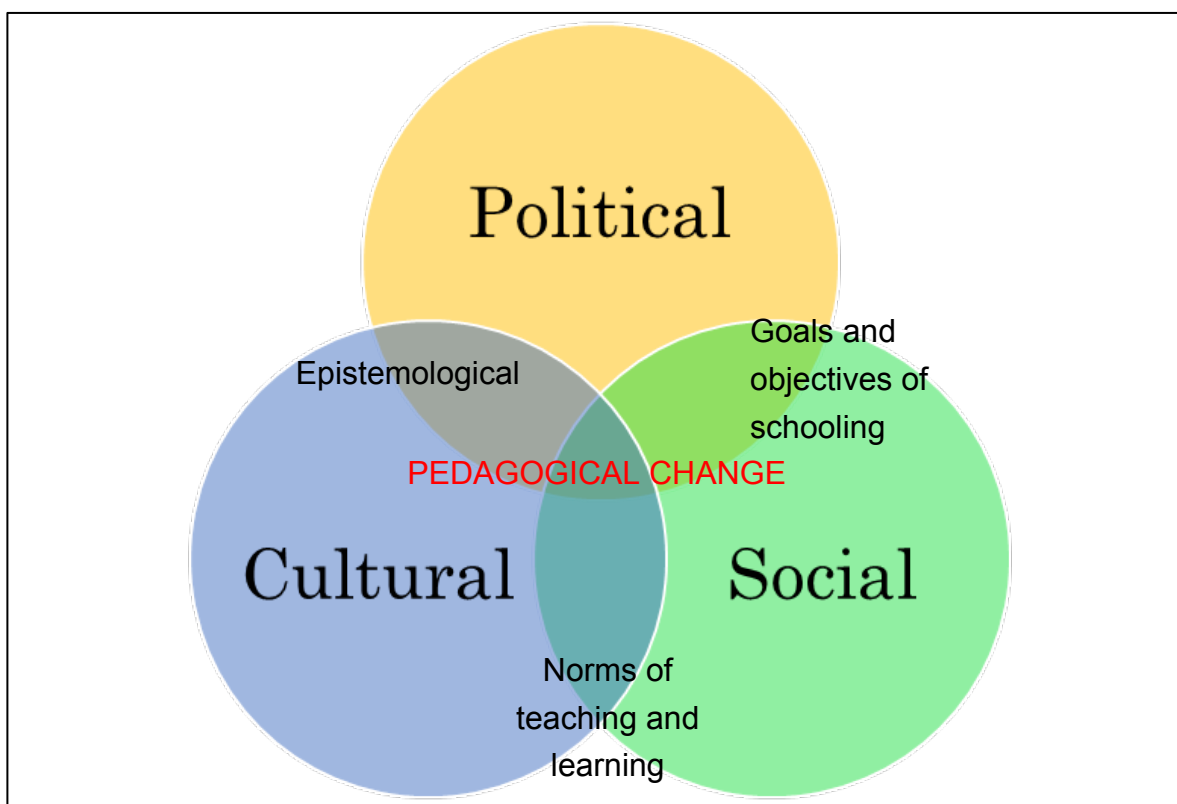
- A) *Political*: ETL is a political project. Donors strategically take part in ETL having political agendas such as improving presence in their community. For the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), it is a political project to legitimize itself both domestically and externally. These politics have significant implications for the twists and paradoxes involved in the policy tools.
- B) *Social*: ETL is also a social project. For international and national actors, it is to promote economic and social development of the country. Similar to other policies in Cambodian education, ETL cannot be independent from national development goals. Moreover, especially for the advocates of student-centered pedagogy in early years, it

was an embodiment of their desires to make Cambodian society democratic and peaceful. Making and doing ETL reform is also a social process in which various actors negotiate and reify its meaning.

- C) *Cultural*: ETL is a cultural project that concerns Cambodian epistemology, which values correctness and rigidity over flexibility and creativity. The logic of *paccekteeh* governs various aspects of local practice and in the course of the reform it actually was sustained and strengthened rather than changed.

Each of these three is an important rationale that defines how ETL could be understood and practiced, and things get more complex because these rationales are entangled with each other. Figure 8 below attempts to illustrate this complexity.

Figure 8. Multiple Rationales of Cambodian Pedagogical Reform



Source: Developed by author

In political-social intersection, there exist goals and objectives of public schooling that strongly reflect both political and social circumstances. They have strong implications for a pedagogical reform by defining what kind of education should be offered in order to prepare students for contributing to the maintenance and advancement of the society. In Labaree's (1997) terminology, ETL policy documents are based on "democratic equality" whereas the actual reform promotes "social efficiency" by emphasizing effectiveness (p. 42). It should be noted that the current reform lacks attention to "social mobility", by which Labaree means education as a means to equip students with competitive advantage (p. 42). In a social-cultural milieu, there exist norms of teaching and learning that are primarily

defined by the clear relationship between teacher as a storyteller and students as the audience. New pedagogies introduced by ETL are filtered through the social-cultural logic that supports and sustains social structure and culture. Because knowledge and power are so strongly linked in Cambodia, epistemology—a theory of knowledge production and dissemination—exists in the intersection of cultural-political milieu. Epistemology governs what knowledge and skills should be taught and how, which sometimes hinder pedagogical changes. Together, these three rationales become stronger in interaction with one another, and define the shape and scope of ETL.

Revisiting the Literature

With the findings discussed above, this research can speak to the existing literature mainly on three points. First, this research contributes to developing our knowledge about globalization in education by exploring deeper complexities in this phenomenon. Second, based on the social constructivist theory, my findings speak to the literature on the gap between education policy and practice. Related to the second point, my findings also build on what we know, more broadly, about the nature of changing pedagogies.

Globalization in Education

This research is informed by theories of globalization in education. In Chapter 1, I have discussed that the purpose of this research is to investigate “conflict within” a single pedagogical reform (Anderson-Levitt, 2003) by unpacking “politics and economics” over student-centered pedagogies. With vertical and horizontal comparisons, this research provided evidence that complicates the relationship between global and local.

The dynamic interplay between different levels is evident in the case of ETL. But

the relationship between donors and the ministry was not as simple as neo-colonialists have imagined because MoEYS did not passively adopt external support. Although the Child Friendly School model was originally brought by UNICEF, social and political circumstances in the 1990s as well as experiences in nearby countries prepared the Cambodian ministry to introduce it as a means to improve the quality of education. MoEYS was also very strategic in adjusting the model and its student-centered principles by making “politically correct” decisions, rather than simply adopting it. Donors also had to be strategic in selling their projects/program to MoEYS in order to improve their presence in the donor community. Under the norm of ownership and coordination, donors and the ministry had to be wise enough to achieve their political and economic interests. Moreover, especially at the international level, it turned out that student-centered pedagogies were not necessarily perceived as the best pedagogies *per se*, but uncertainties were shared by participants from development partners. These kinds of dynamics between and within different levels led to a condition where even contradictory ideas could be subsumed under ETL.

This research also reveals an interesting phenomena where the ambiguity of a policy enabled actors with various political/social/cultural backgrounds and interests to be involved without seriously agreeing on what it actually means. In the case of ETL, MoEYS has been using ETL as a symbol of effective teaching but actually twisted its political orientation from transformation to transmission. In this sense, ETL is a “multi-vocal symbol” on which multiple donors and the ministry can get involved while maintaining different understandings and different agendas (Rappleye, 2006, p. 233; Takayama, 2010, p.

67). Conflict within ETL can be understood as a consequence of lack of committed negotiations among multiple actors.

My findings suggested the resilience of local practices to the global forces even though there were no overt contestation or denial by the local actors. Although the impact of the globalized student-centered pedagogies was evident in classrooms (because I observed many teachers employed groupwork and games), local practices were primarily governed by a cultural logic that was very local and traditional. Local actors did not oppose or complain about ETL. Rather, they actually worked hard to complete all the tasks listed in the checklist. Nevertheless local actors did not simply accept globalized pedagogies, but constructed and reconstructed them through interacting with others and policy tools.

Gaps between Policy and Practice

As I have noted repeatedly, this research draws on the social constructivist theory. Informed by this theory, I conceptualized Cambodian pedagogical reform as a complex social practice, not a normative text, in which various actors construct and reconstruct meanings of teaching and learning. I also conceptualized actors involved in the reform—from donors to local teachers—as active agents who contribute to constructing ETL through negotiating and reifying the meaning. Given that negotiation and reification take place in a socially situated manner, this perspective posed an important question to the basic assumption of an education policy: Is it really possible to implement an education policy as it is written? Researchers in this tradition have focused on the situated nature of policy appropriation and have contended that a written policy cannot be conveyed as it is because personal/collective experiences and repertoire work as a filter (Coburn, 2001;

Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2006).

My findings suggest that this line of research underestimates active roles that actors play in constructing and reconstructing the meaning of a policy. In the case of ETL, policy messages are not only filtered down, but ETL subsumes a lot of meanings that are even contradictory to its original goals. For example, in addition to the student-centered principles advocated in the written policy, ministry officials extended the meaning of ETL to any teaching approach that produces better learning outcome in the context of growing consideration about effectiveness in education. Local actors also twisted the meaning of the checklist by considering it as a set of techniques that suffice as effective teaching instead of minimum requirements. These findings suggest that actors play more active roles than just absorbing certain meanings from a written policy. They engage in constructing the meaning of a policy by adding emerging issues in the scope of a policy and reconstructing the policy by selecting, twisting, or changing key messages.

This research also highlights the significant roles that tools play in a policy (as a social practice). As Wenger (1998) pointed out, cognitive tools do not just assist people to do the activity, but they define what meanings can be made about the activity itself. In the case of Cambodia, Courtney (2008) examined the observation checklist and contended that it hinders changes in practice due to its bad design. My findings develop this point further and suggest that policy tools would let actors construct a policy in the way that is quite opposite to the original intentions of a written policy. Policy tools used in ETL, such as the checklist and manual, were developed to promote a transformation model of education. But their content was based on a transmission approach and thus conveyed very contradictory

ideas. Mixed with minimalistic circumstances at the local level, the design of these tools also led local actors to use them to strengthen rigidity and correctness (transmission) rather than to promote flexible and creative practices (transformation). Therefore, rather than just hindering changes, a policy tool could promote adverse meaning especially when its design and content are not well developed. It is not surprising that the gap emerges between the written ETL policy and practice.

Pedagogical Changes

In relation to the second point, my findings speak to the existing literature about pedagogical changes. Many researchers have revealed the difficulties in changing local teaching practices (Cohen, 1990; Cuban, 1998) and identified a range of obstacles to pedagogical changes (American Institutes for Research, 2006; Brodie, Lelliott, & Davis, 2002; Guthrie, 1990; O'Sullivan, 2002). These obstacles include (a) teachers' lack of capacities to use new pedagogies appropriately; (b) mismatch with local cultural and physical conditions; and (c) lack of incentives to encourage teachers to use new pedagogies. So far, we know a lot about difficulties and barriers, but not much about the nature of pedagogical changes. One of the objectives of this research was therefore to unveil the nature of pedagogical changes.

Comparative education researchers have revealed that pedagogy is contingent to local culture (Alexander, 2001a, 2001b; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989) and local physical contexts in which teachers work, especially in low-income countries where only limited materials are available (Brodie et al., 2002; O'Sullivan, 2002; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012, 2013). My findings reaffirmed the contingency

of pedagogy to local culture, but further suggested that culture is not the only factor that affects pedagogical changes. Rather, a pedagogical change is multifaceted by nature. ETL is not just a pedagogical project; political, social, and cultural rationales define the scope and shape of this reform. In Cambodia, teaching and learning is strongly linked to political circumstance, socially appropriate relationships, and cultural norms and value. Also, these rationales are closely entangled with each other and work as a mechanism through which student-centered principles are changed and twisted to be incorporated into local practices. This suggests that we need to re-conceptualize a pedagogical change, and see it as a political, social, and cultural enterprise that requires revisiting fundamental assumptions in education, ranging from the theory of knowledge, the socially appropriate relationship between teacher and students, to the purposes of education.

My findings also reaffirmed the contingency of pedagogy to working conditions in some schools in Prey Veng cluster, where the range of teaching approaches possibly taken by the teachers was limited due to the severe working condition. This research also provided evidence, however, that suggests improved material conditions by itself does not necessarily foster pedagogical changes. Rigidity and correctness were sustained and strengthened in a classroom where more resources were available, whereas difficult conditions necessitated flexible and creative practices in another one. It suggests that local material conditions and a political-social-cultural logic that governs local practices are very closely intertwined and that we need to address both the logic and conditions at the same time, in order to foster substantial changes in teaching and learning.

Revisiting Methodology

I turn to discuss methodological aspects of this research.

Multi-level Case Study

This research exemplifies the potential of the vertical case study as a research framework to be applied in research that draws on theoretical traditions other than critical theory. Informed by social constructivist theory, I focused on communities of practice as the primary unit of comparison while applying the framework of vertical comparison, which involves international, national, and local levels. By reflecting about my experience in this study, I want to discuss how this study supplements vertical case study.

One of the strengths of a vertical case study framework is its power to capture both global convergence and local divergence. Vertical comparison across levels helped me investigate the process of policy borrowing (convergence) and explore appropriation of a borrowed policy (divergence) in the same case. This was particularly helpful for me to understand the dynamic interplay between macro and micro over the meaning of ETL. However, with its close linkage with critical perspectives, vertical case study does not allow us to illuminate the social aspect of an education policy, which is in-between individual agency and the structure. Therefore, in this study, I focused on communities of practice in order to understand the social process of changing pedagogies. It turned out that communities, such as donor meetings, ministry steering committee and working groups, and local teacher meetings were not necessarily the place where shared understandings were made and disseminated. Rather, these communities involved actors with different interests who expanded the scope of ETL (such as the ministry officials referred to ETL as

any pedagogies that are effective) or modified the meaning of key terms (local actors changed the meaning of slow learners to *koon ot ceh*, who cannot learn). Therefore, both global convergence and local divergence need to be explored with more nuanced understanding about individual agencies and the structure than critical theories often imagine.

My experience in this research also confirms the necessity of more nuanced understanding about levels, whose boundaries are not so clear and self-evident. Many participants of this research belonged to different levels simultaneously, such as an international official from a donor agency with rich experiences as a project manager in the local schools, and was accordingly, both international and local. In my analysis, I found I needed to make decisions about whether I should assign Cambodian participants who work in donor agencies to international or national level. I decided to assign both of these participants to international level because they participated in donor meetings but did not join cluster meeting or ministry working groups. I divided levels based on the communities. Had I decided differently, the results of this research might have changed. Although not many researchers have pointed this out, assigning the methodological decision regarding levels have implications for analytic findings. Assigning individuals to levels requires methodological care because such work has the potential to undermine the possibility that an individual may belong to multiple levels.

I used communities of practice as the primary unit of comparison instead of levels, which vertical case study uses as its basis for comparison, because I could not clearly define levels. Having identified this unit of analysis helped me effectively deal with a large

amount of data throughout the process of collecting, organizing, and analyzing it. I prepared a common interview protocol that I addressed to all participants, and it helped me to see how actors make sense of ETL similarly or differently within and across communities. Also, before analyzing data, I organized all of the data based on the community. Communities actually worked as an important descriptor of each interview and observation data. In the analysis, I first applied codes on the data and started with horizontal comparison within the communities in each level, and then moved on to vertical comparison across levels.

However, as Vavrus and Bartlett (2009) contended, vertical case study as a research framework opens up a possibility to further compare “through the juxtaposition of cases” (p. 14). Although the juxtaposition of cases is not part of the scope of this research, employing the framework of vertical case study allowed me to compare my findings with existing case studies. These comparisons helped me deepen my understanding about the processes in which local actors actively construct and reconstruct the meaning of a policy. It also suggests that this research has a potential to be the basis for comparison across cases, which may contribute to a deeper understand better the issues addressed in this research.

Positionality

Social constructivism informs how I understand my role as the author of this research. The knowledge produced in this study cannot be separated from myself, as a researcher, and the social interactions I have had in the research sites. Because I have been educated both in Japanese and US universities, being exposed to two interrelated but different academic cultures shapes my unique positionality as an educational researcher.

How I relate to teachers is strongly influenced by Japanese culture in which teachers are more socially respected than in the US. My undergraduate training was in a Japanese university where educational researchers were perceived as learners who accompany teachers, not advisors, helpers, or evaluators. Studying in Michigan State University, one of the leading teacher education programs in the US, helped me become aware of this unique perspective and the importance of understanding academic cultures that may produce and value different kinds of knowledge. These experiences helped me acquire a perspective that enables me to understand educational phenomena in comparison to both Japan and the US. Therefore the knowledge generated in this study is unique to me and not reproducible by others.

My experience in the field also shapes how I interpreted the stories and how I represented them in this dissertation. Actually, only a few components went as I had planned in the research proposal. It was various people I met in the field who guided me, by connecting me to unexpected but important informants and sharing stories that were not originally within the scope of my research but caught my interest. Sometimes I became quite irritated by the ways teachers treated students, but these phenomena frequently led to breakthroughs in the fieldwork and data analysis. People who were not included in this research, such as the landlord of my apartment in Prey Veng province or a young woman who was my neighbor and happened to be a student-teacher, also played an important role to help me understand how ordinary Cambodians think similarly or differently about education from those inside the education system. I always felt that this research itself was constructed through the interactions I had in the field with various people.

Conclusion and Implications

To conclude this dissertation, I summarize the nature of Cambodian pedagogical reform as follows.

- It is a social practice where various actors with different backgrounds and interests actively construct and reconstruct the meaning, mediated by tools.
- It is a reversible process that involves dynamics and tensions both within and across levels.
- It is not just a pedagogical project, but it has political, social, and cultural facets that define its shape and scope.

Several practical implications for Cambodian pedagogical reform can be extracted from the nature of ETL.

First, we have to reconceptualize the roles of actors—especially teachers. As Kim and Rose (2011) pointed out, Cambodian teachers have been referred to as instruments and obstacles for quality education. This research also reaffirmed that international- and national-level actors emphasized teachers' limited capacity as the major issues in quality of teaching and learning. My findings suggest that such perception promoted the idea that teachers need teacher-proof, scripted tasks and techniques with which they can transmit subject contents to their students like a conveyer belt. However, we need to acknowledge teachers as active agents in ETL who also engage in constructing the meaning of ETL within political, social, and cultural circumstances in which they work. Reconceptualizing teachers as active agents, not as implementers, helps us be aware of the importance of seriously listening to the voices of teachers.

Moreover, we also need to consider communities of practice as an important place to initiate changes. The current reform utilized communities, especially cluster teacher meetings, just as a place to disseminate the policy messages to individual actors. But this research reveals that the meaning of ETL was constructed and reconstructed—expanded, twisted, or transformed—in the communities of practice rather than by individuals. It is, therefore, necessary to facilitate teacher learning in cluster meetings by engaging teachers in the discussion and tasks that require critical and creative thinking, instead of scripted and individualized tasks.

Related to the second point, this research implies the necessity to facilitate more direct and committed interaction among actors. Although I found that actors participated in communities of practice where they negotiated meanings of ETL, it turned out that there were only superficial interactions. Opportunity for the direct interaction between levels—particularly between international actors and local actors—was limited to very few occasions. Limited interaction within and between levels made it more difficult for the actors to hold similar—albeit not the same—understanding about ETL. Linking existing communities within and across levels and facilitating their working as a bigger community of practice is a feasible policy option. It is particularly important to involve teachers from the beginning of constructing a policy, which process has often been dominated by international and national actors.

Finally, in order to bring about substantial changes in local practices, we should rethink the fundamental assumptions about education. Pedagogical changes cannot be achieved by just discussing teaching and learning inside classrooms, because they require

political, social, and cultural changes. In the case of ETL, although there are interventions to improve material conditions inside classrooms and capacity of teachers, no intervention has focused on the broader changes. This imbalance resulted in strengthening “traditional” teaching practices rather than enhancing pedagogical changes.

Therefore, if we seriously want to see substantial changes in local practices, we should address both specific issues of teaching and learning and broader political, social, and cultural assumptions about education simultaneously. This can be done by having more open discussions about education—more than just its effectiveness—that involve various stakeholders. Educational research should play an important role to prepare a shared foundation for this discussion by unveiling the hidden and often unconscious forms of logic, thereby making them visible and thus debatable.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol A

This interview does not have correct answers or intend to assess or evaluate your answers. If I talk about what you said, I will give you another name, so that it will be difficult to know that it was you who said it. Please express your frank opinions and feelings when you answer questions.

This interview is to understand how similarly and differently various stakeholders take part in the current education reform. First part of this interview is about general characteristics of the work of your organization and about Child Friendly School (CFS). I won't ask you about specific laws and policies. Rather I am mostly interested in your experience and perceptions of these reform initiatives.

1. First I'd like to know about general characteristics of the work of your organization in Cambodian education. What does your organization do in Cambodian education? What are the goals/priorities of the work of your organization in Cambodian education?
2. I'd like you to tell me about CFS. How would you describe the goals and general characteristics of CFS?
3. How significant CFS is in Cambodian education and in the work of your organization?
4. Could you locate the areas of your work (and the work of your organization) using the CFS framework (the table attached)?
5. What roles or responsibilities do you think you (or your organization) play in CFS reform?
6. Could you (i) name other major donors/ministry departments and (ii) indicate which areas they work, using the CFS framework (the table attached)?

The next part is to understand how similarly and differently various stakeholders perceive the current instructional reform. I would like to ask you about your understandings about Effective Teaching and Learning (ETL), regardless of your knowledge about specific laws and policies. I am mostly interested in your experience and perceptions of these reform initiatives.

7. How would you describe the goals and general characteristics of ETL? How significant ETL is in Cambodian education and in your own work?
8. What roles or responsibilities do you think you (or your organization) play in promoting ETL?
9. Which stakeholders do you think play major roles in this instructional reform? Could you (i) name them and (ii) tell me how they work?
10. Now I would like to ask specifically about the teaching and learning that is promoted in ETL.
 - (i) How would you describe the general philosophy or principle of teaching and learning promoted in ETL?
 - (ii) How similar or different ETL philosophy is, comparing with other methods of teaching and learning you know from your own experience or from other countries?
 - (iii) What changes do you think ETL tries to bring in teaching and learning?
 - (iv) What challenges or difficulties do you see in bringing such changes?
 - (v) How would you evaluate the progress that the current reform has made so far in terms of changing teaching and learning in your school/cluster/project sites/country as a whole?
11. Lastly I would like to know how you perceive the roles of teachers in ETL reform.
 - (i) Could you talk about the roles of teachers that this reform expects teachers to play?
 - (ii) How does this reform try to change (or try not to change) the roles and/or the status of teachers?

- (iii) What challenges or difficulties do you see in bringing such changes?
- (iv) How do you observe such changes happen in ETL?

Thank you very much for your cooperation. All the information you gave and the final product of this research can be shared with you upon request.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol B

B-1

This interview does not have correct answers or intend to assess or evaluate your answers. If I talk about what you said, I will give you another name, so that it will be difficult to know that it was you who said it. Please express your frank opinions and feelings when you answer questions.

This is the first interview in a series of interviews I will conduct with you in order to understand how your experience and feelings about the current instructional reform. In this first interview, I would like to ask you about your learning experiences as a teacher and your thoughts about the current education reform.

First, I would like you to talk about your past experiences in teacher training.

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What type(s) of pre-service teacher education have you ever received?
3. Have you ever received any type(s) of in-service teacher training last three years? If so, what are they?
4. When did you first hear about ETL? In what occasion? What was your first reaction to ETL?
5. Have you ever participated in the workshops and/or training sessions that focused exclusively on Child Friendly School (CFS) and/or ETL? If so, what are they?
 - (i) Could you describe your experience in one of such opportunities?
 - (ii) What are one or two most memorable things that you learned in such opportunities?

Next, I would like to ask you about your experience in cluster-level teacher meetings and school-level teacher meetings. First I will ask questions about cluster-level teacher meetings.

6. Could you talk about what you usually do in cluster-level teacher meetings? Please pick up a typical meeting and describe it.
7. How would you describe the purpose of having these meetings both for you and for

teachers in general?

8. What roles and responsibilities do you think you play in your grade-level group?
 - (i) What roles and responsibilities do you think does each of the group members play?
 - (ii) Which stakeholders do you think play major role in cluster-level meetings other than teachers? What do they do?
9. Could you tell me your thoughts on the relationship between cluster-level meetings and ETL?

Next, I will ask you about school-level teacher meetings.

10. Could you talk about what you usually do in school-level teacher meetings? Please pick up a typical meeting and describe it.
11. How would you describe the purpose of having these meetings both for you and for teachers in general?
12. What roles and responsibilities do you think you play in school-level teacher meetings?
 - (iii) What roles and responsibilities do you think do other people play, school principal, leader teachers, other teachers, for example?
 - (iv) Which stakeholders do you think play major role in school-level meetings other than people in this school? What do they do?
13. Could you tell me your thoughts on the relationship between cluster-level meetings and ETL?

In the last set of questions, I will ask you to share your thoughts about education in general and the current education reform. You can, if necessarily, refer to the policy documents, textbooks, teaching guides, and so on.

14. You have experienced a series of reform that are intended to improve Cambodian education. What do you think are the major problems in education that need to be improved through reforms?
15. How would you describe the goals of ETL? What do you think are the problems that we try to address in ETL?
16. What do you think is the nature of ETL? How would you compare ETL with other pedagogies you know?
17. Could you raise one or two examples of teaching practice that you think as

student-centered or active-learning pedagogies?

18. What do you think you are required to do in ETL?

Thank you very much for your cooperation. All the information you gave and the final product of this research can be shared with you upon request.

B-2

This is the second interview in a series of interviews I will conduct with you in order to understand how your experience and feelings about the current instructional reform. In this second interview, I am mostly interested in your thoughts about one of the eight areas of Effective Teaching and Learning (ETL).

This interview does not have correct answers or intend to assess or evaluate your answers. If I talk about what you said, I will give you another name, so that it will be difficult to know that it was you who said it. Please express your frank opinions and feelings when you answer questions.

First, I would like you to talk about your thoughts about one of the eight areas of ETL. You can, if necessarily, refer to the policy documents, textbooks, teaching guides, and so on.

1. How would you describe the main idea(s) of this area? You can, but do not have to, describe it in comparison to other ideas you are familiar with or have heard of.
2. What activities/practices do you think does this area encourage you to implement?

Now I would like you to reflect about your own practice in this area. I am particularly interested in hearing the concrete details of your present experience.

3. Could you talk about how you usually plan activities/tasks in this area?
 - (i) What do you consider when you plan, or decide not to do activities?
 - (ii) Do you usually discuss your plan with someone else? Who are they? Could you describe such occasions?
4. Could you tell me what you have done in your classroom or in other places in relation to this area?

- (i) Please talk about one or two most successful practices that fit well in this area.
How successful was it? When do you usually think you succeed?
 - (ii) Please talk about one or two least successful practices in this area. Why were these less successful for you?
5. Do you usually discuss your own practices in this area with someone else? How would you describe such occasions?

Thank you very much for your cooperation. All the information you gave and the final product of this research can be shared with you upon request.

B-3

This interview does not have correct answers or intend to assess or evaluate your answers. If I talk about what you said, I will give you another name, so that it will be difficult to know that it was you who said it. Please express your frank opinions and feelings when you answer questions.

This is the last interview in a series of interviews I have conducted with you in order to understand how your understanding about the current instructional reform evolves over time. In this last interview, I am mostly interested in your opinions on overall Effective Teaching and Learning (ETL).

In the previous interviews, you have shared with me your experience in practicing ETL and learning and development as a teacher. Now I would like you to elaborate your opinions on ETL based on what you have shared with me. You can of course refer to things that you have not said before, but I would like you to think about how your experience informs your opinion.

- 1. How significant ETL is in your own work? Why?
- 2. Based on your experience, what do you think is ETL for?
- 3. How would you evaluate ETL in terms of
 - (i) improving quality of education in Cambodia?
 - (ii) your learning and development as a teacher?

(iii) achieving the goal(s) of this reform?

4. If you were asked to identify things that you want to change in ETL, what would they be? How would you change?

Thank you very much for your cooperation. All the information you gave and the final product of this research can be shared with you upon request.

Appendix C: Observation Rubric

Table 7. Observation Rubric

| I. Classroom Management | Substantial | Formal | Minimal |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1. Arranging furniture | Furniture is arranged in the way that accommodates different learning styles. Teacher makes effective use of space to achieve goals of this lesson. | Furniture is arranged in the way that accommodates different learning styles, but teacher does not necessarily use space effectively. | Furniture is not arranged in the way that accommodates different learning styles. Classroom space is not effectively used. |
| II. Questioning | Substantial | Formal | Minimal |
| 1. Posing different levels of questions | Teacher effectively poses different levels of questions with clear pedagogical intentions. Students also pose questions to teachers and/or classmates. | Teacher poses different levels of questions but these questions are not necessarily based on clear pedagogical intentions. | Teacher does not pose questions or poses only certain level of questions. Teacher does not allow students to ask questions. |
| 2. Relevance of questions | Most questions enhance students' thinking and understanding about the content. Most questions are closely connected to the objectives of this lesson. | Many questions enhance students' thinking and understanding about the content. Many questions are closely connected to the objectives of this lesson. | Only a few questions enhance students' thinking and understanding about the content. Only a few questions are closely connected to the objectives of this lesson. |
| III. Learning Games | Substantial | Formal | Minimal |
| 1. Design | Games are innovative and designed to enhance students' understanding about the content. | Games are not prepared well. Games do not connect to the lesson. | No game is used. |
| 2. Use of games | Teacher uses games with clear pedagogical intentions and explains purpose and rules of the games clearly. Students actively engage in them. | Teacher does not make effective use of games nor explain purpose and rules clearly. No or only a few students participate. | No game is used. |

Table 7 (cont'd)

| IV. Resources | Substantial | Formal | Minimal |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1. Posters/Maps | Classroom is attractive and interesting with posters, maps, students' work, and other materials. These materials are informative and used to enhance teaching and learning. | Classroom is attractive and interesting with posters, maps, students' work, and other materials, but not frequently used or mentioned. | No posters, maps, students' work, and other materials are put on the wall or classroom is not attractive and interesting. |
| 2. Use of everyday materials | Teacher is creative and innovative in using newspapers, magazines, ads, and other everyday materials and relates students' lives with the content of this lesson. | Teacher displays newspapers, magazines, ads, and other everyday materials and incorporate students' lives in classroom. | Teacher does not use newspapers, magazines, ads, and other everyday materials. |
| V. Reading Skill | Substantial | Formal | Minimal |
| 1. Reading for meaning | Teacher provides opportunities for students to analyze the whole text by posing relevant and thoughtful questions about the whole text. | Teacher provides opportunities for students to analyze the whole text by posing a set of questions appeared in Logbook (p. 21). | Teacher focuses on letters and words and does not help students analyze the whole text. |
| 2. Real-time text | Teacher uses texts from everyday life, such as ads, instructions, recipe, etc. and helps students understand different genres of writing. These texts are used to enhance students' learning about the content. | Teacher uses texts that are not so relevant to the students' lives. There are little connection between texts and objectives of this lesson. | No real-time texts are brought into the lesson. |

Table 7 (cont'd)

| VI. Writing Skill | Substantial | Formal | Minimal |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1. Negotiated text | Teacher uses creative and innovative approach to produce negotiated text that is closely related with the content of this lesson. All students are involved in the process. | Teacher follows the negotiated text format but only a few students are involved in producing text. | Teacher does not use negotiated text. |
| 2. Original text | Teacher provides opportunities for students to produce their own writing. Assignments are clear and closely related with objectives of this lesson. Teacher focuses on meaning. | Teacher provides opportunities for students to produce their own writing. Assignments are clear and related with objectives of this lesson. | Teacher makes students copy texts from book or blackboard and does not provide opportunities to produce their own writing. Teacher focuses on spelling. |
| VII. Assessment | Substantial | Formal | Minimal |
| 1. Formative assessment | Teacher frequently assesses students' understanding about the content by asking questions and collecting students' work. Assessment is consistent with objectives of this lesson. | Teacher assesses students' understanding about the content by asking questions and collecting students' work. | Teacher does not assess at all or uses assessments that are not closely connected to the objectives of this lesson. |
| 2. Differentiated instruction | Teacher assures all students' opportunities to learn by giving additional support to slow learners and by giving challenging tasks to fast learners. | Teacher assures many students' opportunities to learn by giving additional support to slow learners or by giving challenging tasks to fast learners. | Teacher assures only a few students' opportunities to learn. |

Source: Developed by the author based on *ETL Logbook*

Note: I scored Substantial = 3, Formal = 2, and Minimal = 1 for the purpose of quantitative analysis.

Appendix D: List of Themes Appeared in the Analysis

International Level

- (1) Relationship among donors
- (2) Various kinds and types of student-centered projects
- (3) Uncertainty about student-centered pedagogies
- (4) Necessary knowledge and skills
- (5) Learning achievement
- (6) Education level of teachers, teacher education
- (7) Physical/material constraints

National Level

- (1) ETL as a national policy
- (2) Relationship between donors and the ministry
- (3) Necessary knowledge and skills
- (4) Learning achievement
- (5) Chet Chhem method and student-centered pedagogy
- (6) Education level of teachers, teacher education
- (7) Physical/material constraints

Local Level

- (1) Use of the checklist
- (2) Relationship between the ministry and the provincial/district education offices
- (3) Relationship between the provincial/district education offices and the cluster
- (4) Technical view of teaching and learning
- (5) Slow learners as the problem in teaching
- (6) Teaching as a transmission of knowledge
- (7) Teaching conditions (salary and facility)
- (8) Centrality of materials (lesson plans and teaching aids)

Cross-cutting

- (1) Politics within and between communities
- (2) Learning achievement
- (3) Teachers, teaching, and professional development
- (4) Theory of knowledge
- (5) Centrality of materials

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